IMPLICATIONS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA COURSE FOR ADOLESCENT SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty in the Curriculum and Instruction Program Of Tift College of Education At Mercer University In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Atlanta, GA
2017
IMPLICATIONS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA COURSE FOR ADOLESCENT SOCIAL MEDIA

USAGE

by

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I want to thank God for all of my many blessings! I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Joseph Johnson and my children, Kamau and Sekai Robinson. Joe, your love, understanding, patience, and motivation kept me going over the past three years. You always believed in me. I could not have accomplished this feat without you. You are my rock. Kamau and Sekai, thank you for loving me unconditionally and understanding that sometimes I had class and could not attend every game or recital. I am truly blessed to have the three of you in my life. I love you with all my heart and soul.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, whose time and effort into this project have not gone unnoticed. You were my dream team! Dr. Bush, thank you for your kindness and encouragement. Dr. West, you are an amazing methodologist! Your high expectations helped drive me to success because you knew I would not fail. Dr. Carr, thank you for agreeing to chair my committee. Thank you for your accessibility, guidance, patience, and help during this process. Without your leadership and I would not have been able to complete this project within these last three years.
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ABSTRACT

NNEKA A. JOHNSON
IMPLICATIONS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA COURSE FOR ADOLESCENT SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
Under the Direction of SHERAH CARR, Ph.D.

The use of social media is becoming more pervasive in our society. Adolescents are suffering dire consequences as a result of their social media postings and many feel that schools are not adequately preparing youth to navigate within this new participatory culture paradigm. The purpose of this study was to acquire an awareness of how a planned curriculum around teaching high school seniors about the various implications of social media changed their social media usage. The study was rooted in Bandura’s social learning theory but more specifically observational and vicarious learning in conjunction with the concept of vicarious punishment.

The research design for this qualitative inquiry was grounded in the case study tradition. Four participants were selected for this study, who represented diverse perspectives. The data consisted of three interviews, social media activity, and archival reflective essays from the course.

After the data analysis, it was deduced that the students changed their social media behavior as a result of what was learned by observation in the course in conjunction with structured reflection opportunities.

Further research should investigate how this curricular intervention would affect students entering high school as opposed to those graduating and entering college to
provide data for contemporary high school curricula. In addition to this suggestion, a longitudinal study on the current participants to discover the long lasting effects of the course is recommended.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The culture of teenage social interaction has been forever altered because of the prevalence of social media in contemporary society. Since the advent of social media, statistics have demonstrated that adolescent use of social media tools has increased every year (Lenhart, 2015). Nussbaum (2007) provided an opinion of how contemporary teenagers use this medium. Nussbaum stated, “Kids today. They have no sense of shame. They have no sense of privacy. They are show-offs ...who post their diaries, their phone numbers, their stupid poetry - for God's sake, their dirty photos! - online” (p. 25). While this may be one person’s thought, one must ask, has our current educational process helped these students avoid social media missteps?

According to Vanderhoven, Schellens, and Valcke (2014), school is the most appropriate venue for educating students on their various social media contexts. The constant interaction between educators and students facilitates opportunities for discussions of academic and social issues. Miah, Omar, and Allison-Golding (2012) argued that educators are responsible for lighting a path for students in all intellectual endeavors, and social media should be no exception. It is essential that educators find a way to increase student comprehension of networked sociality. Miah et al. (2012) asserted,

Although the educational side of technology is defined through the National Technology Plan, there is no definition in social networking as it relates to
education and how it should be used. Social networking has become one of the biggest forms of communication since the growth of technology. This wave of technology is affecting the new generation of communicators beginning with adolescent scholars. Most are not aware of how posting something that is personal or even posting something that is inappropriate can compromise their security. (p. 2)

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards that were published in 2007 addressed the increased communication opportunities facilitated by social media in the digital citizenship element. The 2016 ISTE standards expands the role of digital citizenship, which is affected by social media. The permanence of adolescent online actions is addressed in the report. These adolescents are making decisions on social media that can possibly have long term negative consequences without them understanding the potential far-reaching implications.

Adolescence is a period which can be stressful and characterized by “intergenerational conflicts, mood swings and an enthusiasm for risky behavior. From this perspective, the discussion of adolescence often leads inexorably to the discussion of drugs, delinquency, depression, and sexual deviance” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 2). In addition to physiological adjustments, adolescents in current society bear the additional burden of social media inundation. Schools have attempted to address this phenomenon within the context of media literacy.

The contemporary impetus behind media literacy education is to teach students and teachers how to appropriately use technology in the learning process. Understanding technology tools is at the forefront, while understanding the digital and social interaction
with the world remains in the backdrop. Hobbs and Jensen (2009) further asserted that school districts focus on purchasing hardware to “modernize the curriculum” (p. 5). The concept of modernization in schools is that educational institutions are focused on acquiring the latest technological apparatus instead of updating curricula to promote critical thought concerning various social media tools. Students are not provided the opportunity to reflect on social media implications within a curricular context. There is a void in current curricula which provides no opportunity for students to change their thought process in regard to how they approach their digital personas.

There are various theoretical approaches that explain how students learn and internalize curricular content. Through the lens of Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), this study aimed to gain an understanding of how a social media curriculum modeled under that paradigm affects how students present themselves online after experiencing a semester of a social media curricular intervention. The observational learning and subsequent behavior change can be classified under modeling which falls within Bandura’s social learning theory paradigm.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has erupted into a considerable part of American teen sociality. Research conducted by Lenhart (2015) furnished detailed statistics on teenagers and social media. The report provided data on the prevalence of social media use, shifts in the communication landscape of teenagers, and information about how technology is continuously shaping and evolving adolescent online behavior. According to Lenhart’s research, 91% of teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 access the Internet daily from a mobile device in order to check social media accounts. Of these social
media sites, Facebook is the most widely accessed worldwide. As of 2015, Facebook has over 1.5 billion active monthly users (Preimesberger, 2015). Additionally, 71% of teenagers currently have a Facebook account and 92% of those teenagers log in daily to monitor their accounts. Of those teenagers who access Facebook, 71% of them report accessing more than one social network site. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Google+, Vine, and Tumblr are other social media services that teenagers use (Lenhart, 2015). Social media sites and services are constantly evolving and teenager use of those sites is constantly increasing.

Carroll and Kirkpatrick (2011) contended that some negative effects of adolescent use of social media include susceptibility to and reciprocation of cyberbullying, potential for mental health issues, privacy breaches, sexting, and online harassment. These adolescents may not comprehend the possible ramifications of social media use and the pervasiveness of use is only increasing. Students who are technologically literate are more likely to engage in precarious behavior which opens them up for increased risks via the social media platforms they use (Livingstone, 2014). While these students understand how to use the technology, they do not fully comprehend the associated potential risks.

According to boyd (2008), technology and networked sociality among adolescents are not disappearing. This networked sociality is manifested in the pervasiveness of social media within adolescent culture. She contended that educational thought leaders have a duty to determine the best and most effective way to educate these adolescents. In the future, these students will be faced with a deluge of social media in most aspects of their lives, whether or not academia prepares them. School districts typically block access to social media sites so learning opportunities for students in these schools are
limited (Ahn, 2011). Ignoring or limiting social media access is counterproductive in educating students about potential issues with their networked sociality and does not benefit them long term. While there are risks involved when students use social media, there are also potential benefits. Social media can facilitate friendship extensions, supportive environments, and knowledge acquisition (Carroll & Kirkpatrick, 2011). As a society, how are we coping with this increased teenage networked sociality? Boyd (2008) asserted,

As a society, we need to figure out how to educate teens to navigate social structures that are quite unfamiliar to us because they will be faced with these publics as adults, even if we try to limit their access now. Social network sites have complicated our lives because they have made this rapid shift in public life very visible. Perhaps instead of trying to stop them or regulate usage, we should learn from what teens are experiencing. They are learning to navigate networked publics; it is in our better interest to figure out how to help them. (p. 138)

These assertions by boyd further affirm the necessity of a curriculum that specifically addresses social media within the context of being an adolescent.

Currently, therefore the question must be asked: What role does curriculum or instruction play in educating students about the myriad of social media and of their online behavior? Vanderhoven, Schellens, and Valcke (2014) contended that “more research is needed to find the critical factors to change unsafe behavior and to develop materials that can obtain all the goals that were set out” (p. 125). These curricular goals are student social media behavior awareness.
Dewey (1944) defined education as an experience that should prepare participants for ensuing experiences. He believed that education should be an extension of a learner’s experience. The social lives and mores of the intended student population should be taken into consideration when stakeholders plan and create curriculum, especially curriculum that addresses topics with extensive implications such as social media in our society.

What remains unknown, is how a planned curriculum focused on various social media contexts, centered upon providing observational learning opportunities of social media missteps by others changes student behavior. There is currently a curricular void within the context of social media. Courses with specific curriculum developed to inform high school students on numerous aspects of social media and societal implications are rarely offered. These students can potentially benefit from enrolling in such courses. This study aimed to gain an understanding of whether or not a deliberate social media curriculum will change student’s social media usage patterns.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand how the curriculum and instruction of a high school social studies course, concentrating specifically on social media, changes the social media usage of high school seniors. The social media usage of the participants prior to, and after the course was studied.

Social Media in Our Society was a 17-week, semester-long optional course in which 13 seniors and 2 juniors enrolled during the spring of 2016. During the course, the students were provided information on various contextual implications of social media in society, while I facilitated student reflection on those topics. Social media was defined as
“an umbrella term that refers to tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (boyd, 2008, p. 92). With boyd’s (2008) definition as the leading description of social media, the students participated in discussions and intentional personal reflections on the history of this new phenomenon, society’s mindset of sharing, and the political, social, ethical, and economic implications of social media. The class also viewed examples of individuals suffering consequences as a result of social media actions.

Stein and Prewett (2009) argued that media educational programs should be offered within the context of the social studies curriculum. According to the authors, “media literacy education in the social studies can promote student understanding and appreciation of the role media play in shaping and disseminating particular views of the world” (p. 132). Under a social studies umbrella, students are given the opportunity to understand global events within the context of being a democratic citizen. This course was offered as a social studies elective with the understanding that social media influences numerous incidents within contemporary society. While teaching students how to participate within a democratic society is one of the goals of the social studies curriculum, teaching them how to participate within the digital realm of that society would be an equally beneficial goal. Youngbauer (2013) asked “How can citizens engage in democratic practice without the ability to critically analyze available information in the modern media world” (p. 183)? This curricular endeavor should lie within a social studies paradigm.

Teenagers have been inundated with social media, therefore creating extensive implications on the ideal of these students’ networked selves. As stated by Papacharissi
(2010), a networked self is the concept of socially presenting one’s self within a digital context. She argues that “a networked self, communicated across collapsed and multiplied audiences, seeks social opportunities for expression and connection” (p. 317). Social media provides an expanded arena for sociability that has boundless implications on how students interact within the larger society. Social media sites facilitate connections that transcend geographic location.

To gain an understanding of the implications for the participants, a qualitative methodology was employed. Achieving an understanding of how individuals forge their behaviors and the meaning provided to their reality fell under the qualitative research paradigm (Merriam, 2009). This qualitative inquiry included interviews, social media observations and update requests, in addition to the analysis of archival course data. The accumulated data included reflective essays focusing on various social media topics. This qualitative study captured a rich understanding of student experience, voice, and developmental processes with regard to their social media usage and interaction with social media.

The information gleaned from this study will be of interest to parents, curriculum stakeholders, and practitioners who have daily contact with high school students, many of whom spend an abundance of their time on social media.

Research Questions

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?

2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The curriculum used in the course was based on a combination of conceptual and theoretical theories that impacted how students behaved online. The data analysis correlated components of the conceptual and theoretical model. See Figure 1 for representation of this study’s conceptual and theoretical framework.

Dewey’s Reflective Thinking

The conceptual framework for this study is Dewey’s reflective thinking. According to Dewey (1933), reflective thinking provides a mechanism for one to change from impulsive actions, which are instinctive by nature, to a more deliberate way of...
being. The action of reflective thinking is a calculated, thought-driven, analytical, and deliberate method of organizing thoughts. Dewey asserted that reflection is defined as an “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). The deliberation of reflective thought provides an alternative method of thinking that provides a deeper analysis of beliefs. Dewey (1933) asserted that these thoughts are “True judgments because they are based on intelligent selection and estimation, with the solution of a problem as the controlling standard. Possession of this capacity makes the difference between the artist and the intellectual bungler” (p. 105).

Promoting this type of thinking within the context of curriculum is beneficial to students. This process of reflective thinking is precipitated by a state of puzzlement in which the individual attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the issue and make an appropriate judgment. Facilitating reflective thinking in curriculum can be a productive method in teaching students content. The next section discusses this study’s theoretical framework which has demonstrated the ability to be an effective method in teaching students as well.

Theoretical Framework

This specific research is rooted in Bandura’s social learning theory. According to Bandura (1977), “Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling; from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (p. 22). The foundation of this research is centered on Bandura’s concepts of observational learning within his theory. Behavior modification due to observation presented within curriculum
is applicable under the paradigm of social learning. In the social media course, students were exposed to readings and videos which chronicled teenagers and adults suffering dire consequences as a result of their social media posts. Bandura’s theory of social learning aligns with the concept of students changing their online behavior facilitated through observing consequences of others.

Observational Learning

Bandura (1989) posited that within the parameters of the social learning theory, individuals learn by modeling and “derive the conceptions from observing the structure of the behavior being modeled” (p. 46). Observational or vicarious learning occurs when an individual observes behavior, learns and changes their own behavior through modeling.

According to Bandura (1977) vicarious learning is a facet of modeling. Vicarious learning occurs when an individual witnesses events that happen to others and the individual is able to learn from it without directly experiencing the event. This correlates to Bandura’s assertion based on empirical research that children and adults amass emotional reactions, attitudes, and behavior through modeling when exposed to media via film and television (Bandura, 1973). Behavior modification through modeling using visual media has been demonstrated to change the behaviors, attitudes, and emotions of both adults and children (Bandura, 1977). He further asserted that people learn from examples and thus are spared from “needless errors” (p. 22). These needless errors can run the spectrum from minor events to major catastrophes.
This study analyzed the effect of a curriculum framed around the social learning theory on student actualization of their networked selves or online behavior. The curriculum provided numerous observational learning opportunities.

Significance

This study’s significance was found in the ability to contribute to the body of literature which encompasses how a planned curriculum which provides opportunities for observational learning related to social media can contribute to the development of student online behavior.

An additional significant benefit of this research is the curricular aspect which provides instruction on a relevant topic to contemporary students. Social media use can have pervasive ramifications on the lives of individuals in society, especially adolescents. Curriculum that specifically addresses social media usage and potentially changes student behavior has far-reaching educational significance.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is the lack of transferability. This is due in part to the participant sample. The participants in the study were students who recently graduated from a private high school in which the financial demographics of the student body are middle to upper middle class. The participants matriculated to a four-year university in the fall of 2016. Because of this, transferability could possibly be limited to students within the same socio-economic demographics.

According to Barrett (2007):

Although methodological literature provides useful frameworks and heuristics to guide the process of transforming field data into credible findings, learning to
analyze and interpret qualitative data also involves a transformation of the researcher as the primary instrument for making sense of the phenomenon under study. (p. 417)

The research could potentially have an additional limitation because the participants were my former students. As the instrument, I had to work feverishly to ensure that my prior biases did not influence data analysis.

According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). I was the instrument, and I worked judiciously to ensure that I recognized any pre-conceived and personal bias during my data analysis by acknowledging and declaring any biases while analyzing data.

Definitions of Key Terms

*Networked public* is a culture facilitated by an online structure (boyd, 2014).

*Participatory culture* is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009).

*Reflective thinking* is the process of analyzing events and making non-instinctual decisions. Through reflective thinking individuals actively engage in their thought process (Dewey, 1933).

*Social learning theory* is Bandura’s theory (1977) in which he posited that individuals learn from each other by observation.
Social media is defined as “an umbrella term that refers to tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (boyd, 2008, p. 92).

Vicarious learning or observational learning is defined as “Any relatively permanent change in behavior or thought which takes place after watching or otherwise sensing another being acting in some particular way” (Audi, 2009, p. 344). The concept also refers to the action of changing actions, feelings, and values by “observing other people’s behavior and its consequences for them” (p. 569).

Vicarious punishment occurs when individuals observe a model exhibit a behavior and is punished for that behavior. The observer then, in turn, ceases to perform the punishable behavior (Malouff, Schutte, & Rooke, 2009).

Summary

A school setting is a productive venue for educating students. Thus, educators are consummately creating and reconstructing curricula in order to formulate an educational process which remains germane and simultaneously optimizes student learning. While the core tenets of traditional educational theories remain pertinent, the development and inundation of social media in our society, especially with adolescents, necessitates the need for a curriculum which focuses specifically on how teens present themselves in the digital world. Currently, school systems tend to warn adolescents of the dangers of social media, rather than teaching them how to safely navigate through this participatory culture while reflecting on their networked selves.

Chapter two provides a synthesis and review of the literature established in the areas of the history of social media and its effect on adolescents, the curricular response
to a social media, Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), and Dewey’s reflective thinking (1933). The void in literature is then provided in conjunction with a justification of the study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide a historical overview and academic definition of social media. I then present research on the effects of social media on adolescents, which includes the concept of students presenting themselves digitally. The national curricular response to social media, the role of curriculum to this new communication medium, and the social studies curricular obligation are also addressed. I will then discuss the conceptual framework of this study, which is Dewey’s (1933) reflective thinking. The literature review will then focus specifically on the use of Bandura’s social learning theory (1977) to modify behavior of individuals and the concept of vicarious punishment. In the next section I will discuss the search strategy I used to locate literature and research relating to students, social media, reflective thinking, and behavior modification within the construct of Bandura’s social learning theory.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of electronic articles, books, and journals was conducted using various online databases accessed through Mercer University’s online library. These databases included ERIC, ProQuest, JSTOR, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. I also referred to publications of national educational organizations. Seminal writings and books used in this review were Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), and Dewey’s (1933) reflective thinking. The search terms that I used for this academic inquiry were: reflective thinking, social learning theory and curriculum, observational learning,
vicarious reinforcement and punishment, vicarious learning and adolescents, social media, networked selves, social media curriculum, social studies, and media literacy.

I focused on locating research on the effects of social media on adolescents, in conjunction with Dewey’s reflective thinking, and Bandura’s social learning theory. As an extension of Bandura’s theory, I also focused on research that directly correlated to the use of observational learning, vicarious learning, and vicarious punishment that explained individual behavior.

Criteria for Inclusion

The following criteria guided my article acceptance for this literature review:

1. The article highlighted research that influenced individual behavior.
2. The article was a peer-reviewed article.
3. The article was written in English.
4. The article described research about adolescents and social media, Bandura’s social learning theory, observational or vicarious learning, and/or vicarious punishment.
5. The article was cited by others.

I did not limit the publication date range for theoretical works. The articles referring to social media were all written within the past 15 years.

Introduction

This chapter begins with a historical perspective of the advent of social media in our society. Providing a historical context for the pervasiveness of social media contributes an underpinning for current practices and discourse. While social media has shifted the concept of communication in society, adolescents are especially susceptible to
the pitfalls of this new communication medium. The statistics of adolescent use of social media applications and online communication is constantly increasing (Lenhart, 2015). Adolescents are especially vulnerable to risks while they explore and utilize social media. These students have to contend with issues such as sexting, cyberbullying, and online harassment (Livingstone, 2014). These online, social interactions provide context for student online behavior. This new student behavior paradigm provides a conundrum for schools when deciding on appropriate curricular interventions.

