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A study on self-representation of Dutch high school adolescents on
Instagram



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF CULTURE
AND SOCIETY

By Eoin Hennekam

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Supervisor

Jakob Svensson

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ABSTRACT

In the world of Web 2.0, the evolution of the static web towards an interactive, collaborative digital world, we are subjected to many social platforms and applications on which we can represent ourselves. These applications enable us to present ourselves accordingly for an applications' social context. However, the application alone does not determine our entire representation of self. No, rather, in addition to the social setting, our peers on such platforms greatly determine our representation.

Adolescents in particular are very vulnerable to meeting the norms of peers and audiences in a specific social setting. They are in the midst of discovering who they are and where they belong. Earlier, adolescents would undergo this development in social settings that were part of one of three domains: family, neighbourhood and school. Now, in the era of Web 2.0 and its endless possibilities in discovering online social environments and other people with whom adolescents can interact, the internet is considered to be a fourth domain where adolescents develop themselves. Instagram is one of these platforms on Web 2.0 where one can choose to represent oneself.

This thesis tried to discover how adolescents represent themselves on Instagram, why and with what consequences according to them. The sample was focused on adolescents between the ages of 15 to 18 in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a strong individualized culture and its population are heavy users of Web 2.0 applications and Instagram. Since the internet is considered to be such an important domain in self-development in adolescence, it was interesting to discover what behaviours adolescents show on Instagram and what effects these behaviours have.

It is not new that adjustments of the self, also referred to as the altered self, take place in different social settings. As far back as 1902, adjustments of the self in a specific social setting have been acknowledged. Throughout the years it has been concluded multiple times that our imagined peers and audiences and their judgements of us, stimulate us to represent ourselves in a way that stimulates positive feedback from others. Web 2.0 social settings, such as Instagram, are still subjected to this point of view where we consider our peers and audiences on Instagram to have 'power' over how we should represent ourselves. These interactions are considered to be part of our outer self-esteem, where we feel good or bad about ourselves depending on the engagements we have with our peers.

For Instagram specifically, the way we represent ourselves is, as mentioned above, mostly determined by others. Adolescents, who are particularly sensitive to the opinions of their peers, voiced the importance of others in this research for their engagement with Instagram. Furthermore, they sometimes try to be popular, but not necessarily, document life events and aim to be creative. They do not tend to share negative feelings on the platform, but solely aim to come across as cool and positive as possible.

What both respondents and literature have acknowledged is that there are several consequences of self-representation on Instagram. Respondents in this research mostly saw people presenting themselves better than they are in offline social settings. It makes the respondents feel insecure and stimulates them to also alter their 'selves' on Instagram to be able to compete with others. This might be related to social media-driven narcissism, where one becomes increasingly insecure because of all their peers whom appear to be living better lives than they are and in return, urges them to alter their own self on Instagram. This self-made standard of determining whether someone is good enough or not, to my peers, seems to be the biggest danger of self-representations on Instagram. It has also been acknowledged in literature that focusing the self too much on fictional aspects, can cause identity problems which, especially in adolescence, can undermine one's self-development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, a time in life that some refer to as the time of the 'identity crisis' (Zhao, 2005). Who am I? Where do I belong? Those are questions that arise frequently in adolescents' lives. Adolescents are vulnerable and extra sensitive to peer-interactions (Bay, 2015; Boyd, 2007). It is a time of self-development and a time where judgements of others are crucial to a teenagers' self-esteem.

It is no secret that we look at others to determine how we want to represent ourselves. We imagine others to have continuous power over us and imagine how we appear in another's mind and how we are judged by our peers (Cooley, 2009). We see ourselves through a looking-glass, reflecting ourselves in an imagined way. And while most of us adults are aware of this and have learned to perform a self that fits with who we are, adolescents, who have yet to discover who they really are, are extra vulnerable to judgements of others.

But this is a phenomenon that has been known for years (Boyd, 2007). We know that adolescents develop their self-representations and identities in three domains: family, school and neighbourhood (Zhao, 2005). We know that self-representations in these contexts might differ, and that who someone is (identity), is an accumulation of all these selves in a single entity at a specific moment in time, because we change constantly. We are not static, but constantly developing (Matano, 2015; Goffman, 1959; Stryker, Owens & White, 2000).

But times have changed. No longer are there three domains that affect adolescents' self-development. We have witnessed an evolution in the media landscape. We have witnessed the rise of the internet, but more specifically, the evolution of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2010). Web 2.0, the architecture of participation (Bohley, 2010), stimulates individuals to participate and interact online in a world that seems to have endless possibilities. Specifically, for teenagers, who mostly are online daily (Zhao, 2005; Belk, 2016), Web 2.0 gives them a platform to further search for who they are and provides them with applications that let them represent themselves how they see fit.

Instagram is one of many applications on Web 2.0 that gives its users the possibility to represent themselves (Mallan, 2009; Boyd, 2007; Moncura, et al., 2016). On Instagram specifically, we can show ourselves by sharing our lives through a series of pictures and visual material and give everyone we want an insight into our lives (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Wandel & Beavers, 2013; Matano, 2015; Moncura, et al., 2016). It is yet another platform where we can represent ourselves to our peers and be judged for it. And, it is a platform on which we can alter our self-representations to meet the social norms of Instagram.

The Netherlands has developed towards becoming a very individualized culture (Felling, 2004). In relation to self-representation, this individualization has even led to the term 'independent self' (Zhu, Zhang, Fan & Han, 2006). The individualized culture has created an environment where teenagers are also more individualistic in the physical world and therefore seek peer-interactions more often in the internet domain. Communications in the Netherlands are even expected to be primarily online in the future (Sonck and De Haan, 2015).

Researching Instagram, the most rapidly growing social platform on Web 2.0 (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2014) is therefore specifically interesting in Dutch culture among adolescent usage in relation to self-representation. That they might represent themselves differently in a social context is not new. But, how do they do this on Instagram and why? Especially since they are developing

their identities and self-representations in this phase of their lives, these questions are very interesting to study. Even more so, what do adolescents see as consequences of self-representations on Instagram? This thesis aims to contribute to studies on self-representation on Instagram. The thesis is focused on high school students, aged 15-18, in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands. The main question of this study is: **how do high school students in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands, present themselves to their peers on Instagram, why and with what consequences according to them?**

Following a description of the context of the study through several key subjects, a literature review, a theoretical analysis containing the main subjects of the study, an elaboration on the chosen methodology, the presentation of the results and a discussion of the results with literature, finally, a conclusion to the study is drawn.

2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Before diving into self-representations on Instagram, it is important to create a better understanding of the context of the study. This chapter aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Dutch culture, Web 2.0, and identity, image and self-representation.

2.1. THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch culture is a top-down culture. However, when most of the people disagree with a specific topic, a bottom-up culture emerges, bonding the people in a mass culture of resistance. The Dutch value traditions, beliefs and history, but have developed into a strong individualized culture. The developments in the media landscape have added to this development. The Dutch culture is defined by a major paradox. On the one hand, there is the Dutch culture combining all Dutch people into one identity. On the other hand, because the culture is characterized by an 'everyone for himself' point of view, the combined culture is that of all individuals protecting their own interests (Mulders, 2016). The Netherlands is a highly developed western country and a technological and social pioneer and one of the key breeding areas for social media developments and social media usage (Silvius, 2016).

In his study, Felling (2004) describes the development of the Dutch culture into a strong individualized culture. Felling (2004) focused on the development of Dutch culture between 1979 and 2000. In his work, he concluded that there is indeed a transformation of a traditional culture towards a post-traditional society. He states, however, that this has not been a radical process, but rather that this has happened slowly and modestly.

What has been a radical change in Dutch culture is the process of, what Felling (2004) calls, 'de-institutionalization' (Felling, 2004, p. 32). One of the major developments in this process is that since the 1980s, religious groups have become a minority. Nevertheless, churches remain the largest voluntary societal organizations in the Netherlands. There has also been an explosive growth of new societal organizations and associations. One of the reasons for this, despite individualism, is the rise of Dutch culture towards a multi-cultural society (Mellink, 2014). This multiculturalism is a result of foreign workers coming to the Netherlands in the seventies. At the time, it was assumed they would eventually leave the country. However, already in the eighties, this assumption changed as culture developed and integration processes along with it. What is critically mentioned by Mellink (2014) about multi-culturalism in relation to individualism, is that there are conflicts between the Dutch being very individualistic now, but that other ethnic groups still value older beliefs. The reason for this is given in the following quote: "Immigrants originating from tribal societies, understandably, have trouble adjusting to our individualized society. It has taken us centuries to get to where we are"

(Mellink, 2014, p. 16). However, younger immigrants in the Netherlands and in the focus group of this study do not act differently online (Koole, 2017). Thus, in this study, this view on multiculturalism has not been tested or risen to the occasion.

Even though the development towards a post-traditional, multi-cultural society has happened slowly over time, traditional core values, political beliefs and religion have become significantly less popular over the course of over 25 years. Less significant in the development of the Netherlands to an individualized culture, but nevertheless apparent, are fragmentation processes. As Felling (2004) mentions, when relating the above-mentioned components to socio-economic beliefs, is that the relationship between these aspects has practically completely disappeared. Where traditional beliefs, and the dominance of Christian religion have diminished significantly, a more hedonistic approach to life has been established among Dutch people. By hedonism is meant that people value pleasure above all. It also means that online, people do not tend to focus on traditional points of view in their social activities, but rather on more hedonistic activities.

In more recent years, the book *Media:Tijd en Beeld Dagelijkse tijdsbesteding aan media en communicatie* (Sonck & De Haan, 2015) further describes modern developments in Dutch society, medialization being one of these modern developments. The Dutch government sees medialization as one of the key trends and developments for the upcoming years. What is meant by medialization is that media gain an increasingly prominent role in the lives of civilians. This more prominent role stimulates changes in the way people inform and organize themselves, and how they communicate with each other and the government. This process further stimulates de-institutionalization and 'de-traditionalization' (Sonck & De Haan, 2015, p. 11). It affects the relationship between institutions, the government and civilians, the political game and sectors such as science and arts (Sonck & De Haan, 2015; Felling, 2004). In conclusion, Sonck and De Haan (2015) mention that social communications shift more and more towards online communication, rather than offline.

2.2. WEB 2.0

Web 2.0 is a term that refers to the evolving nature of the web. As discussed by Tim O'Reilly (2010), there has been some disagreement on the definition of the term, as some simply consider it to be a marketing 'hype' word, but mostly it is considered a meaningful term in describing the evolution of the web from being static content to a dynamic platform, where everyone can create content and where the platform stimulates collaboration and community. The main difference between the static web (Web 1.0) and the interactive web (Web 2.0) is that people no longer only read content, they create what is referred to as, user-generated content. They contribute to and participate in the web platform. Many supporters of Web 2.0 say it is revolutionary that individuals are enabled to contribute to and create content, and share information. However, counter arguments also exist, as many feel filters are necessary to distinguish 'amateur' content from 'expert' content. They add to this that amateur content might be unsubstantiated, biased or inaccurate, and that industries creating meaningful content might suffer from amateur media production.

