



Full length article

Understanding social media and identity work in young people transitioning to university



Lisa Thomas ^{a,*}, Pam Briggs ^a, Andrew Hart ^b, Finola Kerrigan ^b

^a PaCT Lab, Psychology Department, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK

^b Department of Marketing, Birmingham Business School, University House, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 March 2017

Received in revised form

13 August 2017

Accepted 14 August 2017

Available online 14 August 2017

Keywords:

Social media

Transition

University

Identity

Students

ABSTRACT

Social media (SM) are a core component of young people's lives and have been researched in relation to relationship building and maintenance. While SM are known to be useful in supporting life transitions for young people, we know little about the specific use patterns or activities associated with social adjustment during the specific transition to university. We explore the use of social media during the student transition to university in relation to theories of social comparison and community building and describe a three stage process which accounts for this transition. Participants move through the stages of affirmation, assimilation and integration similar to other life transitions, but in doing so, we reveal the importance of the intersection between offline and online activities and highlight the benefits and limitations of SM use in this transitional period.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Adolescents rely upon social media (SM) as a core component of their social lives (Boyd, 2014; Yang & Brown, 2013) and will typically use SM to build new peer affiliations, manage existing relationships and stay informed about social activities within their network (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). It is not surprising, then, that young people can find SM especially useful when moving from home to a new university environment. These 'emerging adults' experience marked change at this time, and use online services to bridge these kinds of life transitions (Orzech, Moncur, Durrant, & Trujillo-Pisanty, 2016). University students have demonstrated that they use SM when searching for new relationships or maintaining existing friendships (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011; Lampe et al., 2006; Pempek et al., 2009) and SM resources are particularly important for first year students seeking to build new relationships and establish a sense of community at college (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012). Yet, little is known about how specific use patterns or activities are associated with social adjustment to university; how students use SM and digital communication to

establish new communities, as well as maintain existing ones; how students balance their online and offline identities during this process; and finally the possible drawbacks of SM use during these transitional periods. This study addresses these questions.

This empirical paper reports on a study of first year undergraduate students in the UK in relation to their use of SM when transitioning from home to university in order to understand the role played by SM in their transition. We contribute to this discussion by identifying similarities between our work and the theoretical stages identified in previous work exploring when people cross borders or cultures, as in the example of expatriates living abroad (Mao & Shen, 2015), and literature on people coping with acculturation. The paper is structured as follows: we describe related work in terms of SM use in young adults, with a particular emphasis on the literature on social comparison and identity-management within SM, and a review of research surrounding the role of SM in community building and the much smaller literature on SM use when making the transition to university. We then outline and justify our own study, which uses novel methodology to capture and interpret SM use during times of transition.

2. Related work

There has been a rapidly growing body of research which seeks to understand young people's use of SM technologies and their

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: lisa.thomas@northumbria.ac.uk (L. Thomas), p.briggs@northumbria.ac.uk (P. Briggs), f.kerrigan@bham.ac.uk (F. Kerrigan).

participation in online communities (Boyd, 2007; Schoenebeck, Ellison, Blackwell, Bayer, & Falk, 2016). Many of these studies have focused on patterns of Facebook use in large part because it is the most widely used of the social networks in a Western context, but we should note at the outset, that SM use evolves quickly across different platforms and that, while Facebook remains popular, other sites such as Instagram, WhatsApp and Pinterest are seeing an increase in their user base (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

Young people typically use SM to maintain and regain social connections and for 'identity work' that includes the sharing and tagging of photographs, the creation of 'status updates' and associated forms of social approbation such as 'liking' posts (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Pempek et al., 2009; Sosik & Bazarova, 2014; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Such exchanges can help to bind a community together, but can also induce various forms of social anxiety. This is particularly true for young people who seek social approval to reinforce their own sense of self, and who can sometimes be negatively affected by the social comparison processes that accompany SM exchange (Feinstein et al., 2013). These two elements: social comparison and community building are explored further, below.

2.1. Social comparison

The social comparison processes invited by SM are well recognised. For example, selfies are common currency on many SM sites, but selfie posting is also associated with certain social pressures such as the need to post positive 'fun' selfies and to try to gain sufficient 'likes' or risk damaging self-esteem (Pounders, Kowalczyk, & Stowers, 2016). Such comparison processes are far more likely to take place when the other members of a SM community are similar to the self, whether by age, sex, or other dimensions of identity (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006; 2010). Young people spend many hours viewing the posts of similar others (Pempek et al., 2009) and inevitably are drawn into the process of social comparison (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). This process, first described by Festinger (1954), involves two possible acts: people can either compare themselves unfavourably to others – making an *upward comparison* (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997) said to form part of the drive to self-improvement (Collins, 1996), or they can compare themselves favourably to others, making *downward comparisons* that can be used to restore threatened self-esteem (Wills, 1981) and create positive affect (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989). These upward and downward comparisons are part of self-presentation (Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Houghton, 2016). They affect the creation of a desired self (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and inform personal choices about how to 'look good' (Wang, Hinsberger, & Kraut, 2016).