Wiggins (2015) inquired as to whether or not contemporary high school curricula adequately prepares students for their adult lives. The current standard curriculum of American schools was created at a time when preparing students to become good citizens with democratic morals was the primary goal (Wiggins, 2015). To continue this tradition, the social studies curriculum should incorporate some aspect of citizenry within the context of social media. Student use of technology has increased, and an updated curriculum can properly address this occurrence.

When referring to social media literacy and the social studies curriculum, Stoddard (2014) stated,

Instead of being transformational, the literacy practices seen most often in today’s classrooms, in social studies in particular, are associated with text-based literacy and traditional pedagogies adapted to new media. Since the social studies were not included as a mandated testing subject in NCLB, this subject area has been marginalized in the lower grades in many states or used to teach the types of literacy required to meet annual yearly progress assessments required by NCLB. The new Common Core State Standards (2010) likewise include literacy
standards for the social studies, but emphasize those more fitting for a field like history than for active citizenship. (p. 5)

Stoddard’s (2014) assertion provided some level of context on how the social studies curriculum is void of these types of literacies, which are necessary for students need to demonstrate digital citizenship. These students are not provided opportunities that will arm them with the knowledge needed to navigate within a digital realm. Similarly, Wagner (2010) stated that it is imperative that today’s students are prepared for their future, not our past. These assertions have profound implications on the current lack of a formal curriculum that provides educational and reflective opportunities for adolescents relating to their networked sociality. Piotrowski (2015) asserted that:

Despite pronouncements from the U.S. Department of Education and academic scholars that the formal educational system needs to leverage modern technology in order to enhance student and collaborative learning experiences, scholarly research on the social media-education nexus is in a nascent stage. (p. 299)

This contention was based on a lack of empirical research that focused on social media in education and how that education changes student behavior. Through the lens of Bandura’s social learning theory, this review of literature will analyze and chronicle empirical research on the use of observational or vicarious learning that changes individual behavior.

History of Social Media

In an effort to understand the growth and potential societal implications of social media, a historical perspective is necessary. Danah boyd is a principal researcher at Microsoft Research who has extensively chronicled and investigated the phenomenon of
teenagers and social media. According to boyd (2008), social media is defined as “An umbrella term that refers to tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (p. 92). These network technologies consist of popular social media sites and applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Conversely, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) provided a more specific definition which asserts that social media is “A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p. 60). This user-generated content is usually in the form of text or original videos.

The notion of a Web 2.0 paradigm began when Internet content consumers shifted into Internet content producers. Web 2.0 consisted of websites which provided opportunities for consumers to create, collaborate, share, and edit online content. Web 2.0 is also referred to in the literature as the read-write web (Richardson, 2006). The read-write web spawned a new paradigm of cultural connectedness which was facilitated by the Internet. Prior to the advent of the read-write web, people were passive consumers of content and no online interactivity was present (van Dijck (2013). The paradigm shift precipitated to a more collaborative online mode of communication.

While the term social media is considered an umbrella term encompassing every aspect of networked sociality, distinctions exist beneath that umbrella. There are four main types of social media manifestations. These types includes: social network sites, user generated content sites, trade and marketing sites, and play and game sites. Social network sites encourage and promote communication between individuals or people of a similar association, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn; user generated content sites
such as YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia promote individual creativity by providing the avenue to share content; trade and marketing sites, which include Amazon, eBay, and Groupon provide people the pathways to share or sell goods; and play and game sites, provide the opportunity for people to interact socially by playing online games, like Words with Friends, Angry Birds, and FarmVille (van Dijck, 2013). Adolescents are avid users of many of these types of sites.

Social Media and Adolescents

The proliferation of social media in our society has altered modes of communication and has increased sociality among individuals who would not otherwise be connected. Barker (2009) found that communication via social media affected the self-esteem of the adolescent participants. Barker’s research is one of many empirical studies charged with understanding how this new method of communication and sociality either positively or negatively affects adolescents. Barker found that teenagers who frequent social network sites have to contend with these sites affecting their social capital and well-being. In his study, Barker collected data from 803 high school freshman and he found that the digital relationships that teenagers have online, have ramifications for those real-world relationships. Students are more likely to seek online acceptance if they are not accepted within their peer groups. Barker refers to this as “social compensation” (p. 212).

Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) studied 881 adolescents to investigate the effect that negative or positive feedback on social media profiles have on children’s self-esteem. In this study the researchers found that there was a correlation between the type of feedback received and the level of self-esteem exhibited by the children. They found
that adolescents who received positive feedback on the social networking site profile have enhanced self-esteem, while adolescents who received negative feedback have diminished self-esteem. Ahn (2011) also found that there is a demonstrated correlation between the self-esteem of adolescents and positive profile reactions of their social media friends.

Adolescents are also more susceptible to cyberbullying via social media. Increased occurrences of cyberbullying and online threats advance the depression rates amongst teenagers who are affected (Lenhart, 2007). This new communication medium has implications for teenager well-being.

Another account of the effects of social media on adolescents can be found in the work of Gardner and Davis, most notably in the book The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World (2013). The book is the culmination of five years of empirical research of the effects of a networked sociality on adolescents. The researchers interviewed 150 adolescents, and the data were acquired through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and recorded conversations. This longitudinal study was complemented by a parallel analysis of adults who consistently interacted with adolescents over a twenty-year span. These adult participants included teachers, camp directors, religious leaders, and psychologists. The rationale driving the adult interviews focused on discovering the differences between contemporary adolescent behaviors and those of their predecessors. These data facilitated a more in-depth analysis of the conduct of the students in this new generation. The researchers found that with the advent of this new communication and sociality, the habits of teenagers are constantly changing. According to Gardner and Davis (2013), technology is affecting adolescent
thought, communication, and methods of participating within society because of the increased opportunities available within a participatory culture.

**Participatory Culture**

The Internet is a highly participatory medium and throughout the history of the Internet, the level of individual participation has increased (Deuze, 2006). It is imperative that adolescents have some contextual knowledge of this reality, which is referred to as a *participatory culture* (van Dijck, 2013). Fuchs (2013) asserted this term encompassed the increased sociality that is a result of the social web. This new sociality paradigm encompasses interaction from a plethora of participants. Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, and Robison (2009) provided an in-depth description of a participatory culture in an online context. A participatory culture is defined as:

- A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices.
- In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another, at the least, members care about others’ opinions of what they have created. (pp. 5-6)

Adolescents who participate in this culture exhibit these characteristic traits. This culture is fostered by the availability of numerous social network sites in conjunction with individuals and groups who support others with similar interests. These connections are facilitated via social media.

Ahn (2011) stated that this manifestation of networked sociality affects the social capital of these connected groups. The potential for an increased affinity amongst groups
of strangers online is amplified due to the expansive reach of social media. These networked technologies promote a phenomenon of a participatory culture which encompasses sociality occurrences among adolescents who may or may not have physical interactions.

Networked Publics

In *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, boyd (2014) researched the habits, networked sociality, and online behavior of adolescent interaction with social media from 2007 to 2010. These data were collected via 166 semi-structured and formal interviews. Boyd asserted that a manifestation of this participatory culture is what she refers to as a *Networked Public*.

Ito et al. (2008) define a network public as culture which is facilitated by an online structure. This online structure:

Places the active participation of a distributed social network in producing and circulating culture and knowledge in the foreground. The growing salience of networked publics in young people’s everyday lives is an important change in what constitutes the social groups and publics that structure young people’s learning and identity. (p. 10)

Within a networked public, people become active participants in the same manner as they would in physical locations or publics. The crucial distinction between physical publics and networked publics are the technological implications which transcend geographic locations (boyd, 2010). D’Arcy and Young (2012) further asserted that behavior in a networked public is judged based on shared norms. Adherence to these norms is expected despite the online component; however, this adherence is met with
complication. According to boyd (2007), there are four characteristics of networked publics. These characteristics are persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences (p.126).

Marwick and boyd (2011) provided context for social norms through research conducted of 165 adolescents, ranging from age 13 to 17, over a five-year span. The purpose of the study was to understand the dramaturgical implications of networked publics for adolescents. The researchers found that while teenagers are naturally inclined to be involved in conflict amongst their peers, the networked public of social media adds complication. The assertion that technology promotes teenager digital identities, even when they are entangled in social disagreements promotes the concept of a Networked Self (p. 23).

Networked Self

As stated by Papacharissi (2010), a networked self is the concept of socially presenting one’s self within a digital context. She argued that “a networked self, communicated across collapsed and multiplied audiences, seeks social opportunities for expression and connection” (p. 317). Social media provides the avenue and expanded arena for sociability. These social media sites facilitate connections which transcend geographic location.

In addition, Cano-Viktorsson (2010) further contended that a networked self describes how, as a society, we are globally interconnected through social media networks. Through empirical research, Cano-Viktorsson aimed to gather data which provided clarity to how individuals understand the concept, in addition to, management of a networked self. Through interviews and observations, Cano-Viktorsson concluded
that individuals conduct themselves in a manner which enables them to be viewed more positively by means of social media. He asserts that the “Ultimate goal for the social networking site user will be to make a successful impression or performance that leads to the further interconnecting of oneself with others, what could ultimately be seen as the realization of one’s networked self” (p. 35). People strive to present their most enticing digital selves to as large an online audience as possible through their networked sociality. However, the online audience can vary, and at times there is potential negative overlapping from different network publics.

Social media provides the stage for which adolescents digitally present themselves. Our society’s conveyance of self is based on social benchmarks, the dynamics of the culture, and the institutions in which we participate (boyd, 2014). These social media sites provide the users with the power of discerning exactly what is presented to the masses. (Papacharissi, 2010). The potential complication lies when adolescents do not necessarily use good judgment within a social media context. Boyd (2014) provides a narrative of a real-life implication:

In 2005, an Ivy League university was considering the application of a young black [sic] man from South Central Los Angeles. The applicant had written a phenomenal essay about how he wanted to walk away from the gangs in his community and attend the esteemed institution. The admissions officers were impressed: a student who overcomes such hurdles is exactly what they like seeing. In an effort to learn more about him, the committee members Googled him. They found his Myspace profile. It was filled with gang symbolism, crass language, and references to gang activities. They recoiled. (p. 29)
What are the pedagogical implications for this increase of adolescent networked sociality? Are current day curricula preparing adolescents for, or acknowledging this societal phenomenon? Berk (2009) contended that education has to address social media because of today’s students being “born with a chip” (p. 3). These students are inundated with technology and social media tools that have altered their methods of communication. Are contemporary students being prepared to exist in a society in which social media permeates many of their interactions? What role does curriculum play in educating students about different aspects of social media and their online behavior?

Implications of Social Media Within Curriculum

Egan (1978) asserted that “In all human societies, children are initiated into particular modes of making sense of their experience and the world about them, and also into a set of norms, knowledge, and skills which the society requires for its continuance” (p. 65). This contention provides a foundational approach to curriculum. If the purpose of curriculum is to prepare students for the future, educators would be remiss to ignore the popularity and the pervasiveness of social media.

Broudy (1981) attempted to answer the question, “What knowledge is of the most worth?” (p. 574). In his essay, Broudy analyzed the historical perspective of what knowledge proved to be of the most worth during various historical eras. Throughout history, curriculum has been charged with preparing students to advance in the society in which they are living. However, Wiggins (2015) contended that current curricula are not adequately preparing students. Wiggins argued that curricula should be charged with preparing students to be successful in all aspects of their future.
Apple (1993) asserted that “Curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge” (p. 222). One can ascertain that current curriculum stakeholders do not grasp the societal implications of how social media affects adolescents. The lived experiences of learners should be considered while planning curriculum.

For his book, *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don’t Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need – And What We Can Do About It*, Wagner (2011) interviewed a number of administrators, students, and CEO’s about how schools can better prepare students for the future. Wagner cites one principal who asserts that schools should provide students with a “thinking curriculum” (p. 163). This “thinking curriculum” should be an ever-evolving and intentional process. The premeditation of curriculum development should have facets relating to current and future trends of adolescent experiences.

According to boyd (2008), technology and networked sociality among adolescents are not disappearing. This networked sociality is manifested in the pervasiveness of social media within adolescent culture. She contended that educational thought leaders have a duty to determine the best and most effective way to educate these adolescents. In the future, these students will be faced with an inundation of social media in most aspects of their lives whether or not academia prepares them. School districts typically block access to social media sites so learning opportunities for students in these schools are limited (Ahn, 2011). Ignoring or limiting social media access is counterproductive in
educating students about potential issues with their networked sociality and does not benefit them in the long run. Boyd (2014) asserted,

Teens are struggling to make sense of who they are and how they fit into society in an environment in which contexts are networked and collapsed, audiences are invisible, and anything they say or do can easily be taken out of context. They are grappling with battles that adults face, but they are doing so while under constant surveillance and without a firm grasp of who they are. In short, they’re navigating one heck of a cultural labyrinth. (p. 53)

These assertions by boyd further affirm the necessity of curriculum and media literacy that specifically addresses social media within the context of being an adolescent.

Social Studies and Media Literacy

Youngbauer (2013) argued that these media literacy learning objectives should be offered within a social studies context. The social studies curriculum is charged with creating a contemporary literacy paradigm which will facilitate the necessary skills to be productive in a democratic society. According to Stoddard (2014), there are no coherent curricular objectives for media literacy. Stoddard stated,

The National Council for the Social Studies, for example, has two separate mission statements, one for media literacy (2009) and one for technology (2013). There are many parallel ideas in these two statements, and both profess the need for using media literacy or technology to work toward the goal of participatory democracy. However, the media literacy statement, because it is informed by various perspectives on media (e.g., criticism, participatory culture, new literacy), remains incoherent while the more recent technology statement puts the
integration of technologies and use of technologies for learning alongside goals for critically analyzing these media. In the end, as neither policy has real implications in terms of state or national curriculum, they are at best tools for informing local and state level discussions. (p. 4)

Stoddard also referenced the College, Career, and Civic (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards which are national social studies inquiry-based curriculum standards. He asserted that these standards are lacking media education. The curriculum addresses social media in the context of using the participatory tools as a method to improve communication skills.

The American Association of School Librarians addressed this social participatory paradigm in their Standards for the 21st Century Learner (2007). These standards provided general guidelines for curriculum and students. The standards addressed general social, ethical, and moral issues that should be acknowledged when teaching contemporary students. The report also asserted that the concept of information literacy has grown to include critically evaluating different modes of information.

Throughout history, the description of media literacy has been amended to address relevant media at the time. Contemporary media literacy programs began in the early 1900’s as an answer to the pervasiveness and increase of visual media in society (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). Media literacy education currently focuses on how tools are used within the learning process. Learning how to use these new technology tools is a major goal for media literacy curriculum. Stoddard (2014) further contended that technology curriculum in teacher education programs focus specifically on producing technology products while ignore a “critical analysis component” (p. 4). The curricular
goals promote a focus on the tools, while avoiding deep investigations of possible implications.

Through research over a span of 15 years on teacher use of new technology tools in classrooms, Kist (2013) argued that teachers are increasingly using social media in the classroom for educational purposes. In this case, students are expected to use social media applications while learning; however, the literature demonstrates the lack of implementation of a formal curriculum that provides learning opportunities for students in a participatory culture. Hargittai (2010) further posited that “achieving a knowledgeable Internet citizenry is unlikely to be resolved through a solely technical approach that focuses on infrastructure without any consideration of the social process and institutions in which people’s Internet uses are embedded” (p. 94). Students understand how to use these technologies but are lacking a conceptual foundation of the possible implications of their social media actions.

What is the current educational approach to social media in a classroom context? Bor (2014) suggested that curriculum must adapt to changes in society’s cultural norms and values. The literature demonstrates a lack of a formal curriculum in our nation’s high schools, created specifically as a response to the societal changes facilitated by social media. Students are not provided with sufficient learning opportunities in the realm of understanding the effects of social media on their lives.

Miah, Omar, and Allison-Golding (2012) argued that educators are responsible for lighting a path for students in all intellectual endeavors, and social media is no exception. Educators must find a way to increase student comprehension in this
area. The authors further assert that current curricula are void of modules which inform them of the potential implications of online actions.

Vanderhoven et al. (2014), contended that the definition of media literacy has shifted due to the participatory context of this new media. Consumption has changed to participation, and it is essential that contemporary media literacy programs address these concerns. The researchers conducted a study in which an intentional secondary curriculum was created in order to provide learning opportunities for students about the potential risks of social media. They found that student awareness was heightened, but behavior was not affected. The classes were short-term, usually consisting of one-hour classes to raise awareness. According to the researchers, “More long term interventions might be needed to observe behavior changes with younger teenagers” (p. 128). These long term interventions can be provided within the context of curricula.

Vanderhoven et al. (2014) further attested that more empirical research is needed to increase the body of literature which addresses learning opportunities that will change student attitudes and behavior within a social media context in secondary school. What are the crucial factors that can change student attitudes and behavior concerning their social media usage?

In a qualitative study, Bor (2014) sought to analyze the effects of an intentional social media curriculum in a higher education journalism class. While conducting his literature review, the author found that there is a need “to incorporate social media and digital reporting skills into the journalism curriculum; however, there is a noticeable absence of literature that evaluates instructional approaches and related learning
outcomes” (p. 245). One can argue that this void exists in all realms of the general educational paradigm.

Conversely, higher education has taken charge in providing social media literacy opportunities within the curriculum. These opportunities are usually integrated within the context of a subject with appropriate ties to social media. In Bor’s (2014) study, the context was a journalism class offered at a university in which students were presented with integrated social media learning connections. The author found crucial elements within the context of social media and journalism, and realized the necessity of adapting curricula to integrate social media literacy opportunities. This curriculum contained learning objectives through a combination of critical assessments, class discussions through an academic lens. The author further contended that the limitation of the study lies within the journalism higher educational context. According to Bor, it is imperative that education responds to the evolving needs of society, and he asserted that there is a paucity of literature that specifically addresses curriculum and social media.

In his research paper titled, “Curriculum Design and Social Media: 140 characters at a Time,” Blevins (2015) made the case for a premeditated social media curriculum. Blevins stressed the importance of curriculum objectives relating to social media that address behavior, privacy concerns, and online conduct. Blevins cited the increased curriculum opportunities, specifically addressing social media within higher education. Higher education has taken charge in updating curriculum to ensure that students are presented with material that increases their knowledge of various aspects of social media and student interaction with these tools.
These higher education programs have adapted to the cultural shift of the networked sociality ethos. Currently, there are two schools of thought within higher education regarding how to address the ubiquity of social media. One school of thought is that the topic of social media warrants its own specific curriculum. Conversely, the other school of thought is that the topic should be embedded within context, which are the subjects in which the concept of social media plays a substantial role (Martinez, 2010).

Thus far, this review of literature has presented a historical context of social media, as well as the implications for adolescents and curriculum. Within the construct of a conceptual and theoretical lens, how can educational opportunities shift student social media usage? The next section continues with an explanation of the concept of Dewey’s reflective thinking which serves as the conceptual framework of this study.