For this study specifically, Instagram is the chosen platform of the study. The Instagram application itself has been elaborated on in chapter 4.3. Russel Belk (2014) mentions why Instagram is part of Web 2.0. First, he mentions that "Web 2.0 sites are pervaded by references to sharing" (Belk, 2014, p. 10). He goes on to state that Web 2.0 applications and sites not only invite us to click a 'share' button to share content from our online peers, but also to share our own content. His view is aligned with Tim O'Reilly's (2010) view on Web 2.0, that it is the interactivity of the platform and the stimulation of collaboration and participation of individuals with Web 2.0 that define the evolution of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Bohley (2010) also states that Web 2.0 consists of applications with a high level of interactivity between users and platforms/applications. It consumes and remixes data from multiple

sources and individual users. It stimulates the altering of data by users and networking between users through an 'architecture of participation'. Instagram is one of the mentioned platforms by Belk (2014) that embodies the meanings of a Web 2.0 application.

Web 2.0 has stimulated social and cultural change in that the interactive and participatory nature of the concept has stimulated individuals to represent themselves individually in online pre-selected communities such as Instagram (Bohley, 2010; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015). For this thesis specifically, this individualized self-representation on the Instagram application in Web 2.0 is very interesting.

2.3. IDENTITY, IMAGE AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

To create a better understanding of what self-representation entails, it is important to distinguish what is meant by self-representation, identity and image, and how these terms differ from each other.

As Stryker, Owens and White (2000) mention, identity generally refers to who and what someone is. But, however short such a definition might be, the authors argue that the determinations of what forms someone's identity is more difficult. What they distinguish in forming identity are three forms of identity: role identity: the location of a person within a role system, such as a family role; group identity: dealing with group memberships and intergroup relationships, such as ethnic groups; and collective identity: dealing with self-definitions in the service of a collective effort (Stryker, Owens & White, 2000, p. 93). Thus, implying that identity can change per context. Personal identity is therefore the cumulation of all various identities one has into a single substance. It is also argued that the values someone has, referred to as value identity, also determine how identity is partly determined (Stryker, Owens & White, 2000).

But, it is critically argued that identity cannot be stated in the sense that someone simply gets labelled as 'this is who and what you are'. The following quote makes an interesting statement about identity being a static definition: "The problem of personal identity over time is the problem of giving an account of the logically necessary and sufficient conditions for a person identified at one time being the same person as a person identified at another" (Hochstetter, 2016). Hochstetter (2016) mentions several similar statements from a philosophical perspective. It is implied that identity is not a static substance, but an everchanging process. Matano (2015) mentions similarly that the self is always developing and can therefore not be subjected to a single definition that is applicable throughout one's life. It is an open and in-becoming process. Thus, not only is identity the cumulation of all various identities someone has per social setting and his values, it is also timebound. Defining one's identity is only accurate at one specific moment, as the identity of the self develops over time.

The difference in self-representation and identity lies in the expression of identity. To clarify this, one can for instance have the role identity of a father in a family. But, self-representation is how the father in this case chooses to conduct his role as a father. He can choose to emphasize certain characteristics of fatherhood more than others, regardless of the motivation he has for this. This is what self-representation entails (Cooley, 2009; Goffman, 1959). It is the way you represent yourself in a specific social setting that is part of your identity. Self-representation is thoroughly elaborated on in the next chapter, but in this section, it is important to define the term and its relation to identity and image.

Image entails the perceptions others have of someone. Identity and image may differ greatly from each other. This difference can occur when someone has a specific identity, but chooses to represent himself differently. "Fact ends by following presentation; the fabricated becomes the true"

(McNeill & Randall, 2001, p. 131). This quote implies that what is perceived and judged by an audience is based on what one chooses to present. Perceptions of someone (image) can be aligned with the person's identity, but can also be different, depending on the self-representation of the person.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To answer my research question of how high school students in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands present themselves on Instagram to their peers, why and according to them with what consequences, I have developed an analytical tool around social constructionism theory, the theory on the looking-glass self, Web 2.0 and Instagram theories in relation to self-representation, and adolescent self-representation domains. All questions and topics that were established in the interview guide are further elaborated on in chapter 5.6.

3.1. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

This research adopts an inductive approach through qualitative interviews and takes a social constructionism point of view (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). "Since the early 1980s, students of the social sciences have witnessed the gradual emergence of a number of alternative approaches to the study of human beings as social animals. [...] What many of these approaches have in common, however, is what is now often referred to as social constructionism" (Burr, 2015, p. 1). To approach this study from a social constructionism's point of view, is most fitting when studying and discussing representation (Hall, Evens & Nixon, 2013).

Furthermore, what is interestingly said about constructionism, is how it differs from constructivism. As Hruby (2001) puts it, constructivism deals with knowledge formation 'inside the head', whereas constructionism deals with knowledge formation 'outside the head between participants and in social relationships'. In terms of self-representation, as will be discussed later in this chapter, widely accepted theories on self-representation focus on social relationships and peer-interactions, meaning it is aimed 'outside the head' (Cooley, 2009). Hruby emphasizes the importance of distinguishing constructivism and constructionism and states how constructionism is "the way knowledge is constructed by, for and between members of a discursively mediated community" (Hruby, 2001, p. 51). Instagram is a mediated social community that fits the ideas initiated by Hruby (2001).

3.2. SELF-REPRESENTATION THEORY

One of the prominent theories on self-representation is that of Charley Cooley (2009) on the looking-glass self. His theory, first initiated in 1902, discusses self-representation as an accumulation of expressing self-feeling, imagining audiences that perceive this expression, and how audiences might judge one's expression and appearance. The relevancy of this theory is that it gives a clear definition of differences in how a person chooses to represent himself and why. Furthermore, it links self-representation to possible consequences of how one might feel or experience self-representation.

The looking-glass self concept fits the social constructionist point of view. As discussed earlier, social constructionism relies on the social nature of human beings and their focus on knowledge sharing externally in mediated communities (see chapter 3.1). Furthermore, the looking-glass self theory has been critically discussed since its first appearance and has been widely accepted in research as one of the key theories on self-representation (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Dennet, 1992; Harter, 1999; Boyd, 2007; Bay, 2015; Matano, 2015; Belk, 2016). The looking-glass self concept has been elaborated on in the literature review. The literature review also shows how an old theory such as that of Cooley (2009), is still applicable to this day and how it is still relevant in relation to new social environments such as Instagram.

3.3. INSTAGRAM

However, it must be critically noted that research on Instagram has been limited. Instagram is one of many applications in Web 2.0 (Belk, 2014) and founded in October 2010 (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2014). As described in the context section of this study, Web 2.0 relies heavily on the interactive nature of its environment and on its users participating and interacting with the platform. Theories on self-representation in relation to Web 2.0 environments have been well established. What Zhao (2005), Belk (2016), Moncura, et al. (2016) and Matano (2015) mention about self-representation in the Web 2.0 era is that we still 'perform' (how Goffman (1959) mentioned it) self-representations, with an audience in mind and with an imagined response of our audience to our appearance. Literature still acknowledges the value of Cooley's (2009) theory in Web 2.0 representations. Since Web 2.0 has been around for many years now, the tendency for self-representations being similar to the social contexts originally interpreted by Cooley (2009), can be concluded based on extensive literature on the looking-glass self in relation to modern age social contexts.

However, for Instagram specifically, limited research has been done on the matter. And for those studies that have discussed self-representation on the platform and its consequences, due to a lack of other research, their conclusions cannot be perceived as final. This study, therefore, is merely a contribution to self-representation studies on Instagram. Social constructivism theory and self-representation theories are relevant to the topic of my study and accurate, but Instagram is subjected to a need for further knowledge, which this thesis aims to contribute to.

3.4. SELF-REPRESENTATION DOMAINS IN ADOLESCENCE

Zhao (2005) relates self-representation among adolescents to general self-representation theory, specifically that of the looking-glass self (Cooley, 2009). To gain a better understanding of self-representation in relation to the sample group, Zhao's (2005) view has proven to be essential. In this work, Zhao (2005) specifically mentions the domains on which self-representation is based in adolescence. Three domains, namely: family, school and neighbourhood have been widely accepted domains that form self-representations among adolescents. Zhao (2005) also captures the idea that self-representations are different per social context, meaning that one presents oneself differently in varying contexts.

As mentioned in the context section, identity captures the idea of who a human being is as a whole and self-representation is what he chooses to show in a specific context, regardless of who he actually is (Stryker, Owens & White, 2000; Hochstetter, 2016; Cooley, 2009; Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Matano, 2015; Moncura, et al., 2016). It means that self-representations can reflect someone's identity, or are more a conduct of identity, or as Goffman (1959) puts it, a performance. This performance can in fact be different from who one actually is, especially in adolescence, where an idealized representation of self has been linked to an adolescent's 'identity-crisis' (Zhao, 2005; Boyd, 2007; Bay 2015).

Zhao's vision on self-representation among adolescents in the era of Web 2.0 is that there is an additional domain that needs to be considered, i.e. the 'internet'. His theory, which has been supported throughout the years (Boyd, 2007; Bay, 2015; Belk, 2016), captures the idea that the internet, and specifically Web 2.0, equally influences self-development and self-representations among adolescents, who are in the midst of developing themselves, who they are and where they belong (Boyd, 2007). Thus, for this research, the importance of Web 2.0 in the establishment of self-representations among adolescents on Instagram is important to consider.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to convey what knowledge and ideas have been established on self-representation, self-representation in adolescence, Instagram and self-representation on Instagram.

4.1. SELF-REPRESENTATION

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to gain insight on self-representation in general. By looking at and discussing relevant theories on self-representation, I aim to establish a foundation on self-representation in literature that will be connected to self-representation on Instagram.

Charles Cooley's theory on the looking-glass self - 1902

One of the older theories on self-representation is that of Charles Cooley in 1902. Charles Cooley (2009) described the self as simply being the pronouns of the first-person, such as 'I', 'me', 'mine' or 'myself'. He continues to say that the self and the pronouns are directly related to emotion and feeling. He speaks of self-feeling. "The words 'me', 'them' and 'self', in as much as they arouse feeling and connote emotional worth, are objective designations meaning all the things which have the power to produce in a stream of consciousness excitement of a certain peculiar sort" (Cooley, 2009, p. 170). The self-feeling and the idea of the self is not an unaltered aspect of personal identity from birth, rather, it is a developing an in-becoming process throughout one's life, adjusting towards contents, context and so on, but especially through personal ideas (Cooley, 2009; Dennet, 1992; Moncura, et al., 2016).

Self-consciousness comes into play when these feelings of self are described by the individual, for instance: 'I am better at math than you are', suggesting we label our self-feeling and bring it into the social world. It is when this awareness of feeling is expressed and brought into the social world, that the looking-glass self comes into play. The example of 'I am better at math than you are' is the social reference one has (and feels) and to some degree forms a definite imagination of how one's self appears in a particular mind. The type of self-feeling one may have is determined by the attitude towards this attributed by another person (the social environment or social audience). This expressing of self-feelings, while keeping the peers and their attitudes towards this expressionism in mind, is what is described as the looking-glass self (Cooley, 2009). "Each to each, a looking-glass reflects the other that doth pass" (Cooley, 2009, p. 184).

The self-idea behind the looking-glass self seemingly has three elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. However, the looking-glass metaphor hardly suggests the second element. Cooley (2009) states the importance of the second element. What puts us to pride or shame is not our reflection of self, but rather the imputed sentiment, the effect our reflection has in another's mind. He describes that another's presence and appearance is what determines our self-feeling. We imagine others to have continuous power in that regard (Cooley, 2009).

Self-representation in everyday life, peers and audiences

It was in 1934 that George Herbert Mead also critically discussed the value of others in relation to self-representation. He described the self similarly to Charles Cooley (2009), a view also shared by Harter (1999): "This process of relating one's own organism to the others in the interactions that are going on, in so far as it is imported into the conduct of the individual with the conversation of the 'I' and the 'me,' constitutes the self" (Mead, 1934, p. 83). His definition also describes the self as being directed at the first-person pronouns, just as Cooley (2009) stated in his work. It also underlines the

importance of others in the development of the self. Mead (1934) also states how the self is a developing substance, rather than a static one. Regarding self-representation, Mead (1934) states in his book *Mind, Self and Society: from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* that conscious expressions of the self, are done with an audience in mind, exactly as Cooley (2009) stated it.