Goffman (1959) has influenced our understanding of the ways that people might use self-presentation to claim membership of a group or community. Goffman argues that, during periods of transition, the 'performers' withdraw until they have established new social norms and rules of interaction. In SM terms, this withdrawal can take the form of self-censoring or editing elements of the digital persona in order to avoid projecting an undesired image to a new online audience (Lang & Barton, 2015; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). When this fails, or when SM users are tasked to 'perform' to multiple and diverse audiences simultaneously, then we talk about this in terms of 'context collapse' (Marwick & Boyd, 2010).

While self-presentation in the presence of multiple audiences can have positive effects (Leonardi, 2014), context collapse can have negative implications since users find it difficult to meet the expectations of multiple audiences simultaneously (Xie & Kang, 2015). For example, Lang and Barton (2015) report that 84% of

users have experienced being tagged in undesirable photos and subsequently taken defensive action. According to Marwick and Boyd (2010: 122), this creates "a lowest-common denominator effect, as individuals only post things they believe their broadest group of acquaintances will find non-offensive." Furthermore, recent research has found that users self-censor and edit their offline behaviour in fear that content will be communicated online causing self-presentational predicaments (Marder et al., 2016). Kerrigan and Hart (2016) illustrated the importance of a temporal approach to understanding performance on SM, as older online selves may be seen as incompatible with new lifestyle or career developments, and users have not yet developed practices for dealing with past selves.

2.2. Community building

Ackerman et al. (2004) discussed the ways that an effective ICT infrastructure can be used to bridge relationships within communities, providing the kind of 'social capital' platform that "enables joint activities and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Ackerman et al., 2004). SM systems can support the development of social capital and community cohesion (Malinen, 2015) while online social networking can also promote psychological well-being (Ellison et al., 2007; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001).

When we explore the creation of new communities, or focus upon communities in transition, then we can see that SM also has a role in both creating and enhancing community relationships. Across a wide range of contexts, including disenfranchised youth in rural Sweden (Svensson, 2015) or new mothers in Canada (Valtchanov, Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2014), SM has been shown to both mobilise and unite individuals. For new students wishing to make an adjustment to university, SM offers a way to support the transition from adolescence to adulthood and presents individuals with the opportunity to tentatively build new relationships 'at a safe distance' (Ferguson et al., 2016). Many students relocate when starting university, and so become physically removed from their close friends and family. They are then faced with the task of maintaining existing connections whilst being surrounded by thousands of unknown contacts (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007) from whom they need to forge new intimate bonds. Thus, both relationship maintenance and establishment have been found to be crucial to successful adjustment during the transition to university (Buote et al., 2007; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008) and, to a certain extent, SM can support both (Ferguson et al., 2016), although it has been argued that Facebook is more effective in the maintenance as opposed to the creation of new student relationships (Lampe et al., 2006). Ellison et al. (2007) argued that students use Facebook primarily for keeping in touch with high school acquaintances and classmates, although in a later survey of undergraduates, Ellison et al. (2011) identified three SM strategies: 1) initiating strategies, which allow for building connections with strangers that have never been met offline; 2) maintaining strategies, used to maintain existing relationships with close friends/ties; and 3) social information seeking, to find out information with newly connected acquaintances. In Ferguson et al.'s (2016) small-scale study, the use of Facebook to support social cohesion and academic communication in a small group of student nurses was clear, but the challenges of SM use in relation to building and supporting a new professional identity were also outlined.

2.3. SM and the transition to university

These two processes of social comparison and community building are important when we consider how young people make the transition to university, although we find more limited and

somewhat contradictory research in this context.

Yang and Brown (2013) examined associations between Facebook activity and social adjustment to college and found peer interaction to be positively associated with adjustment. Yet, those who were motivated to use Facebook to pursue new relationships reported greater levels of loneliness and those who intended to maintain existing friendships reported less loneliness. Consequently, participants more often planned to use SM sites to stay in touch with existing friends, as opposed to making new connections. To a certain extent this 'staying in touch' via SM then became a key factor in determining which of the old and new relationships survived. In their more recent work, Yang and Brown (2016) assessed SM use during the transition to college, and found that deeper, positive, more authentic self-presentation on Facebook was positively associated with perceived support from the audience, thus raising self-esteem for those students. This same point was demonstrated by Sosik and Bazarova (2014: 130) who measured SM use in a sample of 256 students enrolled in a large northeast US university, using an app that collected Facebook communication between close friends in order to explore 'relationship escalation'. They noted the importance of a maintained presence on SM arguing that: "frequent and recent communication through multiple Facebook channels can help partners convey a feeling of closeness ... while communication absence from each other's life corresponds to alienation and relational de-escalation".