Conceptual Framework: Theories of Reflective Thinking

According to Dewey (1933), reflective thinking begins with a state of puzzlement and “an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (p. 9). Dewey further contended that the desire for resolution is what directs and influences the reflection process. The notion of ill-structured problems, which precipitate reflective judgment, is rooted in Dewey’s assertion of a conundrum. The perception of this conundrum compels one to discover a solution to remove or contend with the current puzzlement. All reflective thought begins with a state of perplexity in which reflective thinking aims to resolve. Assessing the merit of different solutions to ill-structured problems is a product of reflective thought.
In the context of education, solving ill-structured problems facilitates higher order thinking skills; however, these skills fare better when an instructor or teacher plays a collaborative role (Byun, Lee, & Cerreto, 2014). Students who engage in this type of problem solving are more inclined to promote different solutions to problems, collaborate with others, and think critically. Through research, Byun et al. (2014) ascertained that reflective thought is a pinnacle attribute in solving an ill-structured problem.

Reflective thinking provides a mechanism for one to change actions from being impulsive, which is one’s instinctual nature. (Dewey, 1933). The action of reflection is a calculated, thought-driven, analytical, and deliberate method of organizing thoughts. Reflection is defined as an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). The deliberation of reflective thought provides an alternative method of thinking that provides a deeper analysis of beliefs.

Reflection as a Meaning-Making Process

Reflection facilitates a learner’s knowledge comprehension by ultimately affiliating different experiences and beliefs. A reflective learner has the ability to take these experiences and facilitate a deeper comprehension and then is able to understand the implications of the thought on his or her environment. Rodgers (2002) stated that “the function of reflection is to make meaning” (p. 848). Reflective learners have the capacity to make meaning of these interactions and potentially adopt new actions.
Reflection should be a critical component of the education process. In addition to teaching students facts, education should encourage them to develop reasoning about problems which affect them (Dewey, 1933).

Reflection as a Rigorous Way of Thinking

The notion of reflection is a deeply thought out and deliberate process. According to Rodgers (2002), reflection is deeper than pondering over content. Reflection requires deep analytical thought which surpasses any superficial thinking about an experience. Removing impulse from decision making facilitates a deeper thought process for individuals. According to Dewey (1933), reflective thinking “involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence - a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors” (p. 3). This sequence is a calculated method which encourages individuals to change future actions.

Reflection in Community

In order to effectively reflect, one must be a part of a community that will hold the individual accountable for his or her reflective actions. Dewey believed that people need a community in order to support their independence. The community provides the individual the avenue to express his or her thoughts, and in doing this the community members are able to assist the individual in strengthening his or her positions. The community members force the individual to defend their points of view, which in turn facilitates stronger opinions.
Reflection as a Set of Attitudes

Dewey (1933) contended that individual attitudes facilitate reflection. These attitudes can hinder or promote the reflective thinking process within individuals. Rodgers (2002) asserted that a community provides a “testing ground for an individual’s understanding as it moves from the realm of the personal to the public” (p. 857). The community holds the thinker accountable for their assertions when shared.

My Pedagogic Creed provides insight to Dewey’s assertions about student reflection. Throughout the book, Dewey promoted reflective thinking within a school environment. Dewey (1897) stated,

I believe that ideas (intellectual and rational processes) also result from action and devolve for the sake of the better control of action. What we term reason is primarily the law of orderly or effective action. To attempt to develop the reasoning powers, the powers of judgment, without reference to the selection and arrangement of means in action, is the fundamental fallacy in our present methods of dealing with this matter. (p. 10)

The concept of reasoning is facilitated by reflective thinking. These rational processes promote a critical lens of content that education should promote. Dewey believed that collective reasoning by individuals in society is beneficial because it promotes an improved democracy. According to Dewey, the promotion of collective reasoning is an obligation of schools.

What are the educational implications for reflective thought within the realm of contemporary curricula? Jorgensen (2015) contended that “Education for social problems--a platform from which to initiate teaching and learning in reflective thinking -
began with the birth of social studies as a subject in 1916” (p. 122). The opportunities for curricula which promote reflective thinking concerning contemporary issues should reside within the context of social studies (Stoddard, 2014). As previously mentioned, the adoption of social media by adolescents increases every year. Accordingly, curricula addressing this occurrence should be contained within the context of social studies.

Research indicates that high school teenagers are using social media at an ever-increasing rate (Lenhart, 2015). Teenagers do not necessarily comprehend the potential consequences of their actions on social media, and this creates considerable implications for curriculum. According to Herring and Kapidzic (2015), the lack of student self-regulation promotes these actions. Furthermore, an inquiry into the curricular implications of social media in a secondary school context is valid. Is it not the responsibility of education to assist in molding students in order to help them navigate through life? Social media has complicated this journey, and the secondary school curriculum in the United States is lacking of consistent opportunities (Stein & Prewett, 2009).

What exists as a possible solution to resolve this issue within education? One can argue that pedagogical stakeholder acceptance of tested learning theories can alter educational practices which, in turn, can promote student learning. The next section provides a literature review on Bandura’s social learning theory, focusing specifically on the construct of observational or vicarious learning followed by a justification of the current research.
Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in Bandura’s social learning theory (1977). The next section provides an empirical foundation and process Bandura’s theory. The section also addresses the concept of vicarious punishment within the context of the social learning theory.

Social Learning Theory

A sound theoretical framework for curriculum designers and teachers to model lessons after can provide deep insight on how students can effectively learn. Bandura’s social learning theory provides insight to the correlation between our thought process and our actions (Bahn, 2001). Within the context of education, the social learning theory is an appropriate empirically sound approach for promoting student learning and possibly altering behavior.

According to Bandura (1977) there are four stages of cognition processes that occur during observational learning. First, is the attentional process. This process is described as the one in which individuals pay attention to the modeled behavior. The retention process occurs when individuals retain “activities that have been modeled at one time or another” (p. 25). Retention occurs both with imagery and verbal representation. The third process is the motor reproduction process. This process finds individuals reenacting the new behavior. The final process of observational learning is the motivational process. In this stage individuals perform what they learn. “Social learning theory distinguishes between acquisition and performance because people do not enact everything they learn. They are more likely to adopt model behavior if it results in outcomes they value than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects” (p. 28). This
behavior adoption will not occur if the individual is not motivated. A reason is necessary to continue the behavior.

Bandura’s (1962) studies on observational learning became the theoretical underpinning for his social learning theory. Bandura studied the actions of children who observed aggressive behavior towards what is recognized in research as the Bobo doll. The behavior of the children who witnessed this aggression was highly impacted. These children modeled the hostility towards the doll as a result of observing the adults’ behavior.

As a continuation of the Bobo doll experiment, Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) further found that children modeled their behavior after viewing aggressive behavior on film. Bandura contended that most behavior is learned by observation through modeling. Through the concept of observational learning individuals learn from the experiences of others, in conjunction with the concept of vicarious punishment where individuals avoid behavior that is negatively reinforced. Bandura (1977) stated,

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do.

Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

This type of learning occurs through an individual’s exposure to books, movies, and television. Through observational learning and vicarious punishment, individuals are able to avoid negative consequences of potential actions. Learning by observation removes the necessity of direct experience, and according to Bandura (1989) “Mistakes
can produce costly, or even fatal consequences, the prospects of survival would be slim indeed if one had to rely solely on trial and error experiences” (p. 14). These costly mistakes can be avoided if individuals vicariously learn through others.

Vicarious Punishment

Within the construct of observational learning, vicarious punishment serves as the cognitive impetus for individuals to change after observing models suffering consequences as a result of a specific behavior. According to Malouff, Schutte, and Rooke (2009) if:

Observers perceive that a model engaged in a behavior they previously believed would be followed by punishment but observe no punishment, the observers have an increased likelihood of showing the behavior themselves. However, if observers perceive that the model experienced punishment, the observers may be inhibited in showing the behavior in the future. (p. 272)

The specific behavior is then decreased because individuals observe others being punished for similar behaviors.

This review of literature will proceed with a review of empirical research chronicling Bandura’s social learning theory, more specifically vicarious and observational learning, and vicarious punishment. The review will conclude with a justification of my research study.

There is an abundance of research of the effect of vicarious learning within the context of organizational culture. Bapuji and Crossan (2004) provided a meta-analysis of empirical studies under the construct of vicarious learning. According to the researchers, “Vicarious learning is facilitated by competition and imitation” (p. 10). In essence, the
concept of vicarious learning is appropriate within the construct of organizations that aim to improve their financial bottom line. Through vicarious learning, organizations are able to avoid and learn from costly mistakes of competitors. At the time, the researchers contended that while evidence of vicarious learning was conspicuous, there was a void of research within small organizations.

Latham and Saari (1979) investigated an improved supervisor and employee relationship that was facilitated by modeling under the vicarious learning tenet of Bandura’s theory of social learning. The participants were 40 supervisors who viewed film of other supervisors executing appropriate employee conflict resolution methods. There were follow-up assessments after six months and then after a year. The researchers found that the supervisors sustained changed behavior patterns when dealing with their employees. The application of vicarious learning was demonstrated within the research data. A limitation existed in the study due to the supervisor and participants in the research were all male.

Kim and Miner (2007) sought to examine if organizations learned vicariously from other organizations within the context of the United States banking industry. The researchers desired to understand if banks learned vicariously from other banks which experienced near failure. The researchers found that banks learned from the failures of other banks, therefore avoided the same missteps and fate. In conjunction with this assertion, if a bank was in the same geographic location as a bank who failed, the stakeholders found more benefit in learning from those similar banks.

Voit and Drury (2013) conducted research specifically to gain insight on vicarious learning in organizational structures. The researchers were interested in how
organizations vicariously learn from other organizations. The data were collected from surveys and interviews and the researchers found that people learn and pay close attention to topics close to and relevant within their context.

While the abundance of research focuses on organizational structures and employee behavior, there is a segment of empirical research which focuses on student behavior and vicarious observational learning. In what capacity has Bandura’s theory affected the behavior of students? Both secondary and postsecondary? The second part of this review of literature will chronicle social learning theory research which focused specifically on vicarious or observational learning and adolescents.

An account of the use of the theory to understand the behavior of adolescents is found in research conducted by Krohn, Skinner, Massey, and Akers (1985). The researchers conducted a three-year longitudinal study with a pool of 1,068 adolescent teenagers to understand the effect of vicarious learning with adolescents. The researchers found a correlation between students smoking through imitation of peers and adults. If the role models or peers smoked, the students became smokers. If their models did not smoke, they did not smoke. This study demonstrates the capacity of vicarious learning to alter adolescent behavior.

Stegmann, Pilz, Siebeck, and Fischer (2012) conducted a quantitative study to gain an understanding of the impact of vicarious learning on 200 undergraduate medical students. The researchers found that participants scored higher on doctor/patient communication assessments after observing numerous examples of optimal communication situations between doctors and patients. While this study yielded the assertion that vicarious learning in a university setting is appropriate, a major limitation
exists within the fact that the instrument was an assessment of possible behavior, not actual behavior.

Allen, Wallace, Renes, Bowen, and Burke (2010) administered a study in which four participants with Autism Spectrum Disorders were examined to determine if the individuals were able to learn by video observation. The participants were shown videos of individuals engaging in retail store trainee tasks. They were charged with wearing costumes to represent the raccoon mascot of the store. According to the researchers, each participant learned to “shake hands, wave, and interact with customers by waving their eyes, ears, and tail in ways that customers and managers found pleasing” (p. 347). The authors concluded that the participants did in fact learn from observation.

Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh (2002) conducted a study which focused on model-observer similarity within the construct of observational vicarious learning. A total of 214, 8th grade students participated in this quantitative inquiry. The researchers found that the students were more inclined to be successful in the course if they modeled themselves after similar students who were successful.

A study conducted by Hoogerheide, van Wermeskerken, Loyens, and van Gog (2016) contradicts the findings of Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh (2002). In their study, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh negate the model-observer hypothesis that children learn more effectively from similar models. In their study, they researched 157 high school students to determine if they learned by observation of adults or their peers. The researchers found that the students learned more effectively from the adult models because an adult is “perceived as more of an expert” (p. 29). These findings
demonstrate that there are still more data to be collected to learn the most effective way to teach students by observation.

In their study, Farmer, Gast, Wolery, and Winterling, (1991) researched high school students with handicaps to determine if the concept of observational learning is effective within the construct of small group instruction. The study consisted of four participants in a “self-contained classroom for students with moderate and severe handicaps” (p. 191). These students were taught vocabulary words using various methods conducive for students with learning difficulties. One of the methods included having the students observe their peers in the group learning the vocabulary words. The researchers found that the small group instruction format can be constructed to increase observational learning. Two of the four participants were able to learn from their peers in this manner.

As an extension of Farmer et al. (1991), Mechling, Gast, and Krupa (2007) conducted additional research on the effect of small group learning of students with learning handicaps. While the researchers agreed that small group learning in conjunction with observation works well with students with these difficulties, they asserted that an “Evaluation of observational learning when instruction is delivered via a computer to a small group of students has not been examined” (p. 1870). This research addressed the action of the students learning by observing content on a computer. There were three participants, all of whom had intellectual impairments. The scope of the research was to determine if the use of PowerPoint slides with vocabulary words increased learning opportunities for the students. The researchers found that traits of observational learning were exhibited. Observational learning is followed by either
vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment (Bandura, 1977). This literature review will proceed with the concept of vicarious punishment.

Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, and Rooke (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 21 research studies to investigate the effect of vicarious punishment. The samples consisted of a total of 876 participants from children to college students. The researchers investigated the effect of the negative consequences suffered by the models based on their actions and how those consequences affected the participants. According to the data collected, when the participants observed models being punished, the participants were less likely to engage in comparable behavior.

This literature review demonstrated an abundance of vicarious or observational learning within an organizational structure, higher education, and students with learning challenges. The review also contained a comprehensive meta-analysis study on vicarious punishment. My study aimed to contribute to the literature by investigating how high school seniors who experienced a social media curricular intervention with observational learning opportunities impacted how the students presented themselves online. What remains unknown is how a planned curriculum within the framework of Bandura’s social learning theory changes student social media behavior and how specifically the concept of vicarious punishment explained the behavior change. The literature is void of qualitative studies using observational learning as a backdrop to change social media behavior of adolescents within the construct of curriculum.

Social learning theory affirms the advanced effectiveness of vicarious observational learning. As per Bandura (1989):
If knowledge and skills could be acquired only by direct experience, the process of cognitive and social development would be greatly retarded, not to mention exceedingly tedious and hazardous. A culture could never transmit its language, mores, social practices, and requisite competencies if they had to be shaped tediously in each new member by response consequences without the benefit of models to exemplify the cultural patterns. The abbreviation of the acquisition process is vital for survival as well as for human development because natural endowment provides few inborn skills. Because mistakes can produce costly, or even fatal consequences, the prospects of survival would be slim indeed if one had to rely solely on trial and error experiences. Moreover, the constraints of time, resources, and mobility impose severe limits on the situations and activities that can be directly explored for the acquisition of new knowledge. Development would be greatly retarded, not to mention exceedingly tedious and hazardous. (p. 14)

The course that served as the precursor to this study, utilized the tenets of Bandura’s theory to teach students of the implications of social media use.

Conclusion

Social media has usurped all other modes of communication to become one of the primary means by which adolescents interact and express themselves. Schools have primarily focused on the dangers of social media without providing students an environment in which to critically discuss all aspects of their digital disseminations, while providing them with an opportunity to reflect on content. This study aimed to chronicle the effect of a social media course created specifically for high school students,
delivered under a social studies umbrella, with numerous observational learning opportunities.

Bandura’s (1977) theory of social learning is based on the premise that individuals learn through observation. Through that mode of learning, the negative vicarious experiences that learners encounter shift future behavior as a result if vicarious punishment. Within an educational construct, this potential shifting of online behavior has far reaching consequences.

Researching this topic has produced the following research questions:

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?
2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?

In the following chapter I will present the methodology of the study. The research design, participant sample, data collection and analysis methods, researcher bias, and ethical issues will also be addressed.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to describe how the curriculum in a high school social media course, which provided learning opportunities for students about the various societal implications of social media, changed student social media usage. The course provided opportunities for students to learn by observation in conjunction with organized reflection opportunities. This study aimed to learn if the course based on the conceptual and theoretical foundations changed student social media behavior. Contemporary students post contents of their lives on social media, yet they rarely think of the possible implications. The curriculum was presented to the students in the form of a semester-long course titled Social Media in Our Society.

Accordingly, the research questions are:

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?

2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?

Research Design

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how and if a curricular intervention changed the way students presented themselves on social media. Achieving an understanding of “how people construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” falls under the qualitative research paradigm (Merriam, 2009, p.
More specifically, in the qualitative tradition, this study will employ a case study research methodology. A case study is a method of qualitative research that provides an in-depth analysis of the subject or subjects researched. According to Lichtman (2010), “A case study can be limited to a characteristic, trait, or behavior” (p. 91). Research that entails deep observations in a contextual setting is better suited for a case study methodology. Yin (2009) further asserted that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived benefits, or learning of anecdotal evidence of a curricular intervention, a case study is necessary. The applicability of a case study methodology is warranted due to the nature of the contemporary phenomenon of student social media behavior and the educational implications.

For the research, I used a holistic single-case study design, which analyzes a single case and “can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building” (Yin, 2009, p. 47). Understanding the implications of curriculum and reflective thinking within the context of social media education represents a significant contribution to the body of literature on curriculum. Yin (2009) further concluded that “the theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as the circumstances within which the propositions are believed to be true. A single case, meeting all of the conditions for testing the theory, can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory” (p. 47). A “case is a single unit, a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 81). Student social media usage will be studied as the case during this research. Consequently the unit of analysis is the group
of my former students. This research will contribute to the literature and provide additional awareness of potential curricular implications of social media and teenagers.

Research Participants

Fifteen students voluntarily enrolled in my inaugural 17-week, semester-long high school course during the spring of 2016. The class was offered in a private school in the southeastern United States which enrolls students in grades PK-12 in an urban district. The majority of the school population consists of students whose families are considered middle to upper-middle class. The student body racial makeup is as follows: 50% Caucasian, 25% African-American, 15% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 7% are considered “other.”

The course titled Social Media in Our Society was a course only available to juniors and seniors in spring 2016. Two juniors enrolled in the class; however, the potential participant pool only included the 13 seniors because of my desire to learn of the course’s impact after they matriculate into college. The senior population consisted of three females and ten males. The average age of the students was 18 years old, and there were four African-American students and nine Caucasian students.

Sample Procedures

Sample selection is key for obtaining pertinent data on the research participants. In order to “find the best case to study, you would first establish the criteria that will guide case selection and then select a case that meets those criteria” (Merriam, 2009, p. 81). In the case of this research, the criteria were a high school senior who enrolled in Social Media and Our Society course and who attended college in the fall of 2016. The criterion-based selection included a diverse population within the racial
boundaries of the class. The sample included four students, varying in gender and race. This sample included an African-American male and female, and a Caucasian male and female. Each of these students had distinctive perspectives on the class and social media use. According to Merriam (2009), “A purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many” (p. 224). If applicability to a general population is not appropriate, the benefit would be what Geertz (1973) refers to as “another country heard from” (p. 23). This research contributed to the conversation of students, social media, and what schools can accomplish in educating students on social media implications. This study provides an additional foundation of academic research to increase data in order to make appropriate curricular decisions.

Sample Recruitment

The participants were students who met the criteria of a being high school senior who was enrolled in Social Media in Our Society, and who attended college in the fall of 2016. The students who were eligible for participation in the study included three African-American males, one African-American female, seven Caucasian males, and two Caucasian females. I employed a sampling procedure that Patton (1990) referred to as Maximum Variation Sampling. This method yields “high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and important shared patterns that cut across case” (p. 172). Acquiring a variation of participants within the context of one course at a private institution will be crucial to the richness of the data. The racial and gender diversity of the sample group assured differing perspectives because of the students’ backgrounds, interests, and activities. I strived to ensure that the participants
were not homogenous. The participants included a former student-athlete, one who was a part of the yearbook staff, one who did not participate in extracurricular activities, and another student who was outspoken and popular. I requested student participation for this qualitative inquiry by way of an email and a personal phone conversation. I collected all student email addresses and personal cell phone numbers at the beginning of the semester. All students were assigned a pseudonym and were informed that their identity was protected.