Erving Goffman (1959) also described how expectations of audiences influence how one represents oneself. People are quick to jump to conclusions and even to stereotypes when encountering new individuals in a specific setting, for instance a job environment. Because of the individual's awareness of expectations per social context of the self, Goffman goes as far as to say that in certain environments, the self is a performance. Individuals do this in the hope that they will be credited and not discredited. The looking-glass self captures the idea that the individual's self-perceptions are highly influenced by their interpretations of how others see them and Goffman's (1959) work suggests the same (Goffman, 1959; Cooley, 2009; Boyd, 2007). Audiences witness an individual and form an opinion based on his socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude towards the perceiver, his competence and his trustworthiness, to name a few. Furthermore, physical traits are also important to audiences in determining who someone is (Goffman, 1959).

Erving Goffman further suggests, from the point of view of the 'presenter', the individual might alter his presentation of self because of the awareness of how audiences form an opinion of someone's persona, as described above. There are several reasons an individual chooses to represent himself in a particular way. He might want others to think highly of him, or want his audience to get the idea he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how he feels towards his audience, or he may wish to obtain no clear-cut impression at all. Regardless of the objective a person might have to present himself in a specific manner, it is in his interest to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him (Goffman, 1959). This control comes from influencing the definition of a situation. The individual can express himself to ensure others respond in a way that is fitting with his own plan.

Self-efficacy – beyond the looking-glass self

The article *Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem* (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) discussed the widely accepted concept of the looking-glass self in research from multiple accounts, but made a critical note to the theory. What the authors argue is that the idea of the looking-glass self and its prominent focus on 'others' is correct, but misses the focus on self-efficacy. Cooley (2009) described how opinions of others might determine how we feel as a result of their judgement of us. The judgment of others could, for instance, boost self-esteem. But, what is interestingly noted, is that we ourselves can boost our self-esteem, without imagining any judgement of someone else, only our own judgements of ourselves.

Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) differentiate outer self-esteem and inner self-esteem. They consider Cooley's (2009) theory to be focused on the outer self-esteem, meaning how others determine our self-esteem. What they mean with inner self-esteem is stated as follows: "One's sense of inner self-esteem derives from the experience of self as an active agent of making things actually happen and realizing one's intents in an impartial world" (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 80). 'Inner' in this sense stems from how a person feels about his own capacity, competence and potency. The consequences of our own actions in an environment provide us with feedback and in return determine inner self-esteem. Inner self-esteem is earned through a person's own competent actions and the rewards that come with it.

Added to the work of Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), not only does this call-to-action stimulate inner self-esteem, in time, it might influence how others perceive you (Yeung & Martin, 2003). To help clarify this sentence, Yeung and Martin (2003) state that over time, by presenting the self in any way someone sees fit, regardless of the opinion of others, the opinion of these people might actually

change to fit the initial self-representation. So, a person does not represent aspects of himself to meet the 'demands' of others, but rather, does as he pleases and stimulates the audience to change their opinions to fit his self-representation. The authors refer to this as self-construction, a dialectic between impressibility and activity. It takes into consideration that one has a good inner self-esteem and is therefore more likely to present oneself based on inner values, rather than external values. Like Goffman (1959), however, most of their research, which was specifically aimed at testing the concept of the looking-glass self, pointed in the direction Cooley (2009) theorized. An overlap between inner and outer values can occur (Yeung & Martin, 2003; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

Self-representation: fictional and historiographical components

"Symbolic interactionism centres human development within a social context wherein experiences with others help shape the way we are in the world" (Bay, 2015, p.5). Lisa Bay (2015) acknowledges the importance of others, not only on self-representation, but on how we become and develop as persons and identities.

Also, that self-representation depends on the meanings and values of a specific social context, as mentioned in this chapter, is supported by Moncura, et al. (2016) in their article *Frapping, social norms and online representations of self*. The authors state that individuals might have multiple social identities associated with different social norms per social context. But the story, the developing process of identity, as mentioned in the context section of this thesis (Stryker, Owens & White, 2000; Hochstetter, 2016), is further elaborated on and specifically directed to online social environments in the article *The Narrative Configuration of Identity Through Social Media: An Empirical Example* (Matano, 2015). The article defines and gives insight into the creation of self-identity. Matano (2015) describes the self as not being considered as a monolithic or static substance, but as an open and ongoing process (Cooley, 2009; Dennet, 1992; Owens & White, 2000; Hochstetter, 2016). Narrative identity is summarized in Matano's article as: "a) Intermedial: an interpretation of life as a story that can be both true (historiography) and fictional (fiction)" and "b) Interconnected and interactive: a tale about ourselves, which is narrated by us and by others and is based on the social context we live in" (Matano, 2015, p. 591) By 'intermedial' is meant that individuals can define a story both by historiography and fiction. However, this simply distinguishes 'truth' from 'fiction', but the story of identity is based on biographical, autobiographical, literary, historical, therapeutic and every-day stories told or experienced (Holler, 2013). Claudia Holler (2013) underlines the dynamic substance that identity is. She also does not specifically aim narrative identity towards online social settings, but to offline and online environments.

What is interesting about Matano's (2015) and Holler's (2013) works, is that self-representations are based on aspects of identity, as stated in chapter 2.3. The example given in this chapter is that a man might have the role identity of a father, but emphasizes certain characteristics in his conduct and self-representation as a father. What Matano (2015) critically notes, is that one can base these self-representations on either fiction or historiography. Freud (1937) argues the two components ought to be in balance. However, with online communities an imbalance is more likely to occur (Matano, 2015).

Cultural influence of self-representation

As described in the context section of this study, the Netherlands is a post-traditional, multi-cultural and individualized culture. Zhu, Zhang, Fan & Han (2006) mention how culture influences self-representation. They underline the environmental importance of representations, because it determines relationships between ourselves and others in social behaviours. What they mention for Western self-representations versus Eastern self-representation, is that Westerners, and also Dutch people, view the self as an autonomous entity, separating from others and behaving according to their own internal attributes and thoughts, what they refer to as the independent self (Zhu, Zhang, Fan & Han,

2006, p. 1310). This cultural influence on self-representation means that Western representations consist of better memory and awareness of self-reference and self-judgement than Easterners, and that mother judgements (the importance of a mother's opinion of her child) are similarly less important as are all other judgements. Thus, Westerners' awareness of self-representation is mostly, but not entirely, based on their own attitude and judgement towards the self. This applies to both physical appearances as other characteristics of the self, such as attitude. More than ever, Westerners imagine audiences in their self-representations. They are more focused on themselves and therefore imagine audiences in social contexts, rather than actually perceiving judgements of their peers as feedback.

What has been discussed in chapter 2.3 is that the more prominent role of media in popular Dutch culture stimulates changes in the way people inform and organize themselves, and how they communicate with each other and even the government. The relationships between people and with other aspects of Dutch society, such as institutions and the government are changing drastically. The most notable change is that Dutch people are increasingly shifting towards online communications and self-representations (Sonck & De Haan, 2015; Felling, 2004).

Self-representation online

The article *The Digital Self: Through the Looking Glass of Telecopresent Others* (Zhao, 2005) interestingly notes that self-representations seem different online. Zhao (2005) describes the value of Cooley's (2009) theory on the looking-glass self and acknowledges its importance on self-representation online. What Zhao (2005) mentions is that self-representations online are done for similar purposes as self-representations offline, meaning one imagines how peers or audiences witness someone's self-representation and judge that representation. By this, Zhao (2005) clearly notes how the theory on the looking-glass self is relevant for online representations as well.

The main difference between offline and online self-representation is related to the term corporeal copresence. "In corporeal copresence, others give off a rich array of embodied nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expression, gesture and posture, kinesics, and proxemics, which reveal their attitudes toward us" (Zhao, 2005). But, as Zhao (2005) mentions, others might try to 'hide' their true opinions of someone by deliberately providing false impressions and suppressing specific expressions, something Goffman (1959) mentions as a performance of self. However, most of the time, we are still able to uncover what others truly think about us. But, online, people interact with each other without being physically present, what Zhao (2005) refers to as 'telecopresence'. What is critically mentioned is that interactions without physical encounters, make it harder for us to determine what someone truly thinks of our self-representation in the online context. With non-verbal cues being completely erased from the equation, it is harder for us to imagine an accurate perception of others of our self-representations. Yet, we still consider others as leading factors in determining our self-representations online, which is still aligned with Cooley's (2009) view on self-representation, but we have a harder time imagining an accurate perception of our self-representation by others and it is harder to accurately perceive another's persona. So, more than ever, we imagine how peers judge us, rather than perceiving actual feedback. Even though telecopresence is not a new concept (for example, communication through bulletin boards, telegraphs, etc.) the internet has greatly expanded this domain, making it accessible to the general public.

Zhao's (2005) work took place in the early stages of Web 2.0. But despite this early research on self-representation in the digital age, and prior to the huge amount of the now available social networks, Belk (2016) acknowledges how the internet has become a major domain for determining self-representation. Russel Belk (2016) considers online self-representations as part of the extended-self. By this term is meant the extension of our persona beyond our mind and body, for instance a person's

clothing, car, et cetera. Online, and specifically on social platforms, this might be a person's online profile.

Like Zhao (2005), Russel Belk (2016) mentions domains for self-representation (see chapter 3.2 for the three domains in adolescence). What is important about these domains is that they are aimed at peers in encountered social settings, such as family, work, school and so on. Web 2.0, however, has created new domains and new depth to self-representation.

An interesting concept Belk (2016) describes, is re-embodiment. What he means by this term is that we used to present ourselves in face-to-face situations, but that social networks enable us to present ourselves beyond the face-to-face situation. This is what is referred to as dis-embodiment. However, since we now have online avatars or photos as a visual representation of ourselves online, we re-embodiment ourselves. This re-embodiment also implies the idea that we can present ourselves differently online and that we might present an ideal self or altered self since it is easier to do so. It is a development that Matano (2015) also describes, where self-representation online might be more aimed at exaggerations of other self-representations. What is interesting though, is that Belk (2016) and Matano (2015) both mention that we still to this day form self-representations based on how we imagine other's appraisals of us. Regardless of any specific motivations we have to do so, we have an audience in mind, meaning the works of Cooley (2009) and Mead (1934) on self-representation are still accurate today, only the podia have changed.

4.2. ADOLESCENTS AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Zhao (2005) describes how adolescents form self-representations and mentions the effects the interactive internet (Web 2.0) has on self-representations. The article refers to the works of Cooley (2009) and Mead (1934) on the concept of the looking-glass self theory and mentions, just like other literature in this chapter, how the self is not static, but developing, and based on a number of domains. The three domains that are part of teenagers' social world are family, school and the neighbourhood. The three domains stimulate how a teenager develops the self, but how he/she might also develop different selves per context. Research has shown that parents have a dominant influence on their children's sense of self prior to adolescence. As a child grows older, however, the influence of peers increases.