We know less about the development of new relationships at university, although many university programs explicitly seek to promote SM networks for new students arriving on campus (Swenson et al., 2008; Ye, 2006). This is understandable, as new peer relationships and interactions have been shown to influence students' adaptation to and retention in universities (Tinto, 1975; Yang & Brown, 2013). For example, overseas students were able to use SM to build new relationships with those from their host country, rather than focusing on maintaining relationships from home (Fraiberg & Cui, 2016; Saw, Abbott, Donaghey, & McDonald, 2013). DeAndrea et al. (2012) designed a student-centred SM site to give students advanced information about other students and staff. It was found that increased use of the website correlated with increased perceptions of a diverse social support network, with increased website activity also predicting successful integration in college life. The activities engaged in prior to the start of term included signposting to fresher's events and how to get the most out of welcome activities. This kind of niche design of SM platforms is helpful to facilitate new interactions at university, but says little about how students manage to maintain the balance between their community building and social comparison activities, nor does it tell us anything about the balance between online and offline communities.

2.4. Research gap

A limited body of work has demonstrated that SM resources can be beneficial when building new relationships at university. However, it also suggests that student concerns about the way they self-present online can cause anxiety. We sought to explore this tension, developing a research design which allows for a more holistic consideration of SM usage, moving beyond a simple consideration of Facebook as the dominant SM platform and taking into account social activities before, during and after the transition to university. The limited research that focuses on students forming new connections (e.g. Ellison et al., 2011; Ferguson et al., 2016) fails to fully explore how they balance their new vs old, online vs offline communities to best effect. We need to develop greater theoretical insight into how students edit and adapt their online and offline identity during these transitional periods. Despite the frequent

social comparison and self-management behaviour of younger users, no work directly examines these behaviours in relation to adjusting to university. Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theories are relevant here, specifically the 'adjusted' self in times of transition, in which performers restrain their behaviour until they have established the new rules of interaction. Finally, many studies focus on the positives of SM in terms of increased social connectivity when establishing new communities but fail to fully explore the possible drawbacks of SM, such as over-disclosure to untrusted individuals (Lee, Park, & Kim, 2013; Sleeper et al., 2016).

Our study focuses on the use of SM and digital data in a sample of first year undergraduate students during their first six weeks at the start of university. We use a novel methodology that asks the students to gather their own SM and other digital communications interactions week by week, using the platform 'Pinterest'¹ to collect items of interest, effectively creating a pin-board of SM activity for each week. This was used as a kind of 'cultural probe' (Gaver, Dunne, & Pacenti, 1999) to elicit rich discussion at interview. In this way, we hoped to assess the role of SM during the early few weeks as an undergraduate and better understand the role played by SM in transitioning from home to university and understand that in relation to more personal forms of communications used. The following research questions were developed to inform this study: How do young people use social media in times of transition to university? How do young people balance the demands of their online and offline communities? How do young people manage the 'context collapse' when their old and new SM communities collide?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

We recruited 25 university students (aged 18 or over) from two UK institutions. In order to understand the transition to university, respondents needed to be first year undergraduates commencing university in September 2015 and who regularly used a broad range of SM platforms. Six male and nineteen female participants, aged 18–22, took part. We recruited 13 British participants, with the remaining 12 originating from Tanzania, Germany, Romania, Italy, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Philippines, India and Singapore.

3.2. Procedure

Participants were recruited through campus networks, advertisements, SM postings and in class announcements. Once they had agreed to participate, the students were invited to a project briefing where the data collection process was explained in more detail and participants were introduced to the first phase of data collection. This required them to set up a Pinterest board where they would post a range of broadly specified data documenting their use of SM (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and digital data (e-mail, text messages, instant messaging etc.) over a 6-week period. Board 1 covered the week before leaving for university, board 2 covered the first introductory week of university ('fresher's week'), board 3 covered the first week of lectures, board 4 the second week of lectures, board 5 the third week of lectures, and finally board 6 the fourth week of lectures. These boards were shared with the researchers and analysis of the boards informed the design of the interview guide used for the second stage of data collection.

In the following stage, we conducted in-depth semi-structured

¹ www.pinterest.com.

interviews with individual participants after a two-week phase of self-directed collation of their data, utilising the concept of a digital scrapbook. Participants only had access to their own scrapbook which consisted of their own data and that shared with them by their friends and families. We wanted to understand what sorts of interactions the students had during this time period, and they were encouraged to 'pin' content that was solely their own, as well as interactions with other people or groups. An average of at least 20 pins (i.e. postings) on each weekly board was requested. These data were created by the participants in the period prior to coming to university and immediately on arrival, but added to the Pinterest boards retrospectively for the purpose of this study. An example board can be seen in Fig. 1. After data collection was completed, the boards were digitally shared with the researchers (by the participant granting access via the Pinterest platform). The subsequent interviews helped us understand the participants' early experiences of starting university, and set the context for their use of media during this time, using the boards as a cultural probe around which to focus the interviews. This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of [anon] University Ethics Committee, with informed consent from all participants. Electronic permission to access Pinterest boards was revoked once interviews had taken place, but participants gave permission to use anonymised screenshots of the resulting boards, as below. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect participant's identities.