This site selection was considered convenient due to the nature of participant selection and the purpose of this qualitative inquiry. The participants were former students of mine and therefore were convenient to access. These students were a sample of students who were enrolled in the course. According to Kivunja (2015), “Clear advantages of this sampling procedure include the availability of participants, the ease with which participation could be observed and monitored, and the quickness with which the data could be gathered for analysis” (p. 8). All of the students lived in the same city, thus acquiring data from those students proved to be manageable.

Data Collection

Qualitative research typically utilizes various forms of data, such as observing, interviewing, and documenting participants (Creswell, 2007). This case study employed participant interviews, observations of participant Twitter accounts, periodic Snapchat story information, and utilization of student course-work. Case studies do not conform to one specific data collection method, so the use of various methods was appropriate (Yin, 1981).
Social Media

For the course and this study, I accepted boyd’s (2002) definition of social media, “an umbrella term that refers to tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (p. 92). I focused specifically on Snapchat and Twitter for this study. The logic behind this selection is that these were the two most pervasive social media applications with the participants. Twitter is an online social media platform that provides users the opportunity to share information in an instant while under a 140 character construct. The immediacy of Twitter posts in conjunction with the ease of student retweets provided a justification of reporting Twitter behavior. I shared the participants’ Twitter use to demonstrate the frequency of use before, during, and after the social media course. Twitter provided tangible evidence of the frequency of student social media use. Snapchat was the logical choice because it was application that all participants used extensively. Snapchat is a mobile application that provides individuals the medium to share ten second videos or images. These images and videos are visible for 24 hours after posted. As far as other social media applications, only two of the four participants used Instagram, and one of those participants used YouTube. Their use of those other applications was at a much lesser frequency than Snapchat and Twitter. While the use of text messaging can be considered social media, the nature of text messaging to the students was private and not necessarily for a global audience.

Interviews

All of the participants graduated in May 2016 and all matriculated to a four-year university. Participants were interviewed before and during their first semester of
college. They were interviewed about their personal beliefs in relation to their social media behavior prior to the course, during the course and after the completion of the course. There were three sets of interview sessions with the participants, the final of which served as the member-checking interview.

According to Warren (2002), qualitative interviewing should be an engineered conversation in which the researcher participates as a listener. I ensured that I listened to my former students while they answered the interview questions. This was not difficult because it was a continuation of my classroom pedagogical practices. I impressed upon my students that I respected their opinions, and I always listened to their perspectives without any judgment. These qualitative interviews were an extension of my experience gleaning information and opinions from my former students. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and contained open-ended questions. Merriam (2009) stated that this type of interviewing method is more common in a qualitative investigation because of the researcher’s desire to capture the worldview of the participants.

The first interview was a face-to-face meeting, at a location comfortable for the participants, conducted prior to the students going to college. The interview was recorded using a laptop and an audio recording program and was transcribed within 24 hours. All of the participants started college in the month of August; consequently, the initial interviews were conducted in the month of July. The purpose of this first interview was to debrief on their social media experiences during the summer and inquire about their expectations for college. I also inquired about their social media usage since the course ended. Once the participants were undergraduate students for two months, I remotely conducted a second interview for two of the participants and the other two
participants were interviewed in my office. I inquired about their first two months in college and the role that social media played in their lives. This interview was conducted using Freeconferencecall.com, a call recording tool. These interviews were transcribed within 24 hours after I conducted them. The purpose of the second interview was to capture whether or not their social media use had changed after being a college student. The questions probed the students on the actions of their college peers and friends on social media as well as the remaining effects of the course. The third and final interview was also conducted remotely towards the end of their first semester in college, during the time they are preparing to take their final exams. The purpose of interview protocol was to document a progression of their beliefs prior to, during, and at the end of their first semester in college and how the course affected those beliefs as well as conducting member-checking.

These interviews served as the culmination of data collection. The prompts promoted reflections on the students’ shifting of their online behavior within the past year since enrolled in the social media course, graduated from high school, and completed their first semester as college students. While the questions varied during each interview stage, there were two to three questions that remained consistent which will allowed me to observe a full progression of student social media behavior.

Archival Data

Archival data served as an additional data source in this qualitative inquiry. These data are usually viewed in conjunction with other data sources when conducting a case study (Yin, 2009). Archival data were generated during the semester in the form of student course-work which were reflective essays about various class
topics. The archival data provided a plethora of information on both student beliefs and student reflections on social media situations. I required the students to write reflections on what the content and topics meant to them. The students created these reflections in addition to other classroom assignments in their personal Google Drive portfolio. During the semester, I assigned a total of seventeen topic reflections and reactions. See Appendix A for detailed unit descriptions. This archival data facilitated a deeper analysis of student perceptions of their social media usage.

This accumulated data complemented the interviews, Twitter observations, and Snapchat story observations and updates. These records served the purpose of providing context to answer the research questions by chronicling student personal reflections on various social media topics.

Triangulation

The use of various methods and numerous data sources can “confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). Analyzing archival data, interviewing participants three times, chronicling Snapchat story information, and observing Twitter accounts provided rich material for this qualitative inquiry. Yin (2009) contended that using numerous sources of evidence is highly suggested for case studies. The data sources in this research assisted in “corroborating the same fact or phenomenon” (p. 116). The use of multiple data sources increased the validity and reliability of this case study’s construct (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

I understood that if I interpreted data prematurely, the analysis would have been based on my previous biases. I understood that I had to defer any theoretical or personal
assumptions in order to avoid theory restricting the analysis. During data analysis, I looked for similarities and differences in the data. I examined the participant data to draw firm conclusions that promoted the internal validity in this study.

Basit (2003) asserted that categories or codes are considered “tags or labels for allocating units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying-sized words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (p. 144). The importance of coding is paramount in any qualitative inquiry. Coding consists of assigning a meaning, capturing the essence of an occurrence, or documenting attributes of content (Saldaña, 2009). Bogdan and Biklen (2006) further assert the necessity of a coding system to effectively analyze data.

Upon initially examining the data, I created analytic memos, which assist with reducing coding ambiguity (Saldaña, 2009). The analytic memo writing process was a critical factor in initially understanding researcher beliefs, ideas, and concepts of data. This action assisted with the process of coding. During the coding process, I ensured that I explicitly capture the participant meaning within the data and not impose my personal conjectures. The use of analytic memos assisted with this measure. After the first cycles of coding the data, I organized the codes into categories and then looked for emerging themes.

Bergin (2011) provided context and value of the use of a data analysis program. As the researcher, I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software. A justification for the functional use of this type of software is data interpretation. This technology provided a medium for “interviews and literature, creating case nodes,
transcribing, coding, querying the data, creating models, and writing memos and propositions” (p. 7). Using the software assisted me in organizing the data, running data queries, managing concepts, and using graphic models to report findings.

Researcher Bias

According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). As the researcher I entered this qualitative inquiry with strong assumptions and a worldview of the interactions that teenagers have with social media. As the researcher and the teacher who had a considerable investment in the success of this course, I employed procedures to ensure my biases were set aside while analyzing data. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) provided methods for qualitative researchers to mitigate researcher bias. These methods include bracketing, analyzing, intuiting, and describing. Bracketing is the process whereby the researcher attempts to remain completely neutral during the research process, where prior preconceived notions have to be identified and set aside. I understood the importance of setting aside my preconceived notions in order to gain an unbiased understanding of the data. The researcher analyzes data by reviewing interviews, coding, and discovering themes. Intuiting occurs when the researcher processes the data and makes conscious efforts to walk in the shoes of the participants. This is accomplished by looking for a “deep critical reflection about commonalities across participants” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p.176). This process provides some personal ownership of participant experience for the researcher. The final process of this method is describing. The researcher provides a description of the
findings about each of the participants. I extensively documented the discoveries from this inquiry to ensure all participant data are accurately represented and analyzed and described.

Researcher as Student

As a consummate learner, I respond positively to reflective and engaging discussions based on curricular content. Participating in primarily lecture-based classes has always proven difficult in engaging me as a student. I remember instances in high school of being bored while teachers were delivering content. Conversely, I recall enjoying discussions in graduate school. My desire was to provide the latter experience to my students.

The Socratic Method of learning has always been intriguing to me as a learner, and now I appreciate it even more as a teacher. I believe students can achieve a heightened level of content mastery in classroom settings that implement the Socratic Method of learning. I believe in the importance of critical thinking when learning, and I hold the belief that the Socratic Method provides an appropriate framework for this type of learning. I concluded that discussion along with analyzing content, increases critical thinking. In 2013, I attended a Socratic seminar workshop that concentrated on how to facilitate Socratic discussions. According to the training, the rules of a Socratic seminar are listening, sharing ideas, questioning oneself, speaking so that all can hear, listening closely, speaking without raising hands, talking to each other, asking for clarification, inviting and allowing others to speak, and considering all viewpoints and ideas. I based my teaching style on this method.
As a current doctoral candidate, I had a desire to model my high school course after my graduate school courses because of these previous positive experiences. I believed that as a graduate student, most classes employ the Socratic Method, which compelled me to promote a reflective critical assessment of curricular content. This pedagogical practice was prevalent in Social Media in Our Society.

As a student and researcher, I began to view concepts through a theoretical lens. Armed with the knowledge of various learning theories, I felt empowered because I believe I have additional insight on student learning. This perceived insight led me to promote classroom reflection and promote social learning through the viewing of videos relating to the classroom content. Before I started teaching this class, I believed providing students with reflective opportunities would cause them to change their social media behavior. I was interested in learning whether or not those reflective opportunities or learning socially about the pitfalls of social media use promoted change in student social media usage.

Researcher as Teacher

As a parent of teenagers, I had presuppositions on how to teach teenagers in regards to the various implications of social media use. I also had a desire to teach students, which inspired me to create and teach this class, which was not within the parameters of my job obligations. Social Media in Our Society was a course that I developed exclusively, and I was the only teacher delivering the content to the students. While I was personally vested in the success of the class, I was also interested in understanding the overall curricular implications of changing student social media usage.
There was a potential bias of the research because of my desire for the results to indicate a positive reaction to the course content. I created this course and because of my dual roles a potential conflict of interest existed. It was my ultimate goal to change student behavior through providing a thoughtful curriculum on various implications of social media. I chose the research questions because those questions would provide insight as to whether or not the course was successful in the way I intended. I invested numerous hours in this course, both in developing the contents and teaching. I also have deep relationships with the students who I taught. They began to trust me as an adult who believed in them, cared about their well-being and also respected their perspectives on the different topics. While I have known a few of them for many years, my classroom interaction with them was in a different context. I had worked on the periphery of their classes in a technology capacity.

Even though I have worked as an instructional technology specialist for the past 11 years at my current job, this was my first experience as a day-to-day classroom teacher. I have spent the majority of my career on the outskirts of daily classroom experiences. Working with teachers to integrate technology effectively within their pedagogical practices has been my major purpose. I am usually a provider of teacher professional development, so becoming a classroom teacher was a new endeavor. Not only did I become a classroom teacher during this experience, I taught a class that had never been offered. I was on a curricular island due to the content of the course I wrote. No other teacher in the school was familiar with social media to the extent necessary to teach this course. Because of this, I was unable to receive any assistance on the class content which provided me complete flexibility with the class material. The
lack of colleague awareness further isolated my opinions about the course content and could have increased my personal bias.

In order to minimize this bias, I ensured that all of the participants had the opportunity to perform member checks of my data analysis. I sent transcripts of the interviews along with my initial analyses which provided the participants the opportunity to confirm or refute my findings. Merriam (2009) referred to this as respondent validation, which is an extremely critical process to ensure that there is no researcher misinterpretation of data.

Ethical Issues

Comer (2009) asserted the relevance and necessity of educational research. Collecting data on students has extensive implications for curriculum and educational policy. While this type of research is necessary to gather information about students, the precariousness of interviewing one’s own students is evident. Students are a vulnerable population and considerable effort has to be implemented to ensure that no ethical lines are breached.

For this research, I interviewed my former students. I applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, in which I declared my intentions and demonstrated how I as a researcher planned to ensure that no student was exploited. See Appendix B for the IRB approval. Complete confidentiality was provided to every participant. See Appendix C for the participant consent form that every participant signed. To assure anonymity, all participants were assigned a pseudonym which is used throughout the research reporting. These former students had the absolute right to decline the request to become research participants and to stop at any time. These students are now graduates
of the school, and all of their grades had been assigned. They understood that participating in this study did not affect them academically.

Furthermore, I was aware that there might be what Bell and Nutt (2002) referred to as the concept of a *power imbalance*. This concept occurs in a practitioner-researcher paradigm. I was aware that my former students may always see me as their teacher; therefore, they may feel obligated to provide answers or that they think I may request or censor their online behaviors. In order to offset this occurrence, Comer (2009) suggested interviewing the students outside of the school to neutralize any potential feelings of teacher influence associated with campus surroundings. I interviewed these participants at locations comfortable for them.

Students were provided an in-depth description of the study, what I requested as a researcher, and how their anonymity was protected. If the Social Media in Our Society course is presented in a large context to educators outside of my school, the students’ names or Twitter handles will never be disclosed.

**Trustworthiness**

Shenton (2004) provided a practical framework which promotes trustworthiness in qualitative research. The existence of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability facilitates the integrity of the study.

**Credibility**

To ensure credibility in this study, the findings had to be compatible with reality. In essence, the data had to be explicit in the explanation of participant attitudes and behavior. Shenton (2004) provided a number of requirements to ensure credibility in a qualitative study. The methods I employed in this research were triangulation of data,
reflective commentary while analyzing data, prolonged engagement of the phenomenon of interest, and member-checking. The triangulation of data occurred with the use of a number of data sources. These data sources included interviews, archival data, the observation of participant Twitter accounts, and Snapchat story information. Collecting data on the research questions using various methods promoted triangulation. I used the memo option in NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis software to create reflective commentary during data analysis. The prolonged engagement with the participants occurred because of the trust I have elicited from the participants when they were my students. As an avid user of social media, I understand the perspectives of navigating in a participatory culture. Researcher reflection remains a tool to support internal validity (Merriam, 2009); consequently, I kept a daily reflection journal during the entire semester of teaching the course. Member-checking or response validation occurred because I forwarded my data analysis to each participant for review and spoke with them to confirm my findings. This helped reduce the likelihood that researcher bias did not hinder data analysis.

Transferability

To ensure transferability and external validity of this research, I provided an abundance of contextual data. The curriculum, methods of teaching, reflective assignment prompts provided the context for educators to make the transfer to their classrooms.

Dependability

To ensure dependability in the research, “the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not
necessarily to gain the same results. Thus, the research design may be viewed as a prototype model” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). I reported in detail all of my findings and biases. I also enlisted the assistance of my committee to acquire an external audit to challenge any findings.

Confirmability

I ensured that I was transparent during the entire research process. I created and shared memos at every appropriate opportunity in order to assist in awareness of any bias that could have possibly influenced the manner in which I analyzed the data.

Summary

This chapter provided the methodology for my research. While the commitment to participant privacy and comfort did not change, the data provided more in-depth specifics to the research methodology.

This qualitative research inquiry is guided by the following questions:

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?

2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?

A private high school in the southeastern United States offered a new social studies junior and senior course based on various societal and personal implications contexts of social media usage. This 17-week course provided intentional reflective and observational learning opportunities for students on various social media contexts. The qualitative analysis studied the effects of the course on student social media usage, within the construct of the social learning theory and reflective thinking. This inquiry was
studied within a case study methodology. Student data were collected via three qualitative interviews, archival data, participant Snapchat story information, and Twitter information.

The next chapter will report the findings based on the methodological procedures.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I report the research findings. I analyzed the data provided by the social media postings, archival class data, and transcriptions of interviews with the four participants. This chapter is organized into the following headings: course description, research questions, data collection and analysis, coding process, themes, social learning theory, detailed participant background and data, cross-case analysis, findings, and conclusion. The participants included: Michael, a Caucasian male who was a student-athlete while attending the school; Jason, an African-American male who was a member of the yearbook staff; Carla, a Caucasian female who did not participate in any extracurricular activities; and Aiyana, an outspoken and popular African-American female. Due to the sensitive nature of the material that the participants referred to, names, situations, and cities have been changed. To provide some context of the curricular impact, the next section will contact the specifics of the course. I will provide the units, in conjunction with the overall atmosphere of the course.

Course Description

Unlike some of the students’ other classes which flipped periodically, this class occurred during the same time every day. Social Media in Our Society consisted of seven individual teaching units. These units include: History of Social Media; Social Media Mindset; Political Implications of Social Media; Social Implications of Social Media; Ethical and Legal Implications of Social Media; and Careers and Social Media.
See Appendix A for a detailed description of units. Initially, the students were apprehensive to participate at the beginning of the course, but after the first two weeks, they all appeared comfortable with the class content and the teaching methods. Discussions always occurred, right until the bell rang for the next period. Overall, the students were extremely vocally engaged and shared their opinions and perspectives about the various social media topics. At times I felt like a referee during class. There were so many opinionated students who would passionately argue their perspectives. A typical day would entail me writing the daily curricular goals, reviewing the homework for the next night, and facilitating a structured classroom discussion about the previous day’s class meeting or homework assignment.

From my perspective, the most engaging unit was the unit on the social implications of social media. All of the students were enthralled with the content in that particular unit. They looked forward to watching the episodes of *The Internet Ruined My Life*, in addition to learning about individuals who suffered dire consequences as a result of their social media posts. This unit provided the most opportunities for students to observe individuals who were similar to them. We discussed college students, student-athletes, high school students, and adults who lost their jobs because of social media. During the course we covered a plethora of engaging topics which provided awareness to the students. In our unit on the political implications of social media, we discussed the Arab Spring in-depth. The students learned how the use of social media facilitated the overthrowing of governments in the Middle East. During our unit on the ethical and legal implications of social media we covered the First and Fourth Amendment and how social
media complicates those rights. The unit on careers in social media provided the students information on how their love of using social media could become a career opportunity.

We had a quite a few classroom visitors. Due to the novelty of the subject matter, quite a few teachers requested to observe the class. Some of the visitors contributed to, and led the discussions. An example of this occurred during our political implications unit. A former United States Army attorney who is currently a teacher at the school, shared stories of individuals in the Army suffering consequences as a result of their social media posts. Another visitor during the class was one of the Dean of Students. Dean [Robinson] shared a story of a young woman in his hometown being sexually assaulted, and that assault playing out on different social media sites.

The next section provides the research questions which provided the framework to better understand the curricular and instructional implications of the social media course.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this study were:

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?
2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?

Data Collection and Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) provided a comprehensive explanation of qualitative data analysis. The authors asserted that this type of analysis is accomplished by “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it,
searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). In the qualitative tradition, I analyzed data on a continuous basis throughout the study.

The dataset for this case study included the content and frequency of each participant’s Twitter and Snapchat accounts, transcripts from three interviews with each participant, and course-work which included reflective essays written during the social media course. Three of the participants have public and active Twitter accounts, and all of the participants use Snapchat. I observed all Twitter account activity from the beginning of their Twitter usage and had direct access to two participant Snapchat accounts with participant permission. For the two participants who I did not have direct access to Snapchat, I requested updates concerning their Snapchat posts. I focused primarily on Snapchat and Twitter because at the time, these two programs were the most pervasive social media programs with the research participants. During the interviews, the participants provided information about their relationships with social media prior to and after the course. I transcribed these interviews within twenty-four hours and transferred all of the transcriptions to NVivo. The work from the course included reflection essays and writings about various topics, were also imported into NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis software.