The relationship of self-development to Web 2.0 for teenagers is that adolescence is a phase of life where teenagers have an 'identity crisis', as Zhao (2005) mentions. It is this concept that stimulates adolescents to use the internet for interpersonal communication and chat with, in many cases, strangers as well as people they know. They do this to get a better idea of who they are and where they belong. Danah Boyd (2007) adds to the notion of determining representation online that teens look at others' profiles to understand what representations of self are appropriate. Other profiles give them cues as to how they should represent themselves. While profiles are constructed through a series of generic forms, there is plenty of room for them to manipulate their own profiles to express themselves. What Danah Boyd (2007) also underlines is Zhao's (2005) statement that teens are extra sensitive to the specific judgements and appearances of others, as they are trying to figure out who they are. Lisa Bay (2015) also mentions adolescents' heightened awareness of others, and they are very likely to be extra sensitive to how others appear.

Zhao (2005) further mentions how the internet opens the gates for teenagers to a whole new world, with many possibilities in discovering the self. Further, the article mentions how teenagers are very sensitive to judgements of others on their appearance, as acknowledged by Bay (2015) and Boyd (2007), and are therefore likely to explore the possibilities of self-development online, as they are not physically present and therefore feel safer.

It is because of all these important developments on the internet in teenagers' lives, that Zhao (2005) adds the internet as a fourth domain of self-representation. This online domain embodies the developments of adolescent self-representations in the era of Web 2.0, a view that is shared by Russell Belk (2016).

4.3. INSTAGRAM: DEFINITION AND RESEARCH

Instagram is a social media platform that enables users to share content with audiences through pictures, videos and other visual material and is part of the Web 2.0 landscape. By using a smartphone, an individual can share visual material and transform this material with filters (Instagram, 2017). The unique concept of Instagram is that profiles are not text-based, but image-based. "The digital storytelling movement (involving the workshop-based production of short autobiographical videos) from its beginnings in the mid-1990s relied heavily on the narrative power of the personal photograph, often sourced from family albums and later from online archives" (Vivienne & Burges, 2013, p. 279).

Since its launch in October 2010, Instagram has grown rapidly in popularity. "In April 2012, it had over 100 million active users worldwide and over 300 million as of December 2014" (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2014, p. 2). Filimonov, Russmann and Svensson (2014) further suggest the platform exceeded several other social media platforms, such as Twitter. Furthermore, Instagram continues to grow at a rapid pace, faster than Twitter and Facebook.

Since Instagram has only been around for approximately 6.5 years, the platform has not been an object of study for a significant time (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2013). Much of the material I came across is aimed at commercial and public aspects of using Instagram for marketing or as a visual interaction tool for institutions and public services. There has been research on popularity of the platform, as mentioned in this section already, self-representation to some extent, body-image (and the consequences of body-image perception), links to selfies and narcissism, and gratification. However, research on Instagram thus far remains limited (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2013).

Self-representation and our audiences are the two key subjects on Instagram. The content we share is mostly that of friends or of self, as can be seen in image 1.

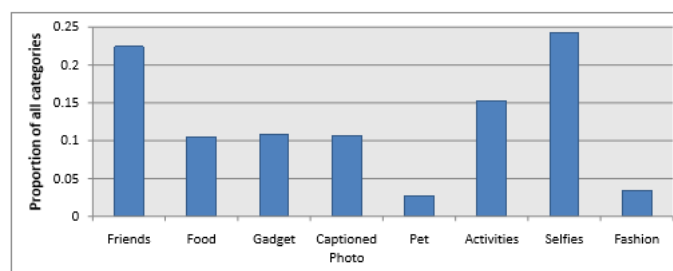


Image 1: What we post on Instagram (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014)

Self-representations on Instagram are mainly based on Instagram 'demanding' to share yourself online, meeting the 'wishes' of your peers and remaining true to the social norms of Instagram's pre-selected social context. Users alter their identity to meet these standards. Interactions with others may be compromised when the 'identity' of an individual contributor may be 'false', disguised or unknown (Freud, 1937). The result is that the technology mediates identity and enables a subject to eschew authenticity, if so desired. (Mallan, 2009; Boyd, 2007; Matano, 2015).

4.4. SELF-REPRESENTATION ON INSTAGRAM

Having discussed how self-representations in Web 2.0 are still subjected to Cooley's (2009) theory on the looking-glass self, literature suggests that Instagram follows the same theory. Thus, this part of the literature study focuses more on specific motives for engagements with Instagram and how one aims to represent oneself.

Self-representation on Instagram

In the article, *Instagram: Motives for its use and relationship to narcissism and contextual age*, Pavica Sheldon and Katherine Bryant (2016) mention four motives for using Instagram, stated in image 2.

	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance	α
→ Factor 1: Surveillance/knowledge about others				
To interact with my friends.	.72			
To see "visual status updates" of my friends.	.67			
It is fun.	.59			
To follow my friends.	.81	7.17	35.85	.86
To see what other people share.	.78			
To "like" my followers' photos.	.69			
To creep through other people's posts.	.41			
→ Factor 2: Documentation				
To depict my life through photos.	.56	1.95	9.76	.83
To remember special events.	.83			
To share my life with other people.	.52			
To document the world around me.	.57			
To commemorate an event.	.79			
To remember something important.	.72			
→ Factor 3: Coolness				
To become popular.	.79	1.58	7.88	.72
It is cool.	.62			
To self-promote.	.57			
To provide "visual status updates" for my friends.	.45			
→ Factor 4: CREATIVITY				
To find people with whom I have common interests.	.62	1.20	6.03	.67
To create art.				
To show off my photography skills.	.66			
	.84			

Image 2: Motives for using Instagram (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016)

Image 2 shows that keeping up with your environment (friends, audiences, etc.) is a key factor for using Instagram. This confirms that what we share with others on Instagram is one of the key elements for others to determine whether to follow our activity or not. Self-representation is therefore subject to the opinion of others, as literature already suggested in this chapter. McQuail (1983) defines factor one as information seeking. Whiting and Williams (2013) add to this that others are a motive for using Instagram and social media. It includes monitoring what others are doing.

'Documentation' is an important factor specifically for Instagram as a motive to use the platform. This is because the unique approach of Instagram is documenting visual material of oneself, where other media are more text-based (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Popularity is a third motive for using Instagram. It is a typical occurrence for people to be stimulated to engage in contexts for the sole purpose of gaining popularity. Due to Instagram's features, 'coolness' arises from the ability to engage with celebrities, use hashtags and filters, and share links. Furthermore, users use social media for 'self-promotion' (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). In order to gain approval from the online social context, we tend to feel an urge to improve our identities (Wandel & Beavers, 2011). This urge to improve stimulates us to focus our identity not on historiographical aspects, but more on fictional aspects (Matano, 2015).

The creativity factor of the motives is the least dominant in the image by Sheldon and Bryant (2016). However, it is a relevant motive, because Instagram enables users to appear creative by adding filters to their visual content. In addition, Mull and Lee (2014) found that creativity is a motive worth mentioning, as previous media have been used for the sole purpose of aiming to be creative, such as Pinterest.

Adding to the four key motives of Sheldon and Bryant (2016) for using Instagram, Zachary Mc Cune (2011) states 'therapy' is a factor to use Instagram. He describes that this is a process whereby users of Instagram are able to cope with feelings through Instagram.

Social media have been described as technologies of the self and as tools of self-representation and self-exposition (Matano, 2015). The social aspect of social media, according to Matano (2015), is the ability one has to show oneself with the illusion of having an immediate audience. The shift in Web 2.0 is that the focus is more on one's narrative identity being in competition with another's narratives, meaning social approval is gained once the competition is matched or beaten (Wandel & Beavers, 2011).

Consequences of representations on Instagram

Although there is a lack of research direction for the consequences of self-representations on Instagram, one consequence is that (altered) representations online can in fact boost social self-esteem and well-being. Also, frequent technology use has been scientifically linked to increases in self-disclosure and friendship quality. Furthermore, positive outcomes like increases in social support have also been recognized in research (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). However, individuals do not necessarily show their complete self on these digital platforms (Moncura, et al., 2016). So, social self-esteem might be based on an alternative version of self.

Consequences might also be negative as a study on social media use in relation to body image shows where respondents of the research, who spent more time on social media platforms, suffered more from insecurity about their body image (Eckler, et al., 2017). To add to the conclusions of Eckler, et al. (2017), Nesi and Prinstein (2015) describe various other negative outcomes of social technologies such as Instagram: "frequent use of social networking sites may be associated with depressive symptoms, short-term declines in subjective well-being, romantic jealousy, and the belief that others are happier and living better lives than one's self" (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015, p. 1428).

There have also been studies where no clear relationship between social media usage on personal behaviour and development has been found (Gross, 2004), nor between frequency of technology use and depressive symptoms (Davila, et al., 2012; Jelenchick, et al., 2013), further highlighting the inconclusive nature of attempts to characterize overall associations between technology use and psychological outcomes. It is mentioned that the quantity of social networking should not necessarily be linked to depressive symptoms, but rather, the quality of peer interactions and behaviours via these platforms (Davila, et al., 2012).

In the study of Sheldon and Bryant (2016), Instagram usage has been linked to narcissism. Social media-driven narcissism consists of SNS (Social Network Site) users engaging frequently with others, by liking or commenting on their content. For Instagram, specifically, selfies (photos a person makes with his/her phone of him or herself) have provided users with the opportunity to develop narcissistic tendencies (Weiser, 2015). "Leadership/Authority and grandiose exhibitionism contributed significantly to the prediction of selfie-posting frequency" (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016, p. 95). However, Weiser (2015) could not conclude if social media-driven narcissism is necessarily a bad thing. Even though the research of Sheldon and Bryant (2016) discussed various positive and negative outcomes of social media usage versus life satisfaction, they did not find any clear relation between the two, which is in line with the other literature in this chapter.

However, in relation to narcissism, Jackson and Luchner (2016) studied how narcissism among respondents affected their self-representation and sense of self-esteem among peer-interactions on Instagram. Interestingly, respondents with narcissistic tendencies were solely focused on meeting a

self-made standard. As mentioned, since the Netherlands is an individualized Western culture, where younger immigrants act similarly to Dutch native youngsters online, self-representations are mostly based on self-made standards. This standard was aimed at a certain number of likes, comments and follows on Instagram that the respondent felt was 'good enough'. Anything not meeting or exceeding this standard was perceived as 'negative feedback' on Instagram by peers, meaning that if someone thinks he should receive 200 likes, but receives 150, all these 150 appraisals are not even considered as positive (Jackson & Luchner, 2016).

What the article *The Role of Narcissism in self-promotion on Instagram* (Moon, et al., 2016) clearly mentions, is that many narcissistic individuals tend to have low self-esteem and need more approval and praise from their peers. However, they also acknowledge narcissists that are just extraordinarily fond of themselves. Also, they acknowledge that those who are not necessarily textbook narcissists, but suffer from low self-esteem, might show similar tendencies on Instagram as narcissists that are insecure. They state that individuals will use Instagram for self-promotion, posting frequently and presenting an idealized version themselves and mainly through selfies. What is interesting though, is that their research has not linked these self-promoting tendencies among insecure individuals to a boost in self-esteem among this group, rather, they become more insecure.

Furthermore, as mentioned, narcissism can either mean that a teen has solid self-esteem - more directed at inner self-esteem, or is narcissistic in that he needs the acknowledgement from the environment - more aimed at outer self-esteem (Thomaes & Stegge, 2007). In the case of the latter, teens tend to be insecure, but have a strong need for acknowledgement and appraisal from their peers. It is this form of narcissism, directed at outer self-esteem, that can create negative consequences in self-representations on Instagram, mentioned above. It stimulates one to present an ideal image and this can be potentially harmful. As Freud (1937) suggested, highlighting fictional aspects of your identity is only a bad thing when it goes too far. If the self-told story is more fictional than true, Freud considers self-representation to be negative.