3.3. Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and a thematic analysis was conducted. As a significant amount of data were in the form of "free-flowing text", they were analysed by finding meaning in large segments of the texts rather than in isolated words, hence coding the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Each data corpus was coded by all four members of the four-person research team, working in pairs and then coming together to reach agreement regarding the codes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages of coding, it was first important to familiarise with the data, which meant reading and re-reading the transcripts. This generated initial descriptive codes through constant comparisons between the data,

and allowed us to search for key themes whereby patterns and repetition emerged in the data. We then reviewed each emergent theme against the overall data set, before developing higher order codes; our final themes. Once the final themes were agreed, the findings were prepared for write-up. The focus of this analysis was on how the students utilised SM during the first six weeks of university, in particular the role of SM to enhance community building and social comparison processes. Analysis led to the development of our key findings explained below and our analysis resulted in the identification of the following practices; affirmation, assimilation, integration and social media use and barriers to integration as discussed below.

4. Findings

Our analysis revealed a number of important ways in which students used SM during the transition to university, but more significantly, showed us how online and offline activities intersected as part of this transition. We present our key findings within four sections. Firstly, we discuss how students use SM to support a process of *affirmation* - reflecting and celebrating the community ties in existence *prior* to starting university. Secondly, we show how they use SM to engage in the process of *assimilation* to the new community, i.e. establishing a new university identity and making new online and offline friendships during the transition from home to university. Thirdly, we consider the act of *integration* - exploring the kinds of 'juggling' that goes on to maintain identity ties with both home and university communities. Finally, our interview data revealed some of the ways in which SM acted as a *barrier to integration*, and we highlight the limitations of social media use in this context. We describe our findings under these subheadings to provide structure, yet we acknowledge the recursive nature of the practises we describe, and the overlap of themes in places. In instances where there is overlap, we have selected the stage we felt was best fit for the example.

4.1. Affirmation- strengthening the 'home' identity

We found that in the early stages of transitioning to university,

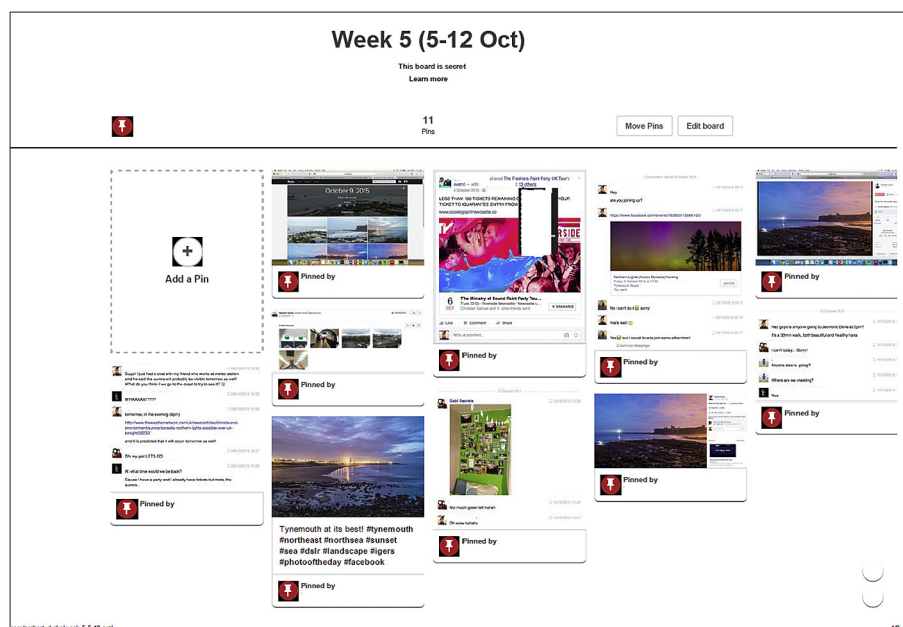


Fig. 1. Anonymised example of a Pinterest board as used in our study.

SM played a large role in affirming the 'home' identity for our participants. SM posts in the early weeks had a strong focus on the process of saying goodbye to friends and family, but there was a celebratory or appreciative tone to this, evidenced by family meals, nights out with friends from home and so on, but also these posts played an important role in reassuring those left behind:

My boyfriend was worried that me going to university was going to alienate him so I was trying to put nice stuff about him on social media. So he'd bought the Chinese take-away that we were having that night and that's a fortune cookie from the Chinese take-away. (Samantha)

While the posts did reveal a sense of excitement about going to university, the need to represent the importance of relationships being left behind was apparent:

Me and my best friend from home used to play the piano for a very long time when we were younger, and I came across an old video of us both playing at a competition, and I just decided to post it on Instagram. I was feeling quite sad that week about leaving home as I knew my life would change, new friends, new environment, new language, everything. So I guess I was feeling quite nostalgic and wanted to post something that would remind me of happier times and something that symbolises my friendship with my best friend from home. (Michelle)