Coding Process

I began the coding process by reading all of the transcripts numerous times and seeking factors that contributed to and demonstrated student behavior change. Basit (2003) acknowledged the intricacies of coding qualitative data. In the spirit of Basit’s assertions, I treated this endeavor with the understanding that coding assisted with
gaining a deeper understanding of what was presented. All of the codes were emergent rather than a priori. The created codes were based on student voice and experience prior to, and after the course, behavior change, and factors that contributed to that change.

The codes that were initially created for this research were: awareness, contradiction, course affect, curricular impact, engagement, epiphanies, learning from observation, less use of social media, maturity, prior to course, privacy, reflective essays, relatable, self-preservation, teacher affect, understanding implications, use of social media after class. Once the data were coded, I looked for recurring themes and then merged appropriate codes. The themes that arose centered on student social media usage change and observational learning.

Themes

Upon assessing and reassessing all interviews, course-work, and social media posts numerous times, it was evident from the data that the reasons for the participants’ social media usage change were due to the course aligned with Bandura’s social learning theory and Dewey’s theory of reflective thinking. The emerging themes were learning from observation and reflection. The most salient data demonstrated that every participant learned from observing others suffering negative consequences because of social media posts. This learning from observation served as a precursor to behavior change because of the observed negative consequences. These concepts directly correlated to observational learning and vicarious punishment. In addition, because the students were provided an opportunity for reflection, the concept of reflection played a role in the data analysis. Maturity was also a theme that emerged during the interviews. The two most prevalent themes, learning from observation and behavior change due to
observed negative consequences, correspond with the tenets of Bandura’s social learning theory.

Social Learning Theory

In the review of literature, a comprehensive definition of Bandura’s social learning theory was provided. Bandura (1977) posited that individuals learn from observation and, therefore, change their behavior accordingly. Bandura (1977) stated,

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

The methods of learning in the social media course which the participants experienced managed to change their social media usage. These students learned through observing potential consequences by way of videos, first-person accounts, and articles. More specifically, the learning that occurred fell within the construct of observational vicarious learning. Learning in this manner eliminates the prerequisite of direct experiences for individuals. Bandura (1989) asserted that learning from these mistakes can save an individual unnecessary conflict because of the preemptive behavior change which avoids potential catastrophes.

In the following sections, I provide the results from the data that correlate with the tenets of the social learning theory. These sections provide participant descriptions, social media history, data, and analysis. Michael is the first participant that I will report on. See Figure 2 for a visual snapshot of Michael’s information.
Michael

“I don’t want that to be me.”

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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Class clown, Out-going</td>
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<td>School Activities</td>
<td>Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Data</td>
<td>Snapchat and Twitter</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Timing of Interviews | • Three months after course ended (7/2016) at coffee shop.  
  • After mid-term exams via www.freeconferencecall.com (10/2016).  
  • Final member-checking phone conversation during the week of Thanksgiving (11/2016). |

*Figure 2. Visual snapshot of Michael’s information.*

Michael tweeted “one hundred dollars to the first person to pull this fire alarm!”

This was an original tweet with an image of the school’s fire alarm and a reward offer. This social media post precipitated his visit to the dean of students’ office where he was subsequently disciplined.

Michael is a Caucasian male senior, who at the time of the class was 18 years old. He had attended the school since first grade. He is the eldest of two boys and lived with both of his parents. He is currently attending a large private university in the southeastern United States. Michael was a football player during his high school years and enjoyed the competition and the camaraderie of the sport, especially because some of his closest friends were on the football team. Unfortunately, Michael was injured during his senior
year and had to cease his participation in football. While he no longer played, he attended all practices and games and was still a part of the team.

Michael was considered the class clown because of his ability to inject humor into class discussions. During one of the class meetings, when discussing Facebook, Michael stated, “Facebook is for aunts and uncles!” This quote was repeated throughout the semester by both me and the students. The statement always elicited laughter from the class. His Twitter postings prior to the class demonstrated his affinity for humor. During the course, Michael intimated that his Snapchat account was full of humor and always made people laugh; however, his sense of humor was considered offensive to some.

Early in the course, another teacher emailed me a screenshot of something that Michael retweeted which she deemed offensive. I referred to his retweet and used it for discussion as a teachable moment for all of my students. I reminded Michael that even though it was not something he directly posted on Twitter, a retweet gives the connotation that he agreed with the retweeted content. In the following section, I will provide historical context to Michael’s social media behavior prior to taking the course.

Social Media History

According to Michael, his Snapchat postings prior to course consisted of his being humorous and doing things such as “cursing, saying offensive things and not really thinking about the repercussions.” He stated that his Snapchat behavior preceding the course consisted of several weekly videos.

Michael began using Twitter on May 27, 2013. Since that date and between the time I checked his posts on September 30, 2016, Michael tweeted and retweeted a total of 1,941 posts. Michael’s Twitter account was public; anyone who accesses his account can
view all of his tweets. *Figure 3* represents Michael’s Twitter activity. After the course ended, there was a sharp decline in the amount of times Michael used Twitter as a vehicle to share his thoughts. This visual representation is supported by Michael's assertions in his interviews about his views on using social media as a method to communicate.

*Figure 3.* Michael’s Twitter activity (tweets and retweets) from the day he started using Twitter, May 27, 2013 through September 30, 2016.

For this study, I extensively reviewed Michael’s Twitter history. Michael’s 1,900 tweets and retweets consisted of material that can be considered extremely offensive. He retweeted posts with curses, crude language, sexually explicit situations, and inflammatory statements. One of these inflammatory tweets is the post that my colleague sent to me. The content of his retweet was considered racially insensitive and offensive. See *Figure 4* for examples of the type of offensive tweets that Michael posted. These re-
tweets include racial epithets, a tweet that can be considered anti-Semitic, and a sexist tweet that is offensive to women. I blurred some of the letters of the expletives.

Figure 4. Examples of offensive tweets that Michael posted on Twitter prior to the course.
I had a total of three conversations with Michael for this study. The first interview occurred at a coffee shop near his home, the second interview was conducted remotely by way of Freeconferencecall.com, and the final interview served as the member-checking telephone conversation. Michael was always very accommodating about participating in this research. The second interview occurred a few days after he completed his mid-term exams. Even though he is my former student, I still felt compelled to build a rapport with him. Building a rapport with research participants prior to questioning is essential for ensuring that they are comfortable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). His comfort level and willingness to open up to me was obvious, which facilitated good conversations. The final interview occurred during his Thanksgiving break. The sole purpose of this interview was for member-checking. The data collected from Michael organized by themes will be presented next.

Learning from Observation

During the initial interview, the first question I asked Michael was what he noticed, if anything, about his use of social media during the summer, after the course. He replied, “I have definitely become more wary since you showed me examples of what can happen when it comes to career and school. There are a lot of potential consequences when you were posting recklessly.” Michael said that he learned the potential consequences of what happens when people carelessly post comments or pictures on social media. The consequences presented in the class included the loss of college scholarships, jobs, anonymity, and dangers to one’s personal safety. Michael stated that the stories I shared in the class were another factor that resonated with him.
And it was never telling us what to do, it was just you showing us that this can happen. A lot of stories about students I could really identify with. I know kids that have done things like that. It could have easily ended up on social media. Especially when Dean [Robinson] came and talked about the rape case. That was terrible, but it was kind of like a hyperbolized example of what could happen.

In one of his reflective essays, Michael confirmed that he related to the topics and subject matter in the course. Michael wrote, “Each topic has demonstrated a clear relevance to my everyday life, so the significance of the unit has been enthralling.” This assertion by Michael demonstrates that the content resonated with him because of his ability to see himself in the individuals that were discussed in the course. This observation caused him to think of his actions.

In another essay, Michael stated,

We learned about the digital permanent record that students build themselves with posts is a very real and startling concept, promoting careful consideration before internet usage. Students are oftentimes their own worst enemies when it comes to social media, and their mistakes in this field can scar their reputations and their friends’ for decades. This digital trail that haunts social media users is an overlooked concept that can cause irreparable damage to one’s life. The author makes the point that people should be more observant and thoughtful while posting and that they should consider the future repercussions surrounding everything they say.
This reflective essay referred to the course textbook titled *lol...OMG!...What Every Student Needs to Know About Online Reputation*. The author chronicled instances of teenagers getting into trouble because of their social media behavior.

During one of the interviews, Michael specifically recalled the stories in which high school students suffered consequences as a result of their social media posts. When I asked him for specific examples he referred to the time when the dean of students was a guest speaker in the class. The dean spoke to the students about a social media controversy that occurred in his hometown. This event was two-fold because a young woman was inebriated and sexually assaulted, and that sexual assault was documented on social media. Not only were the young men who assaulted her punished, individuals who shared their negative opinions of the victim on social media suffered consequences as well. A college student who previously attended the victim’s high school made a disparaging remark about the young woman on his Twitter account. Subsequently, this college student was expelled and lost his scholarship. When Michael referred to this case he said,

> That really resonated with me especially as an incoming college student. People have told me my entire life that posting reckless threats and inappropriate pictures and things like that are bad but that particular example really hit closer to home.

I asked him to discuss this a little more in-depth. I desired to understand why it hit closer to home. What about that case made him become somewhat reflective and decide to change his behavior? Michael stated, “I just kind of saw that was something that I should not model myself after. I kind of felt like I don’t want that to be me.” Michael’s fear of
social media missteps is further demonstrated in his lack of using Twitter and Snapchat. He now makes fewer social media posts.

During the semester, all students had to present an example of an individual suffering consequences because of social media posts. The students had to lead a discussion about the merits of the consequence and answer questions from the other students. Michael made reference to this assignment in one of his essays:

After watching all of my peers’ presentations I have had the opportunity to discover just how easily the course of one’s life can be altered due to a seemingly harmless social media post. Numerous men and women have been publicly shamed, fired, and even imprisoned due to their careless behavior on interactive, online platforms. I will now always take into account that every one of my postings has the potential to be read by virtually anybody, and it may not be taken as lightly as intended. Even seemingly harmless expressions of someone’s opinion may be grounds for dismissal from their workplace because it misrepresents their company or unintentionally exposes personal information that their employer may not agree with. None of my social media activity will be directed exclusively towards my friends from now on, and it will be acceptable on a much broader scale.

According to Michael, these presentations and the content of the unit resonated with him. He was able to gain a fuller understanding of the potential ramifications of negative social media use.

Similar to all of the other participants, Michael sat through assemblies held at the school where the perils of social media use were explained. When I asked him about his
opinion on these assemblies and their effectiveness, he stated “Assemblies are definitely not as effective. Just because our class was more personal. It was a more personal setting because there were eighteen of us. And when you were talking to the whole school, you are not as tuned in.” The avenue for reflection was different than an assembly.

Reflection

Michael’s reflective process was somewhat cursory because according to him there was a lack of in-depth analysis of the content. When I asked if there was more to his thinking process, like a deep reflection, he admitted to immediately observing how others behaved and saw the consequences, and decided not to emulate that behavior.

With Michael’s personality as class comedian, these reflective essays provided the avenue for him to seriously contemplate his observations and what those observations meant to him and his future social media behavior. He used his essays as a vehicle to reflect on content; however, during his interviews he asserted that the act of a deep reflection did not play a role in his behavior change.

Changes in Use of Social Media

Michael’s social media usage change was reflected in his Snapchat and Twitter posts. His Twitter posts since the course consisted of jokes that did not include racial epithets or profanity. He rarely posted on Snapchat, and when he did, the content was extremely lighthearted.

After his assertion of understanding the consequences because of the course, I asked him if he ever consciously or subconsciously still thinks about the course. Michael stated,
I don’t think directly, like I was sitting in class on x day and I learned this thing, but some of it really stuck with me. I subconsciously think, if I see something stupid, oh they can lose their job for that. That is something I learned in the social media class. I would not have had that same thought process if I had not taken the course. I consider those thoughts pretty often when I’m on social media. When I use it, I think about, is this post meant for everybody to see? That’s how I learned every post should be.

Michael’s statement is an endorsement of one of the main goals of the course. I wanted the students to understand that every post had the potential to drastically alter the course of their lives. This resonated with Michael.

After the course, Michael stated that he posts approximately once a month, if that much. I follow Michael on Snapchat, and his posts are indeed very infrequent. The course ended in May, and from the month of July to the end of October, Michael posted approximately 10 videos to Snapchat. These videos were usually of him spending time with his high school girlfriend, who currently attends a different university.

While Michael rarely posted on Snapchat and Twitter after the course, he admitted to observing others’ use of these programs. This new behavior changed many things for him. As a result, he asserted that he did not post as much and is not as enamored with the idea of social media as much as he was prior to the course. Michael asserted,

Honestly, I think that by not posting as much I am not as caught up in it. I experience more of the real world. I think the smartest way to use social media
is to observe. I kind of observe. I watch what other people post. By not posting I find myself staying off of it more. It’s been kind of a positive thing.

See Figure 5 for a visual model of Michael’s story.
Summary

According to Michael, the content of the course changed his social media usage. He learned from the mistakes of others who suffered consequences of their social media missteps. His observation of these consequences initiated the change in his online behavior. Michael chose not to emulate the student-athletes who experienced expulsion, loss of scholarships, and negative reputations. *Figure 6* represents the research findings for Michael. This graphic demonstrates that Michael learned primarily through observation. His usage of social media changed because he is scared of suffering consequences.

*Figure 6. Research findings for Michael.*
While Michael’s reflective essays state that these cases he was exposed to during the course prompted him to change, in his interviews after the end of the course, Michael confirmed that during his interviews.

Michael asserted that reflection did not play a role in this behavior change. He stated that he just changed when he saw the negative behavior portrayed. While this was his assertion, Michael was not aware of the role of reflection in his learning. He had to experience some sort of reflective process to acknowledge his current behavior and then consider the necessity of a change in this social media usage.

Michael’s ability to learn from the experiences of others correlates with the tenets of Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory. The vicarious nature of Michael’s learning process was demonstrated in his ability to learn and change his behavior as a result of observing others. Not wanting to emulate the athletes demonstrates Michael’s ability to learn socially and vicariously because he learned from the mistakes of others. The concept of vicarious punishment was also evident in Michael’s desire not to emulate the behavior that caused individuals to suffer negative consequences.

I asked Michael if his newfound appreciation for staying off of social media was a result of his going off to college and becoming more mature. He agreed that it was partly maturity. He stated, “Going off to college and living away from your home does in fact presents a different perspective.” However, when I asked him if his classmates in college felt the same way and demonstrated the same type of maturity levels when using various social media applications, he said,

I think in this regard I am more evolved because I have taken the course. Like I understand the consequences. I mean I think everyone should have some sort of
social media awareness or instruction on how to use their accounts because I mean in this day and age that is a really important skill to learn.

In the next section I report Jason’s experiences with social media prior to, and after the course. Similar to Michael, Jason changed his social media usage as a result of the course. See Figure 7 for a visual snapshot of Jason’s information.

“

Jason

“This made me cautious and aware of what to do and what not to do on social media because it could all go away in an instant.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Jason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Social Media Data</td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
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| Timing of Interviews | • Three months after course (7/2016) at a coffee shop.  
• After mid-term exams via www.freeconferencecall.com (10/2016).  
• Final member-checking phone conversation during the week of Thanksgiving (11/2016). |

Figure 7. Visual snapshot of Jason’s information.

During the semester, Jason reported to me a conversation that he had with another student in the class during the previous weekend. Jason told the student, “Don’t put that
on Snapchat! What do you think Mrs. Johnson would say?” This was in reference to one of the students participating in underage drinking. This student proceeded to post a video of him drinking on Snapchat. Jason was with him and promptly reminded him of what they learned in class.

At the onset of the course, Jason was an 18 year-old senior who had attended the school since ninth grade. He is African-American and the younger of two boys and lived with both of his parents. Jason is currently attending a university in the northeastern United States. While Jason was not a vocal student in the class, he was active on the yearbook committee, was a school journalist, and a member of both the Spanish and business club.

During the course, Jason had opinions but did not contribute those opinions to discussions as much as other students. He was silent during most of the classroom conversations; however, his reflective essays provided a personal, deep analysis of the classroom content. What he lacked in classroom participation, he provided in his reflective essays. The following section provides a synopsis of Jason’s social media behavior prior to taking the course.

Social Media History

The only social media account Jason used was Snapchat. With Jason being absent from Twitter, unlike the other participants, I asked him why he never used Twitter to communicate. He conceded that the creation of a Twitter account always seemed like a hassle when trying to find people to follow, so he chose to remain absent from that medium. While he decided not to use Twitter during his time in high school, he stated that he would most likely have to create a Twitter account once he began college. Jason
is enrolled in a communications program at his university, and social media is a part of the curriculum.

When asked about his use of Snapchat prior to the course, Jason asserted that he posted content to Snapchat infrequently. The videos he posted consisted of songs and music videos.

I had a total of three conversations with Jason. The first interview was conducted in a coffee shop near his home, the second interview was conducted remotely by way of Freeconferencecall.com, and the final conversation was a phone call that served as the member-checking interview. Similar to Michael, Jason appeared to have a high comfort level and was always willing to speak with me. We had a good rapport which facilitated good conversations. Jason was a cooperative and easily accessible participant; therefore there was never a problem interviewing him. He rarely visited home, so two of our three interviews were conducted remotely.

Learning from Observation

During the initial interview, which occurred two months after the course ended, I asked Jason if he noticed any changes about his use of social media over the summer since the course. Jason said because of the course, he did not feel the need to post on Snapchat as often as others. He said that the course made him more cautious and aware of what to post. I asked Jason what in the course facilitated that awareness and he replied,

When we learned about people losing their jobs and losing scholarships because of what they did on social media it made me more guarded about what I post and don't post. Learning about people losing scholarships. I am about to go off to
college myself and I am receiving scholarships to go to college. This made me cautious and aware of what to do and what not to do on social media because it could all go away in an instant.

Jason is specifically referring to part of the curriculum where I presented specific examples of students losing scholarships because of social media posts. We read a number of articles that provided real-world examples of high school students who have lost college scholarships as a result of their social media posts. There were also examples of student-athletes, adults, entertainers, teachers, and a host of other individuals who did not consider that their social media posts were going to provoke anger from the populous. These concepts resonated with Jason, as he was also a student who earned college scholarships and was fearful of losing that scholarship because of something posted on social media. He was able to reflect on being a student and not losing his college scholarship.

Reflection

An important part of the course was the reflective essays that every student had to write for each unit. These assignments were a part of the curriculum which provided the students the opportunity to formally reflect on the learned content. For Jason, the role of reflection by way of the reflective essays played a role in his learning. He said the following about the role of the reflective essays written during the course, “It helps me organize my thoughts. I didn't know everything I did know until I wrote it down. I was able to see what I actually learned. I guess it was there subconsciously.” The unit reflections were shared with me, the teacher, to chronicle how they internalized the content presented to them.
Jason was not a vocal student in class, so the reflective essays provided a vehicle for Jason to compose his thoughts and change his potential future actions. Jason’s reflections provided insight to this thought process during the course which were not necessarily demonstrated during class time.