Given that self-representation is still done similarly today as many years ago, Instagram has not given rise to a new phenomenon. The main differences between now and then are the reach of a worldwide audience through Instagram, the continuity of being online, self-representations being related to telecopresence and the restrictions in creating a profile on Instagram. The latter is a subject relating to social media in general, not just Instagram (Mallan, 2009). The consequence of focusing self-representations too much on fictional aspects, due to the imagined 'demands' of audiences in a specific social context, is that we might focus too much on others, and on presenting a self-image to meet the norms of others, rather than our everyday self (Matano, 2015; Belk, 2016). It is our peers in a specific social setting that for the most part determine how we represent ourselves, as literature suggested in this entire chapter. The consequence being that we might value our idealized version of self (Belk, 2016) by our peers more than our authentic self.

However, it must be critically noted that all literature on narcissism in relation to Instagram and adolescents has stated that more research is needed to gain a more solid understanding on the matter. Even though there have been trends in research, it is still too limited for clear-cut conclusions. This further underlines the inconclusiveness surrounding consequences of self-representation on Instagram among adolescents. Furthermore, it must be noted that this part of this chapter relates narcissism specifically to social media-driven narcissism and not narcissistic personality disorder, since that entails more than just Instagram usage and more that of a psychological study.

In the Netherlands, narcissism is considered a bad thing, as Derksen (2009) mentions in his book *Het narcistisch ideaal. Opvoeden in een tijd van zelfverheerlijking*. What he mentions is that in Dutch society, we live in a time of self-glorification and it is perceived as a generally bad thing. He describes

how the shift in Dutch culture towards individualism has stimulated narcissistic tendencies among new generations. Parents are more reserved and thus children seek acknowledgement elsewhere. Derksen (2009) hereby implies that children develop narcissistic tendencies out of insecurity, which makes them more vulnerable to peer acknowledgements on, for instance, Instagram.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this section of the study, the methods and tools are discussed and the empirical research method and its contents have been elaborated on.

5.1. CHOICE OF METHOD: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The approach of this research was inductive through qualitative interviews and from a social constructionism point of view (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013), see chapter 3.1 for an analysis on the research paradigm of this study.

Semi-structured interviews allowed all participants to be asked the same questions within a flexible framework. Participants were asked similar questions to meet the goal of the study. The ordering of the questions could vary, depending on the way the interview progressed. The open nature of the questions aimed to encourage depth and vitality and to allow new concepts to emerge (Dearnley, 2005).

The subject of self-presentation is a personal and possibly sensitive one. As mentioned by Miles and Gilbert (2005), questionnaires did not allow me to elaborate on particularly sensitive questions. In return, participants might have felt uncomfortable or have other reasons to be uneasy with questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews, however, enabled me to change the setup of the interview, such as location and other aspects that might help participants to feel at ease.

Strengths of this research method, as described by Johnson and Turner (2003), were that this method was useful for me to explore ideas and interviews also allowed for good interpretive validity. Furthermore, as a researcher, I could obtain in-depth information about exactly how respondents thought about the research issue. Finally, the method allowed quick turnarounds.

5.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative research has two ethical considerations, namely: safety and human rights. The way to protect these ethical values is by informed consent. However, the utilization of informed consent in qualitative research is in some cases practically impossible, because the direction of the research is largely unknown. Informed consent can be achieved in qualitative research by re-negotiation when unexpected events occur, but one can argue in turn that this places greater responsibility on the researcher, as well as requiring them to possess a high level of skill, especially in negotiation (Carr, 1994; Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Furthermore, ethical issues can also play a more significant role depending on the topic of the study. My respondents considered this topic to be sensitive and to consist of potentially harmful information, in the sense that their answers revealed sensitive personal opinions on sensitive subjects. Therefore, regardless of informed consent, respondents could choose to remain anonymous during the research and I respected this (Roberts, 2015).

Further ethical considerations for semi-structured interviews that I considered relevant for my study, were based on the work of Cockburn (2014). Interviewees had to be fully briefed about the focus

and purpose of the research to establish openness and trust. It was in my best interest to ensure respondents were not surprised by certain aspects of the study. I also adopted an informed and sensitive approach, considering the vulnerabilities of the participants. If they declined to speak about certain subjects, I would honour their request, or reassure them that the information was essential to my study. Furthermore, on agreeing to participate, interviewees were asked to sign a form giving their consent, which Jacques Koole (2017) assisted me with. Jacques Koole (2017) is a former director and now teacher at Het Groene Hart Lyceum, the school community I have contacted to acquire my respondents. As Jacques Koole (2017) supervised the process, interviewees were stimulated to provide him with feedback on how I conducted the research. If I did something that was considered less than satisfactory, they should have the possibility to express themselves. All raw data is available to anyone, since respondents are anonymous and Jacques Koole (2017) agreed to honour their anonymity. I honoured the request of participants to remain anonymous. Even though Het Groene Hart Lyceum can be traced, Jacques Koole (2017) does not mind this school community being mentioned in the research. The students, however, will not be traceable. The school community consists of hundreds of students, and thus, anonymity of the respondents can be honoured. As a researcher, I had to respect the knowledge, insight, experience and expertise of the respondents. Finally, I have done my utmost to ensure that I have been honest and accurate in conveying professional conclusions, opinions, and research findings, and in acknowledging the potential limitations.

5.3. SAMPLE

The research sample consisted of 14 adolescent, high school student, Instagram users in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands, aged 15 to 18. The location was chosen for two reasons. Alphen aan den Rijn is a typical city in the province of Zuid Holland (the province with the most number of residents) (Provincie Zuid Holland, 2017). Alphen aan den Rijn performs around the average of Dutch cities on all aspects, as can be seen on Oozo.nl (Oozo.nl, 2017). It has a population of around 100.000, with approximately 10 percent of this population falling in the age category of 15 to 24. The exact number of 15 to 18 year olds has not been mentioned, but it is safe to assume this percentage is lower. 17,5% of the population are immigrants, with approximately 10% of this group being non-Western immigrants. In the entire Dutch population, 22% of the residents are immigrants and about 13% of them are non-Western (CBS, 2017). The Netherlands have been noted among one of the highest social media users (Silvius, 2016). 60 % of adolescents between 14 and 18 use Instagram in the Netherlands (Waterschoot, 2016).

The students are in a major transitional phase of their lives. Social, physical and emotional transformations are major aspects of the transitional phase in adolescence. As described in her thesis, Lisa Bay (2015) notes how adolescence is a time where individuals must solidify aspects of their identity to continue their further development. The most important task in this process in adolescence is structuring one's self. One of the domains prominent in adolescence entails peer relationships (Harter, 1999). "Given the highly visual and interpersonal features of popular social media outlets (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) it is likely that adolescents, who already have heightened awareness of their physical and social selves, will be particularly sensitive to these aspects of SNSs (Social Network Sites)" (Bay, 2015, p. 1-2).

Het Groene Hart Lyceum is a community of multiple high schools in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, that has been used for the collection of respondents in this research. Jacques Koole, former director and now teacher at Het Groene Hart Lyceum, acknowledges how Het Groene Hart Lyceum is in line with the average performance and student backgrounds of other schools in the city (and province) (Koole, 2017). Jacques Koole (2017) provided me with students that were willing to participate in this study, and matched the criteria of the sample. He was aware of the choice of many respondents to remain anonymous. Thus, Jacques Koole (2017) has agreed not to provide any information

regarding the identities of the students. All students are at HAVO or VWO level, which in the Netherlands, prepares them for studies at higher vocational colleges and universities (Koole, 2017). An equal distribution between HAVO (Pre Applied Science College) students and VWO (Pre University) students was acquired. An equal distribution between gender has also been achieved.

The total sample group consisted of 14 respondents. The sample contained seven females and seven males, aged 15-18 and all of whom are daily users of Instagram. The age selection was based on the belief that older adolescents would understand the research and the questions better than younger adolescents between 12-14 (Bay, 2015; Boyd, 2007). Not all respondents chose to be anonymous, but most of them did. To create uniformity among the respondents, all of them have been made anonymous and are referred to as 'Respondent X', X representing a number that meets a specific respondent, see table 1.

Name	Gender	Instagram	Level
Respondent 01	M	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 02	M	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 03	M	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 04	V	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 05	M	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 06	M	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 07	V	Yes	HAVO
Respondent 08	M	Yes	VWO
Respondent 09	M	Yes	VWO
Respondent 10	V	Yes	VWO
Respondent 11	V	Yes	VWO
Respondent 12	V	Yes	VWO
Respondent 13	V	Yes	VWO
Respondent 14	V	Yes	VWO

Table 1: Respondents

5.4. DATA COLLECTION

The study took place between March 26th and August 21st, 2017. During this period, data on the sample was collected through oral semi-structured interviews between the 10th of May and the 6th of July (see Bibliography). A first version of the thesis was created in the initial study period between March 26th and May 24th. However, since the first version of this study was provided with critical feedback, in the period between mid-June and the 21st of August, 2017, this thesis has been revised and most empirical data has been regathered. Each interview consisted of a similar structure, but with a flexible component. Depending on the conversation, the ordering of the questions could vary. The questions were constructed in an interview guide, see Appendix I. The used interview guide can be found in appendix II, which is the Dutch version of Appendix I. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, because this is the respondents' mother tongue, as well as mine. Therefore, to prevent misinterpretations of the contents of the study, conducting the interviews in Dutch was more efficient. To ensure all data would be translated accordingly, Geraldine Nesbitt (2017), who is a sworn translator and the owner of translating company Write Away Text and Design in the Netherlands, assisted me

with the translations of the data from Dutch to English. In elaborate oral interviews, the respondents were asked to answer the questions from the interview guide and, as an interviewer, I asked additional questions if so desired.

5.5. LIMITATIONS

Because the period of this study was approximately two months, time was a limitation during this study. If more time was available, the research could have been aimed at a larger sample. Even after the first moment of feedback in June, 2017, limited time was available to broaden the sample of this study.

Johnson and Turner (2003) state that only using the semi-structured interview method for research is usually a weakness, as working with a small research group might miss out on saturation. However, they do not state that one should always use an additional method. For this study specifically, I believe a representative image of adolescents in higher educational high school levels in Alphen aan den Rijn has been achieved. However, it must be critically noted that this study cannot be considered to be representative of other samples. The research sample and the sample group only represent a small fraction on the subject. A limitation of the study therefore is that all conclusions in this research do not necessarily speak for a larger population, even if Alphen aan den Rijn is considered a typical city in Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands. More research on other/larger samples would be required to overcome this limitation.

The sample group consisted of HAVO and VWO students, which are two of the three major levels in the Dutch high school education system (Koole, 2017). This being said, a limitation is that the lowest level of high school education, namely: VMBO, has not been researched in this thesis. Therefore, this thesis only represents high school students at higher educational levels in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands.

5.6. CONDUCT

I carried out oral semi-structured interviews based on the description of the semi-structured interviews method by Kallio, et al. (2016). The authors have created a framework for creating an interview guide, that they have based on research on ten different papers, see image 4. I have determined the relevant aspects for my own development process.