It was important to our participants that they were still connected to home through being kept informed and connected to family life:

That's my dad sending me pictures of my dog. He's just showing me that he took him to the pub, and he's all muddy. I love being filled in on stuff about my dog. (Abigail)

We see from the extract above, that as well as generating content themselves, communication was not unidirectional, as participants would often get prompts of home in the weeks after moving to university. This was especially true for international students who would get reminders of the cultural differences back home, such as the native food and weather:

There are lots of pictures of [Italian] food and coffee from back home, they just seem to be everywhere. And I seemed to be complaining about the weather again as its 3 degrees here, which in my world is freezing cold ... It's such a cultural change, it's only natural to miss home. (Luis)

These practices were documented as a way to remind the participant, as well as their families, of their ties to home. It can be seen as a means of strengthening home ties and affirming connectedness with a former life and place. It resonates with [Lingel, Naaman, and Boyd's \(2014\)](#) work on migrants to New York city both in the sense of affirming ties to friends and family, but also in the sense of celebrating an identity that is tied to place. For the majority of our participants, the first Pinterest board reflected ties to home, to people that were going to be missed, and the leaving parties or meals that were planned. Homesickness was common for our participants, but for some, the distance to travel home was much greater, and therefore the leaving rituals were more notable:

This is my best friend. We spent my last day in Romania and we spent it together. Because it was like the last week spending with my family and my friends. So it was kind of important, because I haven't been home for five months or so. (Lauryn)

For international students, the distance from home made the use of SM and digital technology even more important as a means of keeping in touch:

I was using Skype literally every evening so I was a bit homesick. I'm used to a completely different life where mom could cook something for me to eat. That transition was really hard. Thanks to social media, communicating with my father on Facebook or using Skype to video chat, all these were extremely useful. And I think for every international student, these inventions are probably number one. (Nathan)

Participants said they would make attempts to retain a tradition from home to comfort them whilst in their new environment. This served as a comfort for them but also reassured their families that they were settling in, and that family ritual was still important:

My mum she always used to cook me a lot of Indian food before I came to uni, but then on a Tuesday she would also make pasta. So now since I've started uni, I always make Indian pasta every Tuesday and Thursday as it provides me with some home comfort and some kind of routine I had when I was at home. I would also Snapchat a picture of the food and send it to my mum. (Kaden)

Others have written about the importance of family rituals as a means of celebrating the connectivity and shared values of family life (e.g. [Bell, 2009](#)) and, more recently, the role that SM can come to play in shared affirmation of these family rituals ([Petrelli & Light, 2014](#)). What we see here is the role of the ritual in preparing the way for transition, acknowledging, documenting and sharing thoughts and images about what will be missed. This is part of the process of 'bridging the gap', between home and the first few days at university. Students also took selfies with family, personalised their accommodation with artifacts as reminders of home and posted the pictures online as part of the process of affirmation, and joined societies or clubs that were part of previous home life to help them settle:

I'm the type of person who has to feel at home. You want it to feel safe and homely. So I remember putting up my photo wall in my room next to my bed, so that it felt like everyone was closer to me even though they are all the way back in Germany. (Anna)

Here, in the printing and pinning of photographs, drawn from SM, we can also see the need to make these memories into more tangible artifacts i.e. to become a touchpoint to home that exists in the physical, offline world. This physicality can be important – something noted by those writing about the value of 'slow technology', who have observed that virtual forms seem to be less valuable than physical forms ([Gerritsen et al., 2016](#)). So, while we recognise the importance of using SM in its digital form as means to reconnect with an earlier life ([Zhao et al., 2013](#)) what we see here is the importance of offering people from the old home some kind of physical space in the new one.

4.2. Adjustment & assimilation

All of our students were involved in making a major life transition and most were setting up home for the first time, some in a new country. The two universities involved in our study gave all students the opportunity to use SM to help establish new peer networks prior to their arrival on campus in order to better manage the transition to university (a process supported by the findings of

Swenson et al., 2008; Ye, 2006; DeAndrea et al., 2012). In this section, then, we report on the uptake of this opportunity, describing the ways that students took advantage of SM, but also the ways in which they were cautious about disclosure, particularly during the first two or three weeks, highlighting some of the ways that they chose to 'edit' themselves or announce their new identities. This meant that students were engaged in a considerable amount of identity work in the weeks before they felt comfortable with their new 'friends'.