In one of his essays, Jason asserted,

Reading these articles gave me a whole different perspective on student-athletes. I used to think they had it so easy. I thought they only had to worry about playing their respective sport. They have so many other things to worry about now that social media is around. Many of the people being recruited for teams have to be care about what they post because of the repercussions. The spotlight shines on athletes so they have to behave themselves on and off the field.

These essays served as an avenue for Jason to share his reflections, which served him well in the course. He did not speak much in class, but shared his opinions in his writings.

While he was able to share his reflective thoughts during the reflective essays, reflection did not appear to be primary factor in Jason’s social media usage change. His desire to not emulate others who suffered life-altering consequences because of social media posts played a larger role.

Changes in Use of Social Media

Jason’s Snapchat posts have increased since the course. I asked him why, and he stated that now he knows more people so he posts a little more. Other than Michael, Jason is the only other participant that I follow on Snapchat. From the month of July 2016 to the end of October 2016, Jason posted a total of four Snapchat videos. The
content of these videos consisted of him leaving his hometown, moving into college, having fun at a college party, and attending an honors program. With Jason posting only four videos in a span of four months, his prior use of Snapchat was less frequent.

In another one of his reflection essays from the course, Jason made reference to a six-episode show that we watched named *The Internet Ruined My Life*. This show provided first-person accounts of events of individuals making mistakes using social media applications and how their lives were subsequently ruined. The negative impacts were acutely described by the individuals, their friends, and their family members.

*The Internet Ruined my Life* was a half-hour show that provided first-person accounts of individuals who suffered dire consequences as a result of a tweet, Facebook status update, or YouTube video. The show specifically explored the dangers of living within the context of a participatory culture by demonstrating how a seemingly innocent post can change the trajectory of one’s life. The premise of the show was to demonstrate how one social media update can backfire and ruin the life of unknowing individuals.

Jason stated, “This show taught me to remain careful online about what I say because it can be misinterpreted or skewed by others.” The range of individuals who were affected varied in gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status. Jason went on to further assert,

Because I simply use social media to connect with my friends that I normally would not text, I have never really thought about the ramifications of my social media posts because I do not post anything that I am ashamed of. I walk away for 10 seconds before I upload or post anything so that I do not end up sharing
something I will regret. For this reason, I do not even have a Twitter, where the ‘retweet’ feature makes it so easy to co-sign something inappropriate.

Jason’s comments demonstrate that his social media posts prior to the course were not negative, and according to him, he did not post anything wildly inappropriate. He later alluded to the fact that he could have possibly posted something inappropriate, but he did not remember anything specific.

In one of Jason’s essays, he referred to a woman we discussed who posted something inappropriate and suffered dire consequences. She lost her job, anonymity, and received multiple death threats. When writing about this woman, Jason stated, “I fail to see why she posted this on social media, instead of keeping this to herself or just telling a few friends.” The woman lost her anonymity as a result of a seemingly harmless joke that she posted on Twitter.

Jason touched on not using Twitter in high school. He predicted that his Twitter usage would start in the communications program in his university. In his prediction, he concluded that the use of Twitter in college would be strictly for networking and for class. During his second interview, which occurred after he was enrolled in college, I followed up with his initial statement about using Twitter. He said,

In one of my journalism classes, we have to do a project where we had to tweet certain stuff going on around campus and instances of school spirit and like extra-curricular activities and stuff. I mean, I’m on social media I just don’t post much. I let other people do that.

I then asked if he created the Twitter account, and he did not. He stated that the students were in groups, and one person in the group did the tweeting. Jason found himself
looking at social media posts more often than posting himself. He remained keenly aware of the potential ramifications that come with the excessive use of social media. So much that he did not create the Twitter account because he lacked the desire to use Twitter, even though it was a necessity for his college program.

At the time of our second interview, Jason still thought about people losing their jobs and scholarships as a result of what they posted on social media sites. He asserted, That goes through my head every day. That is something that would change my life for the worse if that were to happen to me. So before I post I flashback to that unit where we learned the social implications of social media. I definitely think about that.

Thinking about these consequences and not wanting to emulate the behavior was a motivating factor for Jason. As he stated, he thinks of the implications of these postings daily and therefore changed the way he used social media. While he learned about the perils of social media use outside of the class, the class resonated with him more so than the school assemblies did.

Similar to the other students, the topic of assemblies was discussed. Jason did attend assemblies during his time in high school where students were warned about the perils of social media. Jason said while he paid attention to those assemblies, the course facilitated a deeper understanding of the potential issues. He replied, “We spent an entire unit about it which was two to three weeks and not 45 minutes in an assembly. It just showed me it happens more often than I thought it would. So it just hammered the point home.” See Figure 8 for a visual model of Jason’s story.
While Jason did not post anything controversial prior to the course, his assertions of learning and gaining an awareness will help him in the future. He admitted to posting things that could possibly have been viewed as inappropriate; however, he was never reprimanded for his social media postings. The examples of college students’ social media missteps resonated with Jason. He learned how not to use social media within the context of being a current college student. The examples in the course of students losing scholarships and people losing jobs reverberated with him. Even though his posts were
not offensive prior to the course, he gained a new awareness which will be beneficial for him in the future.

During our first interview, Jason stated that he did not see the need to post on social media; however, his Snapchat frequency has increased. This is in part due to his becoming more popular in college. He admitted that he has met more people, so his use of Snapchat has increased. While this is the case, he still uses social media with discernment.

After analyzing Jason’s data, I reached the conclusion that Jason demonstrated that he learned through observation. Bandura’s concept of observational learning correlates to Jason’s assertions and data. One of the tenets of Bandura’s theory is that individuals learn from others and avoid costly mistakes as a result of that learning. Jason’s data illustrate this behavior change. Jason’s actual behavior change was a result of vicarious punishment. Not emulating behavior that he observed. *Figure 9* represents the research findings for Jason. This graphic demonstrates that Jason learned through observation and reflection. His usage of social media changed because of his professional aspirations. He aspires to be a journalist and contends that social media is prevalent in that field. While his use of social media has increased, he is more discerning of what he posts.
In the next section I report Carla’s experiences with social media prior to, and after the course. Carla is one of the two female participants in this study. See Figure 10 for a visual snapshot of Carla’s information.

Carla

“The same thing could happen to me.”
Carla wrote in one of her reflective essays, “To me, I think high school and college was probably a better time to make mistakes before the Internet was created. Pictures weren’t uploaded anywhere for the whole world to see and drunk posts wouldn’t later be regretted.” Carla is a Caucasian female senior, who was 18-years old at the time of the class, who had attended the school since first grade. She is the second oldest of four siblings and lived with both of her parents. Carla was an introverted student who did not participate in any sports or any extra-curricular activities in the school.

Carla was the most reserved student in the class. She rarely contributed to the in-class discussions, and when she did, her point of view was overshadowed because of the strong personalities who vocalized their opinions. While she did not share her thoughts in class, her reflection essays provided insight to her thoughts and feelings about the class content. In the following section, I will provide information on Carla’s social media usage prior to the course.
Social Media History

Carla started using Snapchat in 2014. She would have preferred to have created an account prior to 2014; however, she received her first smartphone during her sophomore year. In order to use the Snapchat program in 2014, a smartphone was necessary. When asked about the types of videos that she posted on Snapchat prior to and after taking the course Carla said, “I just post funny selfies of me and my friends. If one of my friends is doing something silly I would video tape it.” While I did not have access to Carla’s Snapchat stories, she informed me of the content whenever I asked. Her Snapchat updates consisted of Carla’s sister and her friends having fun. She used Snapchat as a way to share the light-hearted events in her life.

Carla began tweeting on February 2, 2013. Since that date and up until September 30, 2016, Carla tweeted and retweeted a total of 899 posts. See Figure 11 for a graphic representation of Carla’s tweets. I reviewed all of Carla’s Twitter posts, and these posts primarily consisted of jokes and harmless humorous memes. She retweeted jokes about taking exams, eating carbs, and other things she found entertaining. While these tweets were generally harmless, there were tweets that could be considered offensive. Some of her older tweets consisted of cursing and making fun of individuals using memes. See Figure 12 for examples of original tweets and retweets that can be considered offensive.
I interviewed Carla a total of three times for this study. The interviews were conducted at a coffee shop near her home, in my office at the school from which Carla graduated, and over the phone. During our first interview, I inquired about her college and summer plans. She was enthusiastic about leaving home and venturing out on her own. She planned on attending a large public university in the southeastern United States. Our second interview was conducted as a follow-up to our first interview and the third interview served as the member-checking conversation.
Figure 12. Examples of offensive tweets that Carla posted on Twitter.

Learning from Observation

In one of Carla’s essays she made reference to an article that we read in class about a social media application named Yik-Yik. Yik-Yak was a program that allowed individuals to anonymously comment about others at their school. One student at Carla’s school was bullied mercilessly and an article was written about the incident. Carla wrote,
I remember sitting in my 10th grade Chemistry class when Yik-Yak blew up at our school. I have to admit that I downloaded the app just to see what it was all about. I never posted anything but rather just read. Some of the things that people were saying were crazy and unbelievable, but a lot of them were funny. There was one about me but I didn’t let it bother me too much. And then I saw the [Susan Sanders] post. I was so upset that someone could say that, whether they were joking or not; it was so insensitive. I loved her push to get the app taken down. That’s just so admirable to me. The Yik-Yak situation really showed how immature high schoolers are, as well as the control and power they have when it comes to social media. I do think, however, despite if Yik-Yak was taken down or not, another app would come up in its place and start more drama.

Carla saw the post that was written about [Susan Sanders]. The person commented that [Susan Sanders] should kill herself. Reading how teenagers used social media to bully others struck a nerve with Carla. Her observation of the situation caused her to witness the damage that could be done to someone’s self-esteem as a result of an anonymous post on a social media site.

Reflection

Due to Carla’s shy and quiet demeanor during the classroom discussions, her reflective essays provided insight into some of her beliefs during the course. Carla’s essays were always forthcoming and honest. Her reflective essays correlated with her interview assertions. Her fear of negative repercussions was evident in her writings during the course. Carla wrote,
Although I have never been personally cyberbullied, after these *Internet Ruined My Life*, I have seen how far things can be taken. The cold, hard screen can, unfortunately, be used in such a negative way and can easily take things too far. It is so sad and almost surprising to see how life-changing the internet can be. The internet seems to always spin things out of control. That’s why you really have to tiptoe around on social media and I’m sure that all of these people that we talked about in this unit would testify to that. I’ve learned that I really do need to think about every single thing that I post online because I never know who is watching and just waiting for me to mess up.

Carla’s reflections demonstrate her thought process during the course. She was introduced to a plethora of examples of individuals suffering as a result of their social media posts.

I never thought exceptionally of social media predators, but after seeing those videos and having that discussion, I am more sort of sketched out towards the Internet. There are so many ways around privacies Internet users think they have. What one thinks is private maybe not actually. The action of sharing things on social media is something I haven’t ever thought that much about, either. Snapchatting is dangerous to me in a new way after reading and discussing. Even though I think that my sent snapchats are deleted after the certain amount of seconds allowed for viewing, they are sometimes not, unbeknownst to me. Just because the screen does not say “screenshotted” does not mean that the receiver did not record it on another device. That is so scary to me; I have definitely made
some mistakes in the past that I hope do not come back to haunt me when looking for a job or something else important to me in my future.

The sharing of opinions was an important facet of the course which is not available in the context of an assembly. The discussions provided all students an outlet to voice their opinions. Carla rarely voiced her opinion during class; however, the reflective essays served as a vehicle for her to provide her perspective on the course content. Even though she shared her reflections on paper, Carla asserted that she enjoyed the reflective discussions. She said that hearing everyone else’s perspective and opinion was beneficial to her.

Carla also said that the course made her think about what she posts online. She became reflective prior to posting. She stated, “I definitely started thinking about like who is going to see this. My aunt and uncle might see this. Or people that I don’t know are going to see this and judge me.” The act of thinking about potential viewers of the content displays Carla’s newfound ability to be reflective prior to posting.

Changes in Use of Social Media

During our initial interview the first question I asked Carla was had she noticed anything different about her use of social media during the summer after the course. Carla replied, “I don't tweet personal things a lot. You know those pages that say summer goals. I just look through that type of stuff.” The summer goals that Carla referred to are playful memes of how teenagers plan to spend their summer having harmless fun. These posts are considered innocuous teenage expressions. The post-course tweets did not contain any profanity. Carla just observed the content. She did not create and post any original tweets.
Carla’s Twitter activity decreased after the end of the course which coincided with her graduation. While her Twitter posts are public, her Snapchat stories are not.

Because of the content learned in the course, Carla was keenly aware of how her social media postings could negatively affect her sorority application. Carla primarily retweeted tweets, so I asked her about her retweeting behavior and if it changed, she said,

I think definitely especially now that I'm going into college. I have to think about if sororities are going to look at the stuff I retweet. So if it has a cuss word I'm like ooh don't know if the sorority is going to see that.

During the second interview I followed up with Carla about her initial desire to join a sorority. She did in fact join and I proceeded to ask her if her sorority looks at her social media accounts, she stated,

I think they probably did before I joined. Now they have rules for what you can and can’t do on social media. You can’t post pictures of you with a cup in your hand because of the perception that it may be alcohol. Really if you are videotaped doing anything suspicious and it is put out on the internet you can get in trouble.

Carla’s lack of posting inappropriate content was two-fold. While she was keenly aware of some negative ramifications for teenage girls when using social media, she also altered her social media behavior because of her desire to be a part of a sorority. While that desire played a role in her social media usage, the awareness was developed as a result of the course.

I asked Carla specifically about assemblies at school which provided awareness to students on the proper use of social media. She replied,
Any specific class with 13 [sic] people, even though I wasn’t very loud, you can
voice your own opinion. I know people enjoy doing that; I did too. I like that a lot
more than in the assembly because you are not being talked at. You are being
talked with.

When asked if her relationship with social media changed because of what she learned in
the course, she said,

I have definitely unfollowed a lot of people I didn't even know. It's like I don't
even know you. You are just a friend of a friend. This is stupid. Or people that
I've never even met. It's kind of creepy some of the stories we read in class and
the outcomes. I have definitely taken note of that. It definitely made it seem like
if it could happen to anyone. It was other high school students. Like from a state
or two over. That type of creeper stories could definitely happen to us.

Carla discussed how these stories were more personal to her because of the relatability of
the subjects. During the course we specifically discussed the ramifications of social
media postings that affected high school students. The ramifications included expulsion,
harassment, loss of college scholarships, and loss of anonymity. During her second
interview, when I asked her to be more specific about how these stories affected her, she
stated,

Some of the things we looked at kind of scared me a little bit. I feel like girls my
age a lot of times are the targets of all of the stuff we learned about. That is scary.
If something bad happens a lot of times it was a teenage girl my age. The Dean
[Robinson] example sticks out to me a lot and also I feel that girls a lot of the time
are the targets. A ton of bad stuff happens to the boys too but like teenage girls I feel are like on the headlines.

The Dean [Robinson] example that Carla referred to is the social media case that also resonated with Michael. This was the case where a teenage girl became inebriated then sexually assaulted. The night of this occurrence played out on social media with students posting pictures and commentary. Both high school and college students were penalized, not only because of actions, but because of comments that were made about the young lady on social media. In one of Carla’s reflective essays she stated,

My eyes have been opened up to things I hadn’t ever thought of concerning the internet/social media. I really like where the author is coming from, real life experience. He isn’t just my mom or dad telling me to take things off of my Facebook or Twitter.

She learned from reading the course textbook, *lol... OMG! What Every Student Needs to Know About Online Reputation Management, Digital Citizenship and Cyberbullying*.

See *Figure 13* for a visual model of Carla’s story.
Summary

Carla’s data facilitated my assertion that she learned how social media posts affect others. She personalized the effects that others experienced because of how they used social media. When I asked her what made these stories personal, she specifically stated, “The same thing could happen to me.” While she related to the content, the delivery of the course content also played a role in her beliefs. Carla mentioned the shows that we watched and the examples of incidents happening to people just like her. I asked her specifically if that was what changed her behavior. To this, Carla replied,

Definitely, because before it was just assemblies where we were taught in this one instance this happened. I thought well, that is never going to happen to me. We

"Figure 13. Visual model of Carla’s story."
talked about so many different cases, and the one that really stuck out was the case in [Nashville, TN]. OK, I’ve been drinking before, and someone could have like done that to me. They could have put it all over social media, and my life would have been ruined, and everyone would have known my name. That one I keep thinking about.

Carla’s desire to join a sorority also played a factor in her social media behavior change. This awareness of seeing how social media posts can prevent people from achieving various goals sobered her. In Carla’s case, it was specifically her sorority status. She learned through observation of others that your desires can be denied because of what you post on social media. The concept of vicarious punishment also played a role in Carla’s enlightenment. She did not want to suffer negative consequences so she initiated a behavior change. The tenets of Bandura’s theory of observational learning apply to Carla; however, reflection plays a role as well. Carla reflected and understood that she did not want to emulate those who suffered consequences because of social media posts.

During one of the interviews, when I asked Carla if maturity played a role in her behavior change she brushed it off and contended that she “guessed it was maturity” and that she just didn’t use social media as much. In one of her reflective essays Carla stated, “Teenage immaturity will always be there and it’s super unfortunate. But, it’s also something over the years that I’ve become accustomed to having to deal with.” She believed that teenagers are going to do silly things online and it is because of the lack of maturity. While this was her contention, she did not believe that her change was due to maturity. Figure 14 represents the research findings for Carla. This chart
demonstrates that Carla learned through observation and reflection. Her usage of social media changed because she is scared of suffering consequences. Carla has the other influences that contributed to her change of usage. Her personal aspiration of pledging a sorority changed her perspective and she posts less to her social media accounts and is also more discerning of the content of those posts.

Figure 14. Research findings for Carla.

In the next section I report Aiyana’s experiences with social media prior to, and after the course. Aiyana is the second female participant of this study, and she was the main student who overshadowed Carla. Aiyana was very opinionated and vocal, which proved to be the opposite of Carla. See Figure 15 for a visual snapshot of Aiyana’s information.
Aiyana stated, “Twenty years from now society will be more forgiving of people’s social media mistakes.” According to her this change will occur because of the increased pervasiveness of social media in all aspects of contemporary culture. Many of her classmates repeated her assertion throughout the semester. This perhaps made the students optimistic that these unfortunate consequences will not be suffered by their descendants.

Aiyana is an African-American female who at the onset of the class was 18 years old. She has attended the school since ninth grade. She is the only child and lived with her mother. During her time at the school, Aiyana was a very active student. She was
the manager of the boys’ varsity basketball team, participated in the art and photography program which allowed her to travel, was a member the multicultural awareness club, and in her senior year she joined Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Aiyana was considered to be the outspoken, no-nonsense student in the class. She was very passionate about her opinions and fiercely defended her perspectives and thoughts. She was always extremely forthcoming and honest about her social media activities. If someone said something negative about her or a cause she believed in, Aiyana had no problem letting that person know, via social media or in person. Her most visible social media application at the time was Twitter. Her Twitter account was public, and people were able to view her tweets without her providing formal permission. Aiyana participated in what could have been perceived as acrimonious exchanges with others on Twitter. These disagreements were usually a result of someone saying something that she found offensive or that she perceived as an attack on her. She felt no remorse for replying to tweets in a public arena.

Social Media History

Aiyana created her Snapchat account in 2012. According to her, her Snapchat videos prior to and after the course chronicled her social life with friends. The worst thing that she admitted to posting on her Snapchat story in the past was an image of her holding a beer. While I did not have access to her Snapchat accounts, Aiyana always informed me of what was on her Snapchat story whenever I requested an update.