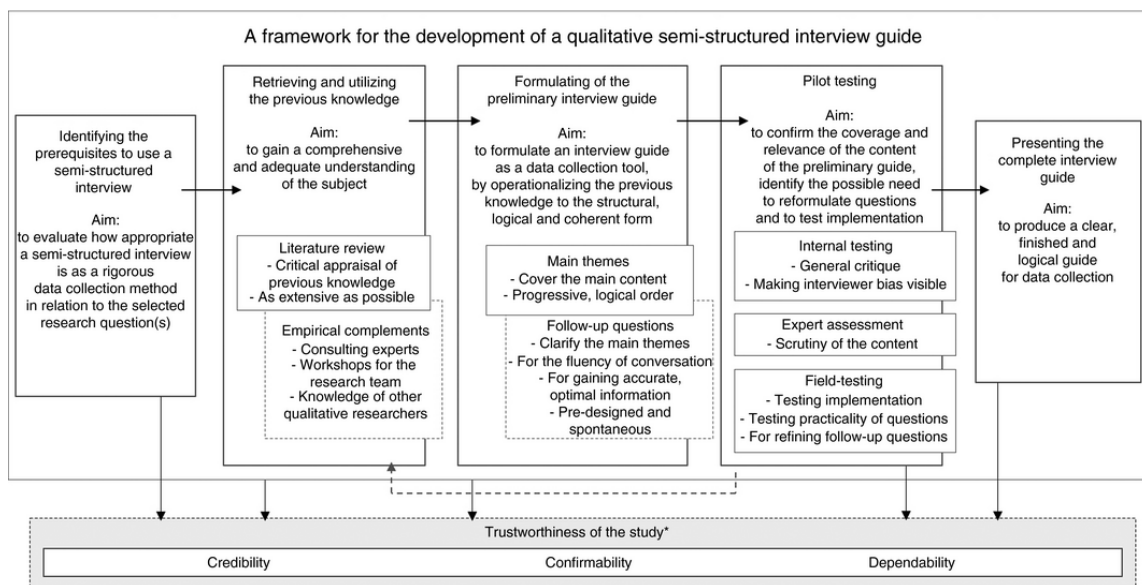


Image 4: Framework for the development of semi-structured interview guides (Kallio, Pietilä & Johnson, 2016)

Explanation of image 4

Identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews

The first phase was to identify the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews. The aim of this phase was to evaluate the appropriateness of the semi-structured interview as a rigorous data collection method in relation to the research question. As described earlier in this chapter, research on self-representation can contain personal and sensitive questions, whereby in-depth interviews provide the possibility to engage with participants sensibly and personally. Furthermore, because of the demand for flexibility in the research questions and the openness of the research, semi-structured interviews were a suitable method.

Retrieving and using previous knowledge

The second phase of the development was retrieving and using previous knowledge. The aim of this phase was to gain a comprehensive and adequate understanding of the subject, which required critical appraisal of previous knowledge and the possible need for complementary empirical knowledge. Previous knowledge created a predetermined framework for the interview. The use of literature enabled already available knowledge on the subject to be used and embedded in the study. In addition, the literature and interviews could be compared to each other and discussed. The literature study can be found in chapter 3. The main theory of the study is that of Charles Cooley (2009) on the looking-glass self.

Formulating the preliminary semi-structured interview guide

The third phase of the development was formulating the preliminary semi-structured interview guide. The aim of this phase was to formulate an interview guide as a tool for interview data collection, using previous knowledge on structural, logical and coherent forms. An interview guide has been defined as a list of questions, which directs conversation towards the research topic during the interview. The interview guide for this study can be found in Appendix I and the Dutch version in Appendix II. The questions were based on the theory of Charles Cooley (2009) on the looking-glass self and the literature review in chapter 4, containing the main subjects of the study and the literature that has discussed these topics.

Since the main question consists of three components, the way the interview guide and the results will be discussed is based on these three components. The main question is: **how do high school students in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands, present themselves to their peers on Instagram, why and with what consequences according to them?** Thus, the topics are:

- How the respondents represent themselves to their peers on Instagram;
- Why they do it;
- The consequences of self-representations on Instagram according to them.

Pilot testing of the interview guide

The fourth phase of the development was pilot testing the semi-structured interview guide. The aim of this phase was to confirm the coverage and relevance of the content of the formulated, preliminary guide and to identify the possible need to reformulate questions and to test implementation of it. By testing the interview guide and enabling participants to provide feedback on the pilot interview, research questions and the interview guide could be adjusted.

For this research, the interview guide was proof-read by Jacques Koole (2017), who helped me to reach the correct sample. As a teacher of adolescent high school students, he was closely connected to the sample and understood what questions were suitable for them to answer. I could adjust my questions fittingly for my sample. For the study itself, I tested the interview guide to ensure I received all information I was aiming to acquire. On the first try, I did not receive all information I

wanted. Thus, I edited the interview guide to ensure I would receive the missing information in the actual conduct of the study.

Conducting the interviews

After completing the steps from image 4, the interviews were conducted. By using the interview guide, a complete data collection among the respondents was acquired. All respondents were told about the purpose of this study, and could remain anonymous if so desired. All interviews were held in Dutch. To ensure all information was translated to English accordingly, I was assisted by a sworn translator to help me do this (Nesbitt, 2017).

Analysing the data

Based on the work of Rebecca Dimond (2015) and Kathleen Piercy (2017), analysing semi-structured interviews was done by following various stages. Firstly, I read the transcripts of all my respondents, in order to discover what was particularly interesting about their answers and made notes for myself to gain a better understanding of the common denominator in their answers. Secondly, I re-read the transcripts to ensure I did not miss specific information in the first reading. After re-reading the answers of my respondents and sifting through my notes, I added any pertinent information. For the analysis, I turned to the literature I found on the subjects and compared the answers of my respondents with the contents of the literature I had read. At this stage, I wanted to discover how literature and my empirical data compared. As with the second step of this process, I repeated the steps for the analysis to ensure I interpreted the acquired data and the literature correctly and created a focus as to how to write it in this study.

6. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section of the study, the results of the conducted interviews are presented. All quotes have been translated from their original language, Dutch, and elaborated on to ensure understanding of the given information. This chapter aims to present the results and discuss them critically with literature. The chapter has been built up out of the three main components of the main question: **how do high school students in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands, present themselves to their peers on Instagram, why and with what consequences according to them?**

The first component of the main question is the 'how' question: 'How do the respondents represent themselves on Instagram to their peers?' The second component of the main question refers to the 'why' part: 'Why do they conduct this self-representation on Instagram to their peers?' Finally, the last component of the main question, aimed at the consequences that adolescents see of self-representation on Instagram by and to their peers, will be critically discussed: 'What consequences do the respondents see of self-representation on Instagram?'

6.1. HOW DO THE RESPONDENTS REPRESENT THEMSELVES ON INSTAGRAM TO THEIR PEERS?

To recap what literature critically mentioned on self-representation, we look at the discussed theory of the looking-glass self (Cooley, 2009). The looking-glass self is described as self-feeling being consciously expressed and presented to an imagined audience and imagined appearance one has in another's mind and how one is judged for this self-representation. It relies heavily on the idea that others play a critical role in self-representation. It is a view that has been widely accepted in literature on self-representation (Cooley, 2009; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Harter, 1999; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

It is an old theory, but nevertheless relevant as literature has shown in chapter 4. It is a theory that was pre-Web 2.0 and pre-Instagram. But, literature on self-representation in the era of Web 2.0

acknowledges the theory's current relevance. As Zhao (2005) and Belk (2016) mention, we still represent ourselves with others in mind and with an imagined judgement of them on our self-representation on social platforms on Web 2.0. Even more so, in determining how adolescents form their identity and their self-representations, they even consider Web 2.0 to be an extra domain in self-development among adolescents. Apart from school, family and neighbourhood having an influence on how an adolescent forms self-representations, interactive engagements with Web 2.0 platforms are equally important in this day and age.

What is critically discussed in literature is the concept of telecopresence (Zhao, 2005). Self-representations could be a performance and could be altered to control a situation or the conduct of others (Goffman, 1959), but mostly, these performances could be uncovered due to non-verbal cues of the performer. Instagram representations, however, give individuals the possibility to alter their representation on the platform and present an ideal or altered self, if so desired (Bay, 2015; Boyd, 2007; Zhao, 2005; Belk, 2016; Matano, 2015; Moncura, et al., 2016). Telecopresence describes how one is indeed present in a social environment, but that this presence is from a distance (hence, 'tele'). This distance allows the presenter to present himself without giving away non-verbal cues (Zhao, 2005). Instagram is a platform that is related to self-representation in a telecopresent fashion and therefore subjected to altered or idealized self-representations. But how do the respondents of this research feel about this?

Ten out of fourteen respondents first of all state that they feel Instagram enables you to represent yourself 'as yourself' on Instagram.

"I feel you can just present yourself as you are on Instagram, but visually, and I feel that initially, this is what I did" (Respondent 01).

This was in an answer to the question: 'how do you feel Instagram expects you to represent yourself?' In this stage of the research, peer-interactions were not mentioned yet. It was therefore interesting to see that most respondents do feel that presenting yourself as yourself, but visually, is what Instagram 'expects' of you. However, in the theories on self-representation, the importance of others is what forms self-representation and what Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) refer to as 'outer self-esteem'. Thus, I asked the respondents why they represent themselves on Instagram and why they engage with it. It was in this section that literature on self-representation seemed to come forward, as eleven of the respondents mention the importance of others for engaging with the platform and determining self-representation.

"Everybody uses it and I enjoy getting into touch with people I know, as well as with people I do not know" (Respondent 04).

"I use it because everybody uses it. I want to stay up-to-date on others. I view pictures of others, for instance of friends, but also of people I do not know yet. I like engaging with new people and getting to know them on Instagram" (Respondent 11).

It is interesting to notice in this stage of the analysis the importance of others. What is interesting about the quotes of Respondents 04 and 11, is how they both mentioned the interest in people they do not know. It was Zhao (2005) and Belk (2016) who described the domains on which self-representations are based. What they stated was that the internet offers adolescents opportunities to engage with others outside the fixed domains of family, school and the neighbourhood. They have the opportunity to interact with new people on many platforms on Web 2.0, Instagram being one of these platforms. Because adolescents are discovering who they are in this phase of life, it is particularly interesting for them to engage with others in this fourth domain and adjust their self-representations to these social settings (Boyd, 2007; Bay, 2015; Zhao, 2005, Belk, 2016). What is interestingly said about adjusting self-representations on Instagram to meet the imagined perceptions of peers is this:

“You present yourself in a visual way, but with the most attractive pictures you can find. You want to look good and stimulate a lot of possible engagements” (Respondent 14).

It is implied that you stimulate many engagements that are not just subjected to the people you know, since an idealized version of self is less important to the people that actually know you, something most respondents felt similarly about. Altered representations are more aimed at the people you do not know, since that altered representation becomes the telecopresent peers’ truth: “Fact ends by following presentation; the fabricated becomes the true” (McNeill & Randall, 2001, p. 131). It gets clearer in this stage that respondents acknowledge the influence of telecopresent peers on Instagram in determining self-representation. They also acknowledge the performance of the self (Goffman, 1959). Nine respondents clearly mention how they feel Instagram users present themselves differently on Instagram than they know these individuals in offline life.

“People try to come across as good as possible. They only show the best side of themselves and present ‘the perfect image’. I feel as though many people exaggerate how awesome they really are” (Respondent 10).

The different representation the respondents mention, is never in a negative sense. Their peers only represent themselves ‘better’ than they are, but never more negatively. The quote respondent 10 gave, mentioned above, captures the main idea about the feelings of the respondents towards different self-representations. Most of them speak of a more perfect image of self, a more exaggerated positive view, a more social and happier looking peer and a more attractive looking peer. Literature has acknowledged the fact that altered and idealized self-representations on Web 2.0 happen, and for Instagram specifically, the respondents of this study feel the same.