In our sample, we found good uptake of the SM opportunities created by universities to aid students in finding their flatmates – with a typical example being the creation of Facebook groups organised around accommodation sharing. Our respondents were thus able to connect with prospective housemates in advance and used this to get to know each other:

My accommodation at [location] had its own Facebook page, and people were posting their flat numbers when they got their flat numbers. That's how I managed to find my housemates, and then we started a Messenger group after that. (Rachel)

This Facebook group also allowed future housemates to find those who had been offered accommodation in nearby flats, thereby building up a wider virtual community around the physical location of their new homes:

We would all post our flat details so we would get to meet other flatmates or people staying near you, so yea that was really good because you get to know people a little beforehand. (Vanessa)

This allowed the students to engage in some practical pre-arrival activities to make the transition easier:

We talked about what I was bringing and what she was bringing, so we could help each other out and share certain stuff. And in general it made it a lot less awkward before actually meeting face-to-face. (Brittany)

Importantly, the pre-arrival contact helped new students to reduce some of the uncertainties about their forthcoming experience and helped them gain a sense that they would meet compatible people with similar interests:

The girl I met was quite similar to me, so when we got speaking it felt like we'd known each other for a long time. So for me it was good to know that I felt like I had already known someone before I had even moved to uni ... I didn't expect to be best friends, but we just hit it off straight away and we're moving in together next year. So Facebook really helped our relationship grow. (Vanessa)

We should note, however, that SM exchanges prior to actually meeting face-to-face were often problematic. We know that people will pre-judge new acquaintances on the basis of their online profiles, a process that can result in false or inaccurate misconceptions (Tuch, Presslauer, Stöcklin, Opwis, & Bargas-Avila, 2012), and this was apparent in our findings:

I was really keen to know who I was living with, but then I think you can prejudge people a bit too much from it. So with [friends name], I saw that she was from a private school down south, she's well-travelled, so I was a bit nervous that we won't have much in common. But actually we just clicked and we get on really well. (Maria)

We found plenty of evidence that the students were using SM to make very early social comparisons. In keeping with the findings of Pempek et al. (2009) and Subrahmanyam et al. (2008), we heard narratives from participants about their investigations of other students before joining university and continuing during the next five weeks at university. As Trottier (2012) points out, on SM we have the opportunity to be a subject, as well as an agent of surveillance.

Most of our students recognised that the SM personas they encountered prior to coming to university might be misleading. Indeed, our participants had sometimes 'edited' their own posts and acknowledged that others might do the same, recognizing that self-presentation is important (Chua & Chang, 2016; Marder et al., 2016) and that people generally like to make themselves look good (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Wang et al., 2016). Participant's 'cleaned' their SM profiles in various ways:

Social media gives you the ability to edit everything you post and make everything seem amazing. I remember I spent a day when I just came to university where I deleted all the photos that I'm not pretty in. I'm pretty conscious about what I post on social media, because I do care how I come across, especially new people at uni. (Nicole)

I think I manage my social media quite well anyway, but I did clear every ugly photo of myself before I came to university ... You just never know how judgmental people can be and you can soon feel exposed and vulnerable if you let people see every photo of you or all those childhood photos of you. They might make a judgment of you before they even get a chance to meet you. (Patience)

It was clear that SM meant that the process of 'meeting for the first time' involved preparation over days or weeks rather than over a matter of hours as is typical with a face-to-face meeting. This then led to further tensions as students had to live up to the promises they had made online:

I've definitely become more vain as I have come to university, so I make sure every post of myself shows the best side of myself ... Because that's how they [new university friends] get to know you. (Patience)

I was a bit worried about who was in the flat, and things like that, because you've never seen them before, and all you can see is what they look like on Facebook, and obviously that's a really one-sided view to take of someone. (Alexis)

Facebook was seen as a SM platform where self management was imperative, particularly in this adjustment stage. Consequently, some of our participants were very cautious in the use of SM during these early transitional weeks as they preferred to wait and see what the offline, face-to-face interaction would bring:

It took me time to establish my university friends ... I don't think social media is the best platform to form new friendships. I think that takes time and you need face-to-face interaction. If you rely solely on social media, then I think it becomes false way to form a new friendship. I much preferred doing that in person and going to the pub to watch the rugby or meeting up after games and things like that. (Henry)

Many of our participants expressed reservations regarding their

use of SM, recognizing that others, like themselves, may be setting out a poor foundation for a friendship by highlighting only the most attractive elements of themselves. The majority of the participants showed signs of what Goffman (1959) referred to as the 'adjusted self' during times of transition by holding back their typical online behaviour until the new rules of interaction have been established. Inevitably, this meant that in their early interactions, the students were sometimes uncomfortable in their new selves – believing that in their offline behaviours, they were being forced to live up to the promise of their online personas:

I don't really post loads of stuff, but when I do I want people to know that I have a social life, and I don't stay in my room all the time, even though I do ... We want to paint this perfect picture of our life online, because it's not so perfect in the real world. So we feel the need to show-off online to cover up the not so perfect life away from social media. (Yolanda)

But also they felt the need to modify their online behaviours so as not to be misunderstood:

It's a bit difficult to talk to new people who you don't really know on social media. I think you have to try harder because stuff can come across in the wrong way. My best friend from back home on Facebook would know the way I mean stuff because we have been friends for 7 years. But with somebody I didn't know, you have to be really careful how you say stuff. (Maria)