Aiyana was an avid user of Twitter before she enrolled in the course. She began using Twitter on February 5, 2011. Figure 16 represents Aiyana’s Twitter activity. Since that time and up through September 30, 2016, she had a total of over 22,000 tweets and
retweets. Her tweets prior to the class included her commentary on a plethora of social issues which she proudly weighed in or provided her opinions. Aiyana was never shy of being honest on Twitter about anything on her mind. She also had quite a few confrontations with individuals on Twitter. Aiyana was once called to the Dean’s office for a potentially insensitive tweet posted on her Twitter account. She was not remorseful about her tweet and refused to take it down. She had an unapologetic demeanor about her social media postings. Aiyana felt that if an individual took the time to review her account, they had no right to be offended because she had the right to post whatever she wanted. See *Figure 17* for type of tweets that Aiyana posted on her Twitter accounts.

*Figure 16.* Aiyana’s Twitter activity (tweets and retweets) from the day she started using Twitter, February 5, 2011, to September 30, 2016.
Unlike the other participants, Aiyana created a YouTube channel. Her sole purpose for this channel was to share makeup tutorials for the public. She created this channel in August of 2016, and by September 30, 2016 she only had three videos. During one of our interviews she informed me that she planned on creating more videos and aimed to increase the subscribers.

![Example of offensive tweets](image)

*Figure 17. Examples of offensive tweets that Aiyana posted on Twitter.*

For this qualitative inquiry, Aiyana and I had three conversations. The first one occurred at her home prior to her leaving for college. For the second interview, Aiyana met me in my office located at her former high school, and the final conversation was conducted on the phone and served as the member-checking interview. During our first
interview, Aiyana beamed with excitement about her next step of leaving home and going to college within a few weeks after our interview. She planned on attending a large public university in the southeastern United States.

Learning from Observation

When I asked Aiyana about her use of social media over the summer she asserted, “I don't use it as much to tweet. I don't tweet as much. I have been trolling.” The assertion of trolling connotes that Aiyana spent most of her time observing tweets of others and not necessarily posting her own tweets. According to her, “I just felt like the stuff that is said on Twitter is idiotic. I am grown I don't have time.” She observed how the use of social media has spiraled out of control with individuals. The students were exposed to case after case of individuals posting nonsensical statements or assertions online.

Aiyana also learned the power of social media. She referenced recent shootings of unarmed African-American men and how she observed the power of social media and how the incidents were shared through social media outlets. Aiyana specifically mentioned Twitter. She said, “Tweeting does something. It evokes emotion.” The course provided that perspective to her, the actual power of social media. She took that learning and applied it to current events which played out on social media sites. She was able to reflect and witness the influence that social media has on contemporary culture.

Reflection

Aiyana’s reflective process and essays directly correlated with her assertions in class. She understood the power and influence of social media and considered the different social media tools as avenues to express herself. In one of her essays, she
wrote, “Social media is a place to express your thoughts and share your creativity.” This assertion demonstrates Aiyana’s feeling that social media is to be used to share one’s beliefs. While Aiyana shared her thoughts on social media, she wrote,

I need to be more careful about what I tweet in the heat of the moment. I also learned to be careful with the information I share online. People can easily track you down. People are mean on social media. People are not careful on social media. That is why I have to be more responsible and properly use social media.

We began to watch *The Internet Ruined My Life* during this unit. This show is about how a tweet or a Facebook post ruined someone's life. Many of the people on the show were just posting pretty normal things, and from there, the internet spun their life out of control. Many of the victims were sent death threats and some were even sent to jail. In the end of the episodes, they tell the viewers to be cautious about what they post because of the dangers of social media. So many people are crazy and will say anything behind a computer screen.

The show that we watched during the class resonated with Aiyana. People were harassed and threatened because of their social media actions.

One other factor that Aiyana asserted that changed her was partially the reflective essays and the classroom discussions. She stated,

I think it was the discussions and the diversity of the class because it was different people that had different opinions about so many different things. It made me think like well you know they have a point. I agree with them. I think also being able to go back in your mind and write down what you learned is important because you just talked about it, and it is out the next day. We didn't have to
necessarily write notes, but when I talked about something, I remember it. So because we talk so much in class, I could write down all the reflective stuff.

The reflective essays helped change her social media behavior. The discussions between the diverse participants of the course also played a role.

Changes in Use of Social Media

I asked Aiyana if her relationship with social media changed since the course ended and she said, “Before I was a bit reckless on Twitter. I would say some unsavory things I think. It was not who I really was. You know because you were trying to find yourself and in high school you do a lot.” Aiyana had quite a few on-line skirmishes with individuals throughout the years prior to the course. She discussed these interactions at length during the class. She proceeded to go more in-depth about how the course changed her behavior. She stated,

The class really taught me a lot about you know just thinking about what you post. That is like the biggest thing because people take things way out of context. I am a very sarcastic person so if I say something on Twitter that is sarcastic to me, someone may say what the heck that is so offensive. Why the heck would you say that? I'm freaking joking like gosh. You don't want to tweet with emotion. But it's like you don't want to say something left field then you get hit with a wave of destruction. I think I don't come for people as much as I used to and I don't respond when people come for me. I just don't care anymore.

Aiyana’s assertion that she is no longer “coming for people” demonstrates that she ceased her contentious public disagreements with others. She stopped feeling the need to vociferously defend her positions or offend others who disagree with her on social media.
When I asked why she changed her behavior and how quickly did that social media usage change occur, she replied,

   It was pretty instantaneous. The horrible things that you were showing us of people's lives. I thought that is not the life I need to be living. Because that stuff was intense. People were really threatening to kill people over some Twitter stuff. People need to stop taking Twitter so seriously. For your life to be threatened your family all of that over tweets.

The horrible things and consequences that Aiyana referred to, specifically, are the episodes of a show named *The Internet Ruined My Life*. This show chronicles how everyday people post something on social media and suffer dire consequences. People received death threats, had to move out of their homes, lost their jobs, and lost their anonymity. While Aiyana understood the potential ramifications, she did not believe that her tweets could be construed as offensive.

When discussing her own growth when interacting with people via social media, she said,

   Yeah, I think I just learned to control myself. Not everything needs to be said. I think that's a big thing. I felt like everything I did I had to say. Like I have to go get some pizza. No one cares. If it is something pressing, I would tweet it.

To further demonstrate some of the events that changed her behavior, Aiyana made reference to the dean visiting the class and discussing what happened to a young woman in his hometown.

   I listened to Dean [Robinson] explain what happened to a girl in his hometown.

   This unit was very eye opening as well as relevant. A lot of the topics we covered
were relevant to teenagers. There are a lot of privacy issues with social media and there were things I was not aware of until unit two. Even though she claims that individuals should be more discriminating on the amount of times they tweet, Aiyana’s frequency of Twitter postings has actually increased since the course. Her Twitter numbers contradicted her first interview assertions. When asked about this contradiction of frequency during our second interview, Aiyana declared that she decided to major in mass-communication in college. She would like to pursue a career in social media journalism with a focus on pop culture. Her increased tweeting is because of her goal of working within a social media context once she graduates college. Her original tweets and retweets consisted of pop culture slang, sayings, memes, and news.

I asked Aiyana what role assemblies played in her learning. Like the others, Aiyana attended assemblies at school where the students were warned about the perils of social media. She replied,

I think one assembly where the adult comes in and basically do what you do and explain atrocities it’s fine. But when it comes to the real present real day stuff it needs to be students. Because students listen to students. For the most part especially if they can relate. Especially the people who are over the assemblies they don't know. They tweet I'm having fun with my dog. They don't know, they don't know. They probably don't even know what petty is. They don't know what beef is. They don't know what trolling is. They don't know anything.

Aiyana demonstrated a disdain for speakers who presented at assemblies. She did not believe that a conversation lead by adults who knew nothing about the intricacies of
social media was valuable to students. Her perspective was that students have to hear about these issues from other students, or individuals similar to them. Consequently, conventional assemblies led by adults who are not versed in contemporary social media culture are not effective.

During one of our interviews, for clarification purposes, I asked Aiyana if she ever worried about individuals being offended by her social media posts. She replied,

I say what I want. I will say it to you in person. Who I am on social media is who I am in real life. If you have a problem with me saying it on Twitter you will have a problem with me saying it in real life.

She displayed this attitude during the course; however, she softened her views on conflicts with others. See Figure 18 for a visual model of Aiyana’s story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media History</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outcomes - Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avid social media user</td>
<td>Reflective essays about course content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined in school due to social media postings</td>
<td>History of SM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely active on Twitter and Snapchat</td>
<td>Social media mindset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrimonious exchanges with strangers on Twitter</td>
<td>Political implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unapologetic demeanor about social media posts</td>
<td>Social implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language on Twitter</td>
<td>Economic implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal and ethical implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Internet Ruined My Life show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom setting/Not assembly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Increased use of social media correlates with career aspirations
- Utilizes social media to tweet about pop culture
- Understands the power of social media
- Will not engage in contentious disagreements on Twitter

**Participant:** Aiyana – Female, African-American, opinionated, popular.

**Figure 18.** Visual of Aiyana’s story.
Summary

The data collected from Aiyana demonstrated that the content of the course provided an awareness for her that did not previously exist. Aiyana was a strong-willed and determined student who was unapologetic for all of her social media actions. In one of her essays, Aiyana shared that she was cyberbullied in middle school. She said,

I was cyberbullied for most of middle school. It was so bad that my mom had to talk to the other girls’ parents so that they would stop. I think that being bullied so young taught me to have a very strong personality. You have got to be tough living in a cruel world as we do. Schools need to do better about educating their youth about self-confidence and being strong.

I believe that this online bullying became the impetus for her determination to remain resilient during online altercations. This strong personality was demonstrated in her social media posts, and her demeanor in the classroom. I made this assertion, and during my member-checking, analysis Aiyana agreed.

While Aiyana asserts that she learned the ramifications of social media through the course, her social media usage may not have necessarily changed drastically. The course provided an awareness to her that she would not have possessed on her own.

Subsequent to the course, Aiyana’s use of social media increased. During our first interview, Aiyana stated that she did not feel as if she needed to share every aspect of her life. While this is what she said, her Twitter actions do not collaborate her assertions. Aiyana tweets and retweets about personal incidents in her life and her opinions on popular culture. When I discussed this with her she stated it was her intention to major in mass communications with an emphasis on social media and popular culture. The
increased use of social media directly connects to her future plans. Aiyana’s tweets demonstrate her desire to use social media to share her thoughts and opinions on various topics.

I asked Aiyana did she think maturity played a role in her awareness. She said, “I think with social media, it takes like growing. I think inner growth comes along with like dealing and handling with social media.” I asked Aiyana if she did not take the course, would her increased maturity have changed her social media behavior. She replied, “I think eventually, but not as fast.” She believed that while the course provided an awareness of all that could go wrong when using social media, and that awareness would have emerged at some point.

To further provide context on maturity, she wrote in one of her essays:

Every child is going to make a mistake. Every child is going to be mean to somebody. I am sure some people hate me. I’m sure I have not been the nicest to some people and I consider myself a genuinely nice person. I like to help people whatever. I don't think that makes children bad. Because they make a few mistakes. I think when it is a continuous action that is when you need to pull the parent aside and see what the heck. The student would be the same way even if it weren't for social media. I think for the most part if your parents raised you well enough to respect others and be respectful of adults. Just to be a decent basic human being. I think you will be fine on social media.

This assertion demonstrated Aiyana’s grappling with the concept of maturity. She was able to demonstrate wisdom relating to how students use social media. She also understood that people make mistakes and it did not necessarily mean that they were evil.
Those mistakes sometimes play out online and it is up to parents to raise “decent basic human beings.”

While her frequency of using social media did not change, she contended that the course made her aware of how posts can be misconstrued. She learned through observing how people suffer consequences because their posts are misinterpreted, which caused some online discord. While this was her belief, her determination to say what she believed was not deterred. She changed her behavior within the context of having arguments on social media with others, however she remains unapologetic about what she posts. One revelation that I discovered about Aiyana during one of the interviews, is that she is majoring in mass-communication and would like to pursue a career in social media journalism. The increased use of social media directly connects to her future plans.

Aiyana exhibited traits of Bandura’s theory of observational learning. Her ability to learn through observing others was evident in the collected data. Her reflective essays, social media behavior, and interviews, all correlated with the notion of learning through vicarious means.

*Figure 19* represents the research findings for Aiyana. This figure demonstrates that Aiyana learned through observation and reflection. Her usage of social media changed because of her professional aspiration of working in the field of mass-communications with an emphasis in social media. While she posts more to her social media accounts, she is more discerning about the content.
There were similarities in all four of the cases, and there were also some differences. The next section will provide a cross-case analysis of the participant data.

Cross-case Analysis

In this section I will compare and contrast the participants in the study. I will examine their similarities and differences. According to Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008), “Cross-case analysis is a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and difference in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies” (p. 1). In all of the initial conversations with the participants, each student specifically stated that they learned how social media actions can change lives and how those actions caused negative consequences for individuals that they did not want to emulate. The prevailing themes were learning from observation and
reflection. The next section will provide specific examples of the themes within a cross-case analysis context.

Learning from Observation

During the first interviews, all of the participants said that they learned the potential ramifications of certain social media posts during the course. They learned that people could lose scholarships, jobs, and receive online death threats. All of the participants exhibited traits of vicarious learning. Michael and Carla were the participants who were most affected by observing others’ behavior on social media. They posted less to their social media accounts and when they did post, they were more discerning about the content.

According to Bandura (1989), individuals “anticipate the likely consequences of their prospective actions, they set goals for themselves, and they otherwise plan courses of action that are likely to produce desired outcomes. Through exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions anticipatorily (p. 39). The participants exhibited traits of learning by observation in conjunction with not replicating behaviors because of vicarious punishment.

There are many factors which alter how individuals who observe behavior modify their behavior. Some of the factors include the “similarity of the model to the observer, the status of the model, and the consequences experienced by the model” (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte & Rooke, 2009, p. 272). The similarity of the models who were presented in the course did affect the students. The individuals who were similar in age, had similar desires made an impression on the students. While the students empathized with those individuals who were different, they were affected more by others who were
similar to them. An example of this occurring was our unit on the political implications of social media where we discussed the Arab Spring. While the students appreciated the awareness that this unit afforded them, the consequences suffered by individuals within that context did not affect the students. I believe the reason for this was two-fold. The situation of the Arab Spring was not personal with them because they could not relate. The other topics that were mentioned were directly related to their contexts of being students, and posting inappropriate things online. The notion of the similarity of the models directly correlates to the concept of vicarious punishment.

Observing individuals suffer negative consequences because of their social media posts changed their relationship with social media. Every participant was specific about what changed their behavior, and for each one of them, it was observing others’ mistakes on social media and not wanting to suffer the same punishment. That in fact was the specific impetus for all participant behavior change.

While they all validated that they learned vicariously, each one of them uniquely changed their relationship with social media as a result. The two African-American participants have similar results from their data. While they are both African-American, I do not believe that this was the factor that promoted similar social media usage after the course. Aiyana and Jason use social media at an increased rate post course. Their use of social media increased; however, they were cautious of what they posted. Aiyana changed by not getting involved in any more online skirmishes. This was a direct result of observing how online arguments can potentially become dangerous. Jason contended that he posts more, but his posts are what can be considered as lighthearted. Observing students losing college scholarships as a result of online behavior resonated with him.
Both of these participants are enrolled in communication programs at their universities. Aiyana has a professional aspiration to work in the media in a social media and pop culture capacity. Jason has a professional aspiration to become a journalist and understands that social media is a plays a role in journalism.

Michael and Carla vicariously learned through the example that Dean [Robinson] presented to the class. The [Nashville, TN] social media rape incident changed their social media usage by facilitating a decrease in their social media use. While these participants are Caucasian, their race did not play a role in their social media use. Michael related to the athletes who got in trouble because he felt as if they were similar to him solely because they were high school athletes. Michael has drastically altered his social media usage as a result of what he learned in the course. He has a keen awareness of how posting inappropriate content can have long term damaging effects on one’s life. Carla has also altered her social media behavior. She learned from observing how young women fall prey to online social media controversies. While she was aware of this occurrence, her desire to be a part of a sorority that monitors their members’ social media accounts assisted in her usage adjustment. Through learning from the experiences of others, all of the students altered their social media usage. According to Bandura’s theory, this behavior change for all of the participants is a result of the concept of vicarious punishment.

Reflection

Reflection played a role in the participants’ usage of social media. The reflection in the course curriculum was two-fold. In addition to discussing course content in class, the students had to write reflective essays. Reflection assisted with the observational
learning. The data from the research suggested that the reflection-based conversations in the course completed the circle. Michael stated he was not affected by reflection. In fact, he believed that his change was instant. This is perhaps because his posts were the most offensive out of all of the participants. According to Michael, the change of his social media usage was immediate. While Michael made this assertion, I believe that he was not fully aware of his ability to reflect. He was able to think deeply about his posts and then made a conscious decision to change his usage. His ability to make that change demonstrated reflection. Reflection played a role in Jason’s change. He viewed the content of writing down his thoughts as a vehicle for his subconscious to fully understand what was involved in his thinking. The organized reflection that the course presented gave Jason the opportunity to effectively think about his thoughts. The classroom reflective discussions assisted Carla to think about her actions on social media. Her data specifically demonstrated that reflection was a part of her learning process and behavior change. She asserted that the conversations during the class helped her think about her online behavior. Aiyana felt that the classroom discussions were reflective in nature and she was able to understand other’s perspectives and how they related to the course content. The discussions helped her become more reflective on what she posts online.

The data demonstrated that all of the students participated in assemblies that focused on students getting in trouble because of social media. When I asked each participant about these assemblies, they overwhelmingly stated that the assemblies were not effective because the presenters were talking at and not to the students. The classroom discussions were important because they were prolonged and intimate rather than the impersonal discussions assemblies facilitate.
Maturity

I specifically asked each participant if they thought that their social media usage changed because of maturity. Michael stated that he thought that it was partly maturity that changed his online behavior. He felt that going off to college provided a different perspective and that the things he found funny before he did not. However, he contended that his classmates do not have that sense of maturity and awareness about what they post online. Jason said that maturity is a factor for him; however, the fact that mature adults still suffer consequences of posting inappropriate items online made him not consider maturity as a relevant factor. He said it is more of a personal decision on what is appropriate to post online. He asserted, “We learned about grown-ups and adults that would say or comment on controversial issues on their social media. I guess it is what the individual thinks is OK and acceptable more than a maturity level.” Carla acknowledged that the lack of maturity is what caused teenagers in general to use social media in an inappropriate way; however, she asserted that her change was not due to her becoming more mature while in college. Aiyana felt that maturity was one of the factors that caused her to change her social media behavior. She felt that going off to college enlightened her and that her maturity level increased which caused her to behave different. Even though I inquired about maturity, three of participants did not agree that their social media usage changed because they became more mature. In conclusion, maturity was addressed because of my specific inquisition.

Findings

As a result of conducting this study by analyzing the data that included interviews, social media observations, and archival course material, I reached several
conclusions about my participants. I learned that the students learned primarily by observing other individuals who suffered consequences as a result of their social media posts. In the course, these students observed other individuals experiencing negative consequences because of their social media usage and this observation caused them not to emulate those behaviors.