It is also acknowledged in literature that social identities in different social settings differ for the purpose of self-promotion, highlighting that which the presenter feels is relevant for the social context. Having different social identities in varying social contexts has been described in all literature in this study, but specifically online by for instance Moncura, et al. (2016), who specifically stated that one has different identities associated with social contexts. But, as mentioned, this happens with all self-representations: you highlight aspects of your identity that fit with the social context (McNeill & Randall, 2001; Cooley, 2009; Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Harter, 1999; Boyd, 2007; Freud, 1937; Matano, 2015).

“I present myself on Instagram as someone who is into sports and who works out a lot. I like to get feedback on my progress as an athlete” (Respondent 03).

“I present myself with a lot of selfies and extra make-up, to look good, but also to show how skilful I am with make-up and how it changes my appearance” (Respondent 04).

What the quotes show is that respondents sometimes choose a specific interest they have and highlight it on Instagram in their self-representation. It was Moon, et al. (2016) who described this as self-promotion. But yet again, especially in respondent’s 04 answer, the importance of other is clearly mentioned.

6.2. WHY DO THEY CONDUCT THIS SELF-REPRESENTATION ON INSTAGRAM TO THEIR PEERS?

But why do they value the importance of others so highly that individuals might even go as far as to alter or idealize their self-representation? Some powerful answers have been given:

“Being liked is addictive. Being acknowledged positively drives people to exaggerate. I think young people get addicted to the internet. And with self-representations, people form an opinion of you” (Respondent 13)

“People form opinions about you easily, especially on platforms such as Instagram. You therefore want to come across appropriately” (Respondent 04)

Despite these interesting answers, most respondents felt that the appearances you have on the platform are leading in determining why the adolescents choose to represent themselves in a specific way. In their answers, the theory on the looking-glass self (Cooley, 2009) is crystal clear. It is how peers judge our appearance, and how we appear in general to them that determine why we choose to represent ourselves in a specific way. As the respondents mention: people easily form an opinion about your representation on Instagram. This captures the exact essence of Cooley’s (2009) well discussed work on self-representation.

But then, why would you expose yourself to such a platform if you are so aware of the judgements on self-representation on Instagram? It has everything to do with the aspect of others in the lives of people and specifically with the vulnerability of the phase of adolescence. This phase of life, that some consider to be a phase of an ‘identity crisis’ (Zhao, 2005), is a stage in which we discover who we are and where we belong (Boyd, 2007; Bay, 2015). We are in this phase of life, extra sensitive to peer interactions and their opinions of us. So, on the one hand, choosing not to engage with Instagram is an option to avoid judgements of your self-representation as a sensitive and vulnerable adolescent. On the other hand, when everybody except you is using it, you get judged for that.

“Everybody uses it. You do not want to feel left out. People are quick to jump to conclusions about you and you do not want to be different than others” (Respondent 07).

Thus, engaging with the platform is because of others as much as anything else. Certainly, respondents have mentioned that they also use it for fun, but mostly it is because of others that they use it and represent themselves in a specific way. So, the main reason for respondents to engage with the platform and determine why they represent themselves in a specific way is mostly related to how they appear to their peers and are judged by their peers.

There are however specific motives for determining why one represents oneself on Instagram. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) mentioned four key motives for representing yourself on Instagram. This description is aimed at both the ‘how’ and ‘why’ parts of this study’s main question. Their described motives were also acknowledged in the study of Mc Cune (2011). Mc Cune (2011), however, also described an additional motive for representation on Instagram, namely: therapy – dealing with feelings through social platforms. However, none of the respondents acknowledged therapy as being a reason to represent themselves on Instagram. All of the respondents, feel that therapy, or sharing feelings on Instagram, is not an important motive to use the platform. This could also be because of their age.

“I do not find it important. On Instagram, you have a lot of connections that you hardly know and I do not want to expose myself on the platform” (Respondent 10).

Respondent 10’s answer captures the main idea why respondents do not share their feeling on Instagram and thus, do not represent themselves with their authentic feelings. What is interesting about this is that the adolescents do not care to share all their feelings with their telecopresent peers that they do not know offline, yet place great value on their opinions on self-representations. As mentioned, the respondents feel they need to come across in the best way possible, and sharing

negative feelings might jeopardize their image. It was Respondent 12 who summarized this perfectly in her answer:

You want to be perceived as being cool and fun. What you do not want, is that people get the idea that you are unhappy or sad. So, you do not share sad feelings of yourself, but only positive and happy feelings, like saying you are happy to go on holiday: 1) you are happy about going on holiday and 2) you can show how awesome that holiday is and look cool” (Respondent 12).

The other four motives that Sheldon and Bryant (2016) and Mc Cune (2011) mention have all been acknowledged by my respondents, but with varying importance. First of all, as widely discussed in literature, the importance of others in determining how one represents oneself and why. Specifically, as a motive, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) mention the importance of having knowledge of others, or what Mc Quail (1983), and Whiting and Williams (2013) refer to as: information seeking. It consists of simply knowing what your peers are up to. The respondents have in their answers mentioned that knowledge of others determines how and why they represent themselves and why they engage with the platform.

“Knowledge of others is kind of important. I want to make sure that the people I care about, care about me too. So, I follow them on Instagram and monitor how frequently they engage with me too through likes and comments. If they do not engage with me frequently I can try to figure out why” (Respondent 04).

Having knowledge of others is very specifically aimed towards the self in this study. It is not necessarily about the peers, but also about the selves witnessing the peers. Respondents have acknowledged that it is also ‘fun’ to see others’ activities, but also relate their activities to themselves. As Respondent 04 puts it, it is also a means to determine your own self-representation on Instagram. Whether this is because of the Dutch individualized culture (Mulders, 2016; Felling, 2004; Mellink 2014) or not, cannot be answered in this study. More research on culture specifically is needed. However, it is interesting to notice how respondents are very much directed towards the self and not others – the independent self in Western culture (Zhu, Zhang, Fan & Han, 2006) – and that their perceptions of how others see them are very much through their own imagination of how others judge them (Cooley, 2009; Mead, 1934; Harter, 1999).

The next motive Sheldon and Bryant (2016) mention in determining why users represent themselves on Instagram, is the documentation of life events. They mention in their study that documenting life events through Instagram is for many a key motive for self-representation on the platform. All fourteen respondents acknowledge the documentation of life events as a reason for self-representation on Instagram. All of them also document life events, such as holidays and memorable moments. However, mostly they do not share content for the sole purpose of documenting life events, but rather for the singular purpose of sharing something fun.

Popularity is another motive Sheldon and Bryant (2016) have mentioned for why one chooses to represent oneself in a specific way. Since the respondents have been so clear about self-representations being very much determined by their peers, as Cooley (2009) suggested, it is not surprising that both literature and respondents consider popularity as a motive. All of the respondents see popularity as a reason to engage with the platform, but only five out of fourteen respondents actually aim to be popular.

“Gaining more followers is always a positive thing, but it is not necessarily important to be popular” (Respondent 14)

“I find it important to come across positively and interestingly. And yes, I have to admit that I want others to like me and to gain more and more followers, likes and comments. In that sense, I value being popular on Instagram and I enjoy it when I ‘outperform’ others” (Respondent 08).

“It is not fun when you feel like you are falling behind” (Respondent 12)

Respondent 14 and Respondent 12 both mention the positive effects of being liked and gaining more engagements. They do not necessarily think popularity is important, but not falling behind is. It relates to the idea that you want to fit the standards of a social setting (Moncura, 2016; Cooley, 2009). Respondent 08, however, is interestingly outspoken about being popular. He values being popular a great deal. Even though he and four others in the study consider popularity an important factor for self-representation on Instagram, the majority of the respondents simply acknowledge this motive for self-representation, but do not focus their self-representation on Instagram at trying to be popular.

Finally, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) mention creativity as a motive for respondents as to why they represent themselves on Instagram. Mull and Lee (2014) found that creativity is a motive worth mentioning, as previous media have been used for the sole purpose of aiming to be creative, such as Pinterest. Sheldon and Bryant (2016), however, found that creativity is the least dominant of the four motives they described in self-representation on Instagram. Interestingly, creativity is considered to be a more important motive by respondents, with six of the respondents considering creativity in the content they share on Instagram.

I enjoy posting content that is original and different and I also like it when other people’s material looks nice and different” (Respondent 09).

However, the remaining eight respondents do not consider creativity an important motive for self-representation on Instagram. Two reasons have been given for this: 1) simply not caring if someone is creative or not and 2) not being creative themselves. So, even though creativity is not the most important motive, it is more important than popularity, something depicted differently in the study of Sheldon and Bryant (2016). It is in line with the view of Mull and Lee (2014) that social media platform with a visual essence, stimulate more creativity. But, even though there is a difference between the outcomes of Sheldon and Bryant (2016) and this study, where popularity/coolness was more prominent than creativity, it is only with the slightest margin of difference. The two main motives: ‘knowledge sharing’ and ‘documentation of life events’ are similar in both my study and that of Sheldon and Bryant (2016).

6.3. WHAT CONSEQUENCES DO ADOLESCENTS SEE OF SELF-REPRESENTATION ON INSTAGRAM?

Literature has been very inconclusive regarding the consequences of self-representations on Instagram. One of the reasons for this being that research on Instagram has been very limited up to this point (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2014; Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2013; Jackson & Luchner, 2016; Moon, et al., 2016). Instagram has only been around for approximately 6.5 years and thus, future studies can contribute highly to this subject of study.

Despite literature being inconclusive on clear consequences of self-representation on Instagram, there have been findings in literature of possible consequences of self-representation on the application. Respondents were also divided in their answers and have acknowledged both positive and negative outcomes for representations on Instagram.

What Nesi and Prinstein (2015) found was that engaging with and presenting yourself on Instagram can lead to positive outcomes such as: increases in social support, boosts in self-esteem, increases in self-disclosure and better friendship quality. What Nesi and Prinstein (2015) have found, correlates with the findings of my empirical study.

“I feel more social on the platform and this gives me a better sense of self and increases how I think about myself positively” (Respondent 01).

“Engagements of others on Instagram with me, make me feel good” (Respondent 05).

“People enjoy being liked offline and online. This is the same on Instagram and on this platform, it is really easy to stimulate positive engagements with friends and others. I also feel good about myself when I get a lot of likes and positive comments on Instagram” (Respondent 07).

The positive outcomes of self-representations on Instagram were acknowledged by four of the respondents. They experienced their usage of Instagram positively and mention similar positive outcomes to those of Nesi and Prinstein (2015). In particular, a boost in self-esteem and increase in self-disclosure came to the fore in their answers.

But literature also found negative consequences of self-representations on Instagram. Some of the findings in literature suggest that individuals might experience declines in subjective well-being, romantic jealousy, and the idea that their peers are living more interesting lives than they are (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Specifically mentioned by Eckler, et al. (2017) is that there have been findings that indicate people to get insecure about, for instance, their body-image, when there is the belief that everybody looks better than they do. What is interesting about this though, is that it has been critically discussed how we might portray an ideal or altered self-image on Instagram. Perceivers of these altered representations might get insecure (Eckler, et al., 2017).

But, for the presenter himself, who alters his version of self on Instagram, the consequences might also be negative, as Matano (2015) mentions how one might get addicted to a too altered version of self. It relies on Freud’s (1937) theory that one bases self-representation on fictional and truthful aspects and that too much emphasis on fictional aspects might make the presenter very insecure in other social settings. It is a statement that Moncura, et al. (2016) share in their research that people not only have several selves in different contexts (Cooley, 2009; Mead, 1934; Harter, 1999; Goffman, 1959; Boyd, 2007), but that boosts in self-esteem might be based on an ‘illusion’.

It is interesting to notice that most of the respondents, eight in total, mention negative outcomes of self-representations on Instagram. The belief that others might be living more interesting lives was literally mentioned:

“A consequence might be that people have the ‘illusion’ that others are better than they truly are and believe what they see on Instagram” (Respondent 06).

But, not only this consequence was apparent in the answers of the respondents:

“People act differently on Instagram from who they really are. It sometimes makes me very insecure” (Respondent 14).

“I think people get addicted to Instagram and the internet because of all the positive engagements. But I feel that presenting yourself on these platforms makes you more vulnerable to others’ judgements about you” (Respondent 13).

“Instagram often makes me very insecure. People on Instagram are so different than in real life. They act better than they are” (Respondent 11).

The respondents acknowledge how they see altered version of self, a phenomenon that has been widely discussed in this thesis. What is important to notice, is how the respondents mention how they get insecure of such altered or idealized versions of others on Instagram. It was Danah Boyd (2007) and Lisa Bay (2015) who mentioned specifically that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to how others appear to them and that they look for cues in others’ profiles to determine their own self-representation. They respondents have mentioned the importance of others in determining self-representation, which is in line with Cooley’s (2009) theory, but they also now mention their insecurity towards others as spectators of altered representations of their peers.

Literature also found that in some cases, that there were no clear consequences of Instagram engagements and self-representations. What Davilla, et al. (2012) mentioned was that consequences are different per individual, depending on the quality of their online engagements. That consequences therefore vary, can be due to individuals having different qualities of engagement on Instagram. However, that most respondents notice negative consequences rather than positive ones, is an interesting development.

What was particularly interesting in the literature study, is how self-representations on Instagram have been linked to narcissism. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) mentioned the term social media-driven narcissism, which they define as users on social networking sites engaging frequently with others to boost their own outer self-esteem (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Weiser (2015) mentioned that for Instagram specifically, this self-promotion is related to users frequently posing selfies (pictures of themselves). In these selfies, the users tend to look as good as they can to stimulate positive engagements (Jackson & Luchner, 2016).

Why narcissism is specifically mentioned in this section of the results, is that in the Netherlands, narcissism is considered a bad thing (Derksen, 2009). But also, based on the work of Thomaes and Stegge (2007), narcissism can come in two ways: one way being someone who is generally fond of himself, more related to inner self-esteem (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) and the other being more directed at an individual being insecure and seeking for acknowledgement and appraisal of others, related to outer self-esteem (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). It is the latter that is specifically interesting for a study among adolescents (Boyd, 2007). Since they are on a quest to develop themselves and tend to get more easily insecure about themselves than others, they are more sensitive to developing narcissistic tendencies on, for instance, Instagram.

What is also mentioned in literature, is that narcissistic individuals on Instagram tend to alter their self-image more than others (Jackson & Luchner, 2016). It was Freud (1937) and Matano (2015) who already mentioned the importance of truth and fiction in self-representation and narrative identity being in balance. It is with social media-driven narcissism that this balance often is off or non-existent. Most of the respondents feel they already witness individuals who alter their self-image on Instagram a lot and that these individuals are very different in other social settings, as can be seen in the quotes. In return, these adolescents get insecure about themselves and look at others to determine who they must be, meaning that altered versions of self, especially from social media-driven narcissists, might stimulate narcissistic tendencies among vulnerable adolescents. However, this has yet to be researched thoroughly.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to contribute to research on self-representation on Instagram. Through literature and empirical research, this thesis has done exactly that. Since empirical research was limited to a small population and sample, none of the results can be assumed to be definite. Only for research in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands, can the results be accepted as representative of that specific sample. Other samples would benefit from additional studies among varying samples and populations, since this study cannot be assumed to represent other samples and populations. Also, research on Instagram has been limited as literature has suggested (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2014; Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2013; Jackson & Luchner, 2016) and the small empirical research sample in this study, has only slightly created more depth in this research landscape.

Self-representation theories have been well established throughout the years and old theories have been critically discussed in modern day self-representations. It can be concluded that an old theory like that of the looking-glass self (Cooley, 2009) still holds in the era of Web 2.0 as the literature section in this study has shown. With Instagram being one of the many applications on Web 2.0 this study has linked self-representations on Instagram similarly to Cooley's (2009) theory as others have done for other social settings. However, it must be critically noted that future research should test this view on self-representations on Instagram, since research has been limited.

For this study specifically, fourteen respondents contributed valuable information on the subject of self-representation on Instagram through oral semi-structured interviews. All respondents were at higher educational high school levels at Het Groene Hart Lyceum in Alphen aan den Rijn, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands. There was an equal distribution among gender and in the results, no relevant or significant differences between their answers was found or worth mentioning.

The most important motive for self-representation according to my respondents is engaging with others. Having knowledge of others is important and doing what everybody else is doing on Instagram is equally important. Adolescents, extra sensitive to peer-interactions, value the opinions of others online just as much as the opinions of family, school and neighbourhood. It is in line with literature suggesting that the internet is a fourth domain for adolescents in developing the self. Furthermore, the importance of others in self-representation is completely aligned with Cooley's (2009) theory on the looking-glass self. How the adolescents represent themselves depends on their peers and how they feel they will get the most positive acknowledgements or appraisals of peers.

A very interesting finding in this study was what consequences of self-representations and engagements on Instagram the respondents themselves see. More than half of the respondents acknowledge primarily negative consequences, such as: feeling insecure, witnessing others presenting themselves better than they are, addiction and dependency. These consequences can also be found in literature. However, this negative thread in the answers of the respondents is interesting. Most literature has been more divided on the subject so far, acknowledging both positive and negative consequences. But, there have been studies that have found primarily negative consequences and this study has found something similar.

Social media-driven narcissism has been thoroughly discussed in literature and has been found as a clear consequence of social behaviour on social media and Instagram. My respondents have pointed out specifically how they witness social media-driven narcissists and that they consider this to be a very negative consequence. In addition to this, not only do they themselves get insecure, narcissists themselves seem to be addicted to being liked and being approved by others. If anything, they are

fuelled to constantly become 'better' than they are on Instagram, and possibly will experience a major gap between their Instagram persona and their offline persona. This gap might stimulate them to become continuously more insecure.

So, even though literature has been inconclusive on consequences of Instagram behaviours among adolescents due to a lack of research, social media-driven narcissism has been acknowledged, and seemingly, this concept is very relevant for studies on Instagram. Since my respondents were so outspoken on this phenomenon, I want to emphasize the importance of additional research into this matter. It cannot be concluded that most self-representations on Instagram do indeed stimulate negative consequences, as literature has been divided and limited. But, it is very obvious in this study that my respondents feel the importance of social media-driven narcissism on Instagram and they find it potentially harmful. Therefore, since this sample and this study cannot speak for bigger populations, it is essential that more research is done on this topic specifically.

In conclusion, Instagram has become a very important application on Web 2.0 for self-representation. Adolescents are in a phase of their life where they discover who they are and where they belong. The interactive web has become a new domain that influences adolescents' development. Adolescents are sensitive to peer-interactions and look at others in their search for who they want to become and where they want to belong. Instagram is a platform that offers these sensitive individuals many profiles of others from which they can get cues as to how to form their own self (identity).

But, if consequences are indeed negative, and adolescents base their self-representation on idealized peers they want to match or beat, this could become a problem. These social media-driven narcissists should by no means be the people adolescents look up to as they themselves could become more insecure and form too altered selves on the platform. The insecurity they might experience will not disappear once they match their narcissist peers, but rather, the self-made standard that they have will only make them more insecure. It is an interesting finding and direction in this research field, and hopefully future research will be able to provide more conclusive information that is representable on a larger scale.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Main topic: representation of adolescents on Instagram in the Netherlands

Introduction

This interview will be conducted for the thesis of Eoin Hennekam on self-representations of adolescents in the Netherlands on Instagram. The thesis will be written for the master programme 'Media and Communication Studies' at Malmö University, Sweden. The wish is that the interviewee answers all questions truthfully and elaborately. For the privacy of the interviewee, his/her name will not be used if he/she wishes to remain anonymous.

Definitions

Self-representation on Instagram: how you show and present yourself on Instagram

Preliminary information respondent

Name: (may remain anonymous)

Gender:

Age:

Instagram account:

Topic guide

Topic 1: Self-representation and the social context

- How do you feel Instagram expects you to represent yourself?

Topic 2: Why we engage with Instagram

- Why do you use Instagram?
- How important is having knowledge of others for you to use Instagram?
- How important is it to document your life via Instagram?
- How important is 'coolness' for you in using Instagram?
- How important is being creative on Instagram for you?
- How important is it for you to share your feelings on Instagram?

Topic 3: Determinations of how we represent ourselves on Instagram

- How do represent yourself on Instagram?
- How does the social context, or how do others, determine how you represent yourself on Instagram?
- How different are you on Instagram?
- Why do you present yourself this way on Instagram?

Topic 4: The consequences of self-representations on Instagram

- What do you feel are consequences of how others represent themselves on Instagram?
- What do you feel are consequences for you in presenting yourself on Instagram?
- How do others make you feel on Instagram?
- How do you see others on Instagram?
- How much narcissistic tendencies do you notice on Instagram from others and yourself?

APPENDIX II: DUTCH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hoofdonderwerp: zelfrepresentatie van adolescenten op Instagram in Nederland

Introductie

Dit interview wordt afgenomen voor de scriptie van Eoin Hennekam. Het onderwerp betreft 'zelfrepresentatie van adolescenten op Instagram in Nederland. Deze scriptie betreft de masterscriptie van de studie 'Media and Communication Studies' aan de universiteit van Malmö, in Zweden. De wens is dat elke deelnemer alle vragen eerlijk en uitgebreid beantwoord. Om de privacy van de deelnemer te waarborgen, mag hij of zij ervoor kiezen of anoniem te blijven.

Begrippenlijst

Zelfrepresentatie op Instagram: hoe je jezelf voordoet op Instagram

Algemene informatie respondent

Naam: (mag anoniem blijven)

Geslacht:

Leeftijd:

Instagram account:

Onderwerpen

Onderwerp 1: Zelfrepresentatie en de sociale context

- Hoe verwacht Instagram dat jij jezelf presenteert?

Onderwerp 2: Waarom we Instagram gebruiken

- Waarom gebruik jij Instagram?
- Hoe belangrijk is het voor jou om te weten wat anderen doen?
- Hoe belangrijk is het documenteren van jouw leven voor jou?
- Hoe belangrijk is het voor jou om cool of populair te zijn?
- Hoe belangrijk is creatief zijn op Instagram voor jou?
- Hoe belangrijk is het voor jou om je gevoelens via Instagram te delen?

Onderwerp 3: De bepalende factoren voor hoe we onszelf op Instagram presenteren

- Hoe presenteert jij jezelf op Instagram?
- Hoe bepalen de sociale context en andere mensen hoe jij je voordoet op Instagram?
- Hoe anders ben jij op Instagram?
- Waarom presenteert je jezelf zoals je doet op Instagram?

Onderwerp 4: De gevolgen van zelfrepresentatie op Instagram

- Wat zie jij als de gevolgen van hoe anderen zich presenteren op Instagram?
- Wat zie jij als de gevolgen voor jou ten aanzien van hoe jij je presenteert op Instagram?
- Hoe voel jij je door anderen op Instagram?
- Hoe zie jij anderen op Instagram?
- Hoe narcistisch zijn anderen op Instagram en hoe erg ben jij het?