This was important to our student participants. Their SM activities at this time were very typical of what one would expect in the early stages of relationship building, where some self-disclosure plays an important part. As Altman and Taylor (1973) have noted, at the start of a relationship, people are more cautious and typically only talk about one or two areas of their life – sticking to fairly superficial conversations until the relationship develops. Of course, in these early stages, the opportunities for misunderstanding or misinterpretation are manifold and this impacts on SM usage:

I felt like in the first couple of weeks you had to sort of justify yourself to people more, and put on more of an act for people. And so because of that you are always conscious whether these people actually like you, or whether they're just hanging around with you because you're in the same friendship group. (Brooke)

The students were clearly conscious of the lack of any real intimacy between friends and recognised the need to be careful in their posting. Lee et al. (2013) have written about the perceived risks of sharing information on SM in a life transitional context, and we see the same effects in our study, particularly when sharing new personal content on SM at the start of the university year (see also Sleeper et al., 2016):

Back at my old school, I wasn't really conscious about what I put on social media, because everyone knows me for what I am. But since coming to uni I feel I am very conscious about what I now put on social media because of all these new people following me. (Kaden)

There was a clear evidence that participants were biding their time before they felt comfortable sharing personal SM content online – a finding entirely in keeping with the literature on friendship formation and the social penetration model (e.g. Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007; Utz, 2015), which suggests some hesitation about making important disclosures in

the early stages of friendship. In the later weeks, we began to see new patterns of disclosure, as the students began to share more about themselves.

I was just so much more relaxed [in the later weeks] and enjoying my time at uni. And this was also the first week where I uploaded uni photos on Facebook, which was quite a big thing for me, and the fact that it took me until week 5 to upload anything, I think just shows how difficult my journey has been so far and how long it has taken me to settle. [So] it definitely shifts to more university related stuff as you work through the boards. So at the start I put up a Instagram of all my friends from back home, but now or in the later weeks, it would be an Instagram of my new flat or my new university friends. (Maria)

The kinds of identity work undertaken by our participants changed over time and some forms of open self-disclosure were slower to emerge. This was clearly the case for a student who suffered from anxiety and depression:

I wasn't that bothered about my flatmates knowing that I had depression, but I didn't want them to feel that I was a burden. I didn't want them to be like, "Are you okay?" and making me food and stuff. So I was putting it on [Tumblr and my blog] instead so that they thought that I was okay. [But more recently] there is a lot more stuff on Facebook about depression and anxiety. Like I feel a lot more comfortable posting about it on there now. (Samantha)

Samantha's use of different forms of SM for different purposes illustrates the transitional period. Before forming strong offline relationships, she restricted her posts about her struggles to a less visible platform, but once she had assimilated more into her new environment, she was more comfortable using Facebook to do this. Throughout the study, Facebook was seen as a performance zone. Thus, it was important to announce one's new student identity on SM. The delay in many of our respondents fully expressing their new life through SM platforms was due to this process of assimilation where they were managing their transition from their old to new lives. Facebook seemed to be used less as a tool to aid transition, but more of a signal of assimilation, while some other SM platforms were used as aids to support students through a more difficult transition (such as Twitter, Tumblr, or WhatsApp).

Other identity changes were more commonplace. For example, many of the students recognised that the transition to university was, in part, about creating a new 'student identity'. For many, this was an important status change that should be reflected in their SM profile:

If you list something on your Facebook page, like your relationship status then it definitely feels more official, and it's the same when you list your educational status. So saying I am a studying at the University of [anon] felt more real because you are like telling the whole world 'I'm officially a student now'. (Yolanda)

However, participants had different views on what it meant to be a student and also these perceptions were subject to change during these early weeks. For some, being a student required a strong responsibility to focus on their academic studies:

Having that first assignment, making you going to the library and search for articles and see how it was the student life and everything. I think the third week was the week that I started to feel like a student. (Lauryn)

The first time I entered a lecture room I was like, "This is serious. You're part of this life now". (Alexis)

Others saw the value in joining or creating new university societies in order to feel included within university life:

I started my own society in the fifth week with my flatmate, which is basically a new dance group society, where people can learn how to dance Hip Hop. So we organise classes and socials and nights out and stuff. We also had to create a Facebook page for it, a Twitter page, and just generally advertise what we do. So yea it was pretty cool to run my own society and get involved with university life that way. (Kaden)

Interestingly, however, for some respondents, joining the 'student' community required demonstrating signs of maturity and gaining independence as an individual. For example, eating healthy and preparing your own food was indicative of being successful at university as well as showing signs of integration:

When I started cooking on my own, I wasn't that good and I didn't know what to do or what to put in food. But I did get better and I was really proud of the meals I cooked here, so I was taking pictures to send to my mother back home. I wanted to show her that I am keeping healthy. I think it's a sign on my independence and me growing up as a person, saying to back home that I can survive on my own. (Nicole)

When you think of food and uni, you think of kebabs and chips at three in the morning. But we were all very keen to cook food properly, discussing [on SM] what recipes would work. When you post about it, you're saying to your parents 'I can cook, I am doing it, I am adulting properly, I am settling in at university, and I can take care of myself'. (Brooke)

Finally, some of the 'identity work' was about the transition to a new city or even new country.

I think everyone has this ceremonious "I have moved to my new city" on their Facebook. I think it is a nice thing to do to say, "I have moved and be proud of me." (Charlie)

For the international students, this transition had its own particular challenges. For example, they would often face communication barriers in real time and many felt they could be more articulate on SM, where the asynchronous nature of the communication allowed them to take care in self-expression:

Social media is one of the easiest things where you can find new friends, especially for foreign students. Because you can call people, message them, and you can make things grammatically correct before you send them stuff. (Michelle)

Thus SM was seen as offering the opportunity to alleviate potential awkwardness in future face-to-face situations (Indian & Grieve, 2014). For non-UK students, it was very much about trying to adapt as quickly as possible, which meant learning to adopt new SM practices commonly used in the UK to integrate into a new community:

I was quite wary about using Facebook because I'm not used to it and I didn't really know what I was doing. So I was quite conscious as to what people are going to think about me if I share something that's perhaps not funny even though I find it funny. (Ruby)

[SM usage] definitely increased since I have moved to university, especially Facebook. Back home in Germany all my friends didn't really use Facebook, we would just text each other, but here it's just the main source of communication. When I joined the different sports clubs all the detail was posted online and you had to sign up for everything online. And because of that everyone else is also on Facebook connected to these groups, so it became a very good channel of communicating, meeting up with people, knowing when classes are on, stuff like that. (Anna)

Some of the students claimed they still posted in their native language, but others quickly realized that in order to integrate, they would need to post to SM in English:

The language also changed because I used to post in Chinese but when I moved to the UK, I posted in English. (Patience)

Yes, and the thing is, that we are talking in Lithuanian and Polish language and you would actually not understand anything so it was pointless to post it. (Nathan)

These overseas students identified Facebook as an important means of adapting to UK university community culture. Both home and overseas students recognised that they still had two audiences, but overseas students were more likely to use different SM platforms for these different audiences so that they could target their communications more effectively:

I used Path as a way to keep in touch with friends back home, but nobody here knows what it is ... It's a bit like Instagram and Foursquare- it's really big in Asia. It was a great way to keep in touch with my Indonesian friends, particularly early on when I first moved to [university] and I wasn't quite settled. But gradually I found myself using more Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to communicate with my friends here. It was pointless to use Path because nobody knows what it is. (Ruby)

4.3. Integration- maintenance of old identity whilst embracing a new one

As we have seen, the students spend a significant amount of time adjusting to their new lives at university, utilising on and offline resources in order to establish a new identity that would reflect who they wanted to be in this new environment. In this section we consider how the students began to think about how to integrate their old and new lives. The data presented here speaks of the students' need to disclose their 'true' identity, and their desire to reconcile the needs of people at university and those left at home. This results not in one single identity, but two- and the following quotes demonstrate how students come to be more comfortable with managing the two identities across audiences at home and university. Sometimes this was simply about addressing the pragmatics of things like time-differences. International students, for example, realized that they needed to think about more than which platform to use to connect with friends and family, but that different time zones also posed a challenge when trying to integrate old and new lives:

I have to think about the time difference between here and Hong Kong. So I want to make sure that if I do post something that my friends back home can see it and its not lost at the bottom of a newsfeed, where it won't get many 'likes'. So coming to the UK did make me think about what I should post and when. (Patience)

At other times this process was about selectively sharing aspects of the new student identity. As we've seen, using SM to showcase their new academic life, acquiring a job, forming part of a university society, the ability to cook, signs of maturity and independence, and so on, was crucial to inheriting a student identity, and indicative of maturing as an individual. It was also important to communicate this new transformed identity with connections back home, so as to reassure them about successful integration:

I'm from Manchester so my scenery changed completely and that was a photo [of the Quayside] to summarise where I live now and to show everyone back home ... My mum was distraught for a good month so I tried to post as many pictures as I could so she could see I was having a good time because her worst thought was me just sat in my room by myself crying. I think my mum enjoyed seeing stuff like this because she realised that I was okay and I was going to be okay. (Lena)

We also see evidence that the students will edit their SM in order to show more conservative posts to those back home:

I don't like posting pictures from nights out, because I don't like my family seeing them. Because I don't like them seeing me in states like that, so I keep those things on my phone. I will post a picture if it's family friendly, on Instagram. A lot of my family doesn't approve of drinking. (Rachel)

This presentation of different elements of self to different audiences is, as we've seen, well rehearsed in Goffman's work, but it also reflects the way that disclosure loyalties shift from family to peers in adolescence (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). While many of our participants were performing happy, healthy adulthood to reassure friends and family at home, other participants