In conjunction with the reflective essays and discussions, the observation facilitated social media usage change amongst the participants. The students reported that the reflection exercises worked in tandem with the observation. The ways of learning that occurred for the students were observational learning and reflection. See Figure 20 for an integrative graphic of the findings. This graphic demonstrates the course influences and how all of the students learned. Observation and reflection were the two ways that the students learned in the course. The observation was of social media consequences that were experienced by others. The reflection were the reflective essays and the reflective classroom discussions. All of the students experienced a change in their social media usage because of how they learned. The changes varied for each of the participants. Michael and Carla decreased their social media usage. These participants were fearful because they specifically did not want to suffer similar consequences as the individuals that they observed during the course. Additionally, for Carla, the social aspiration of wanting to join a sorority also altered her social media usage. Avoidance of ramifications changed their social media usage. For Jason and Aiyana the opposite is true. Their social media usage changed and they became more active on social media. This was due to their professional aspirations. These professional aspirations correlate
with increased social media usage. While their usage has increased, they currently use social media with discernment.

**Figure 20.** Integrative graphic of research findings.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to share an analysis of the data that were collected. My goal was to understand if and how a curricular intervention focused solely on social media changed student social media usage. The data showed that all four of the participants shared similar curricular experiences. The course provided students an awareness of the potential perils of using social media, which was facilitated by Bandura’s observational learning (1977). While the students all changed because of learning vicariously through the examples presented, reflection also played a role in how they subsequently use social media.
In the following chapter, I will present conclusions focused on the collected data and analysis. I will provide suggestions for future research and curricular implications based on my research discoveries.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this case study, I explored the effect of a social media course on how students digitally presented themselves. Through the lens of Bandura’s social learning theory, I sought to gain an understanding of how the experience of learning by observation changed the social media habits of students. I conducted three interviews with each participant, used course-work, and I followed and requested updates on the participants’ social media accounts. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do students in a social media course learn about the impact of social media usage on their lives?

2. How do students change their social media usage after they have taken a course in social media?

This chapter begins with a summary and discussion of the research findings. Following the summary, I compare the findings in this study to similar previous research. Next I present recommended curricular actions needed to increase student awareness on how to present themselves on social media. I will then offer suggestions for future research, this study’s limitations, a researcher reflection, and lastly I will provide a study conclusion.

Summary of the Study

This case study focused on how four students who participated in a social media course reported a change on how they use and present themselves on social media. The
study also sought to understand what caused the social media behavior change. Each of the four research participants were analyzed separately then a cross-case analysis was conducted to find similarities and differences.

The participants of this study were my former students who have all matriculated into a four-year university. I selected these four students because of my desire to obtain a maximum variation sample. Acquiring a variety of perspectives from students of different backgrounds facilitated a documentation of “uniqueness, and important shared patterns that cut across case” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). The students selected consisted of an African-American male, who participated in the yearbook staff; an African-American female, who was an outspoken and popular student; a Caucasian male, who was student-athlete; and a Caucasian female, who was shy and did not participate in any extracurricular activities.

One of sources of data came from three individual interviews with each of the research participants, one of which served as the member-checking interview. The second data source was student course-work, and for the final data source I observed and requested social media posting updates. I chose NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis software to facilitate this inquiry. The initial coding themes blended with Bandura’s social learning theory, specifically the concept of vicarious learning.

Discussions

As a result of conducting this study, based on the interviews, social media observations, and archival course material, I learned the following about social media use and the impact of a course:
1. Students learn by observing other individuals who use social media, especially others that are similar to them.

2. Students who observe individuals suffering consequences as a result of social media behavior are less likely to emulate that behavior.

3. Students who have an opportunity for structured reflection in the mode of writing or discussions have a tendency to apply what they learned through observation.

4. Maturity of an individual does not necessarily play a role in their social media behavior.

Observational Learning

For this study, I investigated how a developed curriculum framed around the various implications of social media in contemporary society, with a number of observational learning opportunities, changed how students behave online. During the initial interview, the four participants stated how learning through observing the social media missteps of others facilitated a change in how they used social media. According to Bandura (1977), vicarious learning occurs when individuals are able to learn from the actions of others without having direct experience. Bandura’s assertion of individuals learning by observation was exhibited by the post course behavior of all of the students. My research findings support the contention of individuals learning in this manner.

Each participant reported a change in his or her social media usage as a result of observing others suffer negative consequences. The specific situations were different for each student; however, the overall theme was consistent. Bandura (1971) asserted that:
Traditional theories of learning generally depict behavior as the product of directly experienced response consequences. In actuality, virtually all learning phenomena result from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior and its consequences for them. Man’s capacity to learn by observation enables him to acquire large, integrated units of behavior by example without having to build up the patterns gradually by tedious trial and error. (p. 2.)

After the data analysis, I concluded that the cause of the behavior change which occurred during the course for all participants can be identified as vicarious punishment.

The participants did not have to experience the negative consequences themselves, but they learned through observing others’ experiences. The students all reported a change of their social media usage and gained an awareness of the pitfalls of excessive and inappropriate social media use. These actions are a result of what Bandura referred to as vicarious punishment. The participants observed the students being punished for their actions and decided not to emulate those behaviors on social media. While the primary cause for the behavior alteration was vicarious learning, the participants reported a modicum of reflective thinking that assisted the process.

Reflection

Three of the four participations contended that the reflective essays and reflective discussions assisted with their behavior change. Michael contended that the reflective process did not occur when he decided to change his social media usage. While he asserted this, I believe that he was not aware of his subconscious reflection. The data demonstrate that Michael observed others suffering consequences, reflected on his own
social media usage, and then decided to change his online behavior. Jason stated the act of writing down his thoughts helped him reflect on his past and future social media actions. Carla stated that she enjoyed the reflective discussions during class. These discussions helped her become reflective about what she posted online. She started to think about who would view the content that she shared. Aiyana enjoyed the diverse perspectives during the classroom reflective discussions. These diverse perspectives provided differing opinions on the various topics of social media which in turn helped her form her current perspective.

Prior Research

Groth, Longo, and Martin (2016) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of research studies that examined college student behavior on social media. The researchers found that college students engage in risky behavior and post their actions on various social media sites. These risky behaviors include the use of alcohol and illicit drugs. According to the researchers, college students are susceptible to sharing this negative online information on social media. This content is shared via media and typed text. The researchers cite the social norms theory as an explanation for this behavior. Groth, Longo, and Martin (2016) contended that:

Individual behavior is influenced by the perceived behavior of others regardless of the accuracy of such perceptions; specifically, inflated perceptions of risk behaviors increase personal risk taking. Social media is an important source of college students' information regarding others' risk behaviors and therefore, according to social norms theory, plays an important role in individual risk behaviors. (p. 88)
In essence, these research results facilitate the belief that college students are sharing risky behavior online because of their peers. The social norms theory asserts that “Individual behavior is influenced by the perceived behavior of others regardless of the accuracy of such perceptions; specifically, inflated perceptions of risk behaviors increase personal risk taking” (p. 88). According to this study, college students are more likely going to engage in risky social media behavior.

There is a lack of correlation between this meta-analysis study and the study I conducted. The results of my case study posit that the course provided student awareness facilitated by Bandura’s social learning theory. College students do, in fact, blunder on social media, sometimes at the risk of their well-being. According to the data collected, the students who participated in this study are more aware of their social media behavior and will most likely not make those common mistakes in the future.

Motivation by individuals also plays a role in their behavior change. According to Bandura (1986),

Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act. What other factors may operate as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce the desired results.” (p. 228)

Motivation can serve as the possible impetus for student behavior change. Bandura’s assertion that this cognitive construct occurs when individuals believe that their actions will complete a task in question. In this specific study, motivation could have played a role in participant decision making.
Recommendations for Curriculum

In the following sections I will provide my recommendations for curriculum. The recommendations include a suggestion for social studies standards, implementing observational learning opportunities for students, using the concept of reflection in a structured manner, suggestions for educators and parents, and how schools can shift the impact of assemblies.

These recommendations are a result of the content of my study. While the topics are broad, the impetus is to effectively change adolescent social media usage for a variety of students. Each suggestion is grounded in the results of this study.

Social Studies Standards

The concept of a participatory culture may not be addressed consistently in contemporary curricula. My first recommendation is that there should be a formal curriculum that presents opportunities for students to understand the implications of social media use. These specific curricula should be offered within a social studies context. Stoddard (2014) asserted that contemporary social studies curricula are lacking opportunities for students to learn how to navigate within an ever-increasing participatory culture. The College, Career, and Civic (C3) Framework should address the concept of being a responsible citizen within the context of the social media paradigm. These national social studies standards can provide the blueprint for curriculum while addressing this new media.

Observational Learning

Secondly, within the curriculum, practitioners should provide specific examples of similar students experiencing negative consequences as a result of social media
postings. This is a curricular strategy that could be employed in any school. The possibilities of student social media usage shifting increases when students observe others suffer negative consequences as a result of their actions on social media. If those individuals are similar to the students themselves, this also provides an increased expectation of student social media usage change. Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, and Rooke (2009) found that students who observe models suffering negative consequences as a result of a certain behavior were less likely to emulate that behavior. The concept of students observing models who use social media in a negative way and are punished for that usage can be incorporated into curriculum. Within the theoretical construct of Bandura’s social learning theory, these students’ social media usage can change as a result of the provided curriculum.

Reflection

I also recommend that in addition to the exposure, providing students structured opportunities for reflection is also paramount. The reflective essays and reflective discussions are effective methods to encourage students to think deeply about their current and future actions. The course that preluded this research study facilitated classroom discussions based on the Socratic Method of teaching. If the curriculum of the course is modeled, the discussions should always promote critical thought of the social media cultural paradigm. These classroom discussions should cover all aspects of social media to provide the students some contextual information of the power and reach of this new social communication model.
Educators

In the context of a curriculum that focuses specifically on social media, educators do not have to be extremely versed in the topic. Many teachers are not well-versed in the topic of social media. My recommendation is that the teachers will have to provide the opportunities for students to learn within the social learning theory framework, in conjunction with opportunities for reflection, is necessary. Teachers can be trained on the concept of facilitating discussions on different social media topics. These discussions should take place within a classroom context and not an assembly.

Parental Awareness

Parents can also provide social media consequence awareness to their adolescent children. Finding stories or first-person accounts of consequences suffered by individuals because of social media is not a daunting task. One can use YouTube to access these stories and share with their children. Parents do not need to be well-versed in the concept of existing within the current participatory culture, just how to share these stories and possibly have conversations with their children about the ramifications of inappropriate social media use.

Assemblies

General assemblies may not be sufficient methods for changing student online behavior. While interviewing the participants, they all demonstrated disdain for organized assemblies provided by schools and led by adults who do not necessarily understand contemporary social media vernacular. The notion of being “talked down to” during an assembly was not appealing to the students. Schools should facilitate more deliberate and personal activities with students when pertaining to social media. These
schools can also utilize students who have participated in a course such as Social Media in Our Society to help facilitate some of these discussions throughout the school.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided data on ways to teach students of the implications of social media and provided context on how not to behave online. There is still a need to further examine using the social learning theory in schools in order to teach students how to digitally present themselves. The concept of social media is still in a nascent stage in curriculum and needs to further be addressed. Social media is becoming more intertwined in the fabric of society, so an increase in curricular opportunities is necessary for students. The social media pitfalls experienced by people in contemporary society should be addressed in schools. By conducting additional research on how to effectively change student social media behavior, school stakeholders can help create appropriate curricula.

First, because his study consisted of four high school seniors in a private school who matriculated to a four-year university I recommend a study with a larger sample size. While I used a somewhat diverse racial sample, there should be additional studies with students who are not African-American or Caucasian. The study is limited to those two racial groups. In addition to expanding the participant scope, I also recommend conducting this study on younger high school students. Students who are transitioning from middle school to high school would be ideal participants. These students are usually 14 years old and are using social media at an ever-increasing rate.

Second, the study participants attended a private high school which had a tuition cost of over $25,000 per year. The financial stability that the parents of these students
enjoyed is not necessarily represented in the entire population. Conducting a similar study on students from a different socioeconomic status would provide beneficial data. A beneficial study would be one which specifically studied low-income students. Because the participants in this current study are from affluent families, there could have been outside factors relating to their social media usage.

Third, a study investigating the concept of tweeting and retweeting is warranted. While the participants tweeted what can be considered offensive, their retweets of offensive content was more prevalent. Exploring the difference in the thought process that occurs when individuals post content versus reposting content would be a beneficial contribution to the literature.

Finally, a longitudinal study of the current participants would provide valuable data. The students are currently college freshman. The longitudinal study should chronicle the students from freshman year until they graduate college. Investigating the long-term effects of the course would provide valuable data to the literature.

Limitations of the Study

I concede that limitations in this study exist. According to Morgan and Spanish (1984), there is a limitation of qualitative research interview data because “interviewing typically involves directed statements gathered in isolation” (p. 260). Asking interview questions in isolation can cause participants to alter their responses due to the guided nature of interview questions. Additionally, the results from qualitative inquiries are not applicable to the general population.

The research conducted only contained data from the participants who were enrolled in the course. A limitation exists within the context of not having data from
individuals who did not participate in the course. The findings can only be applied to those students and not to individuals who did not receive the curricular intervention.

Because of the research began after the course ended, a limitation exists from the data set not including the reflective discussions. These discussions were an important piece of the classroom ethos and could have provided additional rich data for analysis. The duration of the study is also a limitation. This short period of time does not provide a complete data set of all of participant online behavior change.

While I observed and analyzed the data which demonstrated that the students were careful of the things they posted online, this could have been completely for my benefit. I am their former teacher, and they knew I was reviewing their social media posts. They may have felt compelled not to post certain things solely because of my observations. The two females who participated self-reported their Snapchat posts; consequently, they could have incorrectly reported their activity.

Researcher Reflection

As I embarked on this qualitative inquiry, I worked hard to hold my theoretical assumptions loosely. My initial assertion prior to conducting the interviews was that the students changed their social media usage because of the reflective essays. I believed that the process of purposeful reflection would have been the only valid reason for student behavior change. I conducted my first literature review on King and Kitchener’s (1994) reflective judgment model. The power of reflection was plausible to me because I am a firm believer of that process. I thought the data collection would confirm my assumption.
When I conducted my first set of interviews, I became extremely interested in the fact that the students did not change solely because of the reflective essays. As a researcher, it was my duty to locate a theory that explained student behavior in such a way that the theory was not forced. While Dewey’s (1933) concept of reflective thinking does somewhat play a role, it was not the behavior catalyst that I expected. I revisited the literature and searched for gaps in research in Bandura’s social learning theory, but more specifically, vicarious or observational learning. This study contributes to the literature because of teaching students vicariously to alter behaviors within the context of social media.

Conclusion

For this study, I explored the catalyst for social media usage change for students who participated in a social media course. This research was framed around Bandura’s social learning theory. The study concentrated on learning vicariously through the experience of others; and this was done in conjunction with reflective thinking. I researched student social media usage, accessed archival course materials, followed public Twitter accounts, and requested Snapchat updates from two participants of whose Snapchat accounts I did not have access. The study consisted of four participants, all of whom were consistent social media users.

The focus of this study was to understand how and why students exhibited social media usage change after participating in a course concentrated on social media use. All of the students reported vicarious learning experienced in the course as the impetus for the change of their usage. A secondary factor was the opportunity for reflection which the course provided. This research suggests that students can learn vicariously about
social media consequences and then, in turn, adjust their social media so that they do not suffer fallout because of their online behavior. My desire is for educational stakeholders to understand that changing student social media usage does not require a complicated curriculum. There is currently a void in curriculum that focuses on educating our students on how to navigate within the current participatory culture. This type of education is necessary in contemporary society.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

COURSE UNIT DESCRIPTIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units and descriptions</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1 – History of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Students will evaluate and understand the evolution of social media and how social media has influenced the way our culture communicates. Students will also have deeper knowledge and understanding of common social media tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 2 – Social Media Mindset</strong></td>
<td>Students will understand the consequences of excessive social media sharing and what compels us as a society to share in excess via social media. Students will also understand the ramifications of potentially inappropriate social media dialogue in relation to college admissions for high school students and student athletes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 3 – Political Implications of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Students will understand the role that social media played in the 2008 presidential election and the 2010 Arab Spring. Students will also be able to assess and critically evaluate online movements to determine fairness and credibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 4 – Social Implications of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Students will understand the potentially negative impact and influence that social media yields over our culture. Students will have a deeper understanding of the possible harm of online actions and the unintended consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 5 – Economic Implications of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Students will understand how businesses use social media to market products. Students will understand what it takes to create a successful marketing strategy with social media. Students will also understand the implications of using social media for raising money for business start-ups or donations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 6 – Ethical and Legal Implications of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Students will have an understanding of the first amendment and fourth amendment and the social media implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 7 – Careers and Social Media</strong></td>
<td>This section of the curriculum will focus on current careers in social media and how individuals have been provided social media outlets to earn a living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL
05-Jul-2016

Nneka Johnson

Re: Implications of a Social Media Course for Students' Networked Selves (H1606179)

Dear Nneka Johnson:

Your application entitled "Implications of a Social Media Course for Students' Networked Selves (H1606179)" was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research in accordance with Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46.102(k) and 45 CFR 46.102(d) (for expedited review) and was approved under Category 6, 7 per 05-FY06038.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 05-Jul-2016. The protocol expires 04-Jul-2017. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Role(s) Approved:
- New application for qualitative research case study involving three sets of student interviews
- Please complete the survey for the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance. To access the survey, click on the following link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AKCI7II

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonisation's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ana Chamberlain-Richardson, M.B., CIP, CIR
Mercer Institutional Review Board
Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone (470) 301-3273
Fax (470) 301-3323
ORC_Mercer@Mercer.edu
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
2016

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
Provide the names and degrees of all investigators involved in the research study. Indicate the department and institution with which the investigator(s) is affiliated. If you are a student, include the name of your faculty advisor. Also provide the investigator campus addresses and campus phone numbers.

Nneka Johnson, Instructional Technology Specialist
Tift College PhD C&I doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Sherah Carr.
Tift College of Education
3001 Mercer University Drive
Atlanta, GA 30341
404-987-9189

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this investigation will be to gather information about the effects of a social media course on student online behavior. The title of this course was “Social Media in Our Society.” This information will aid in the design of curricula that will engage students and affect how they present themselves on social media.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to permit me to use your interview responses as data. Your participation will only involve about 3-4 hours of your time for interviews over the span of 6 months. Your interview data will remain anonymous and your name will not be used in the report of the findings.

I am requesting the use of your class artifacts created during Social Media in Our Society as archival data.

I will also request to observe your Twitter accounts and request random updates of your Snapchat stories via text.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be selected from the 13 seniors who enrolled in the course, Social Media in Our Society.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. Your participation or nonparticipation will not affect you in any way. Your name will not be used in any reporting of findings. Your interviews will be recorded but you will be assigned pseudonyms.
Potential Benefits of the Research
Potential benefits of the research are better understanding of the ways how curricula can be designed to engage students and possibly change social media behaviors.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. The results of this study may be published but your information such as your name and other demographic information will not be revealed. The results of this study will be kept in a locked file within Tift College of Education (Atlanta campus) for 3 years in Dr. Sherah Carr’s office, Room BE023 Business and Education Building.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a research subject you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact Nneka Johnson, investigator, at Nnekajohnson14@gmail.com or 404-987-9109.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please contact Nneka Johnson, investigator, at Nnekajohnson14@gmail.com or 404-987-9109.

************************************************************************
This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature of Research Participant

_________________________________________ Date
Participant Name (Please Print)

_________________________________________ Date
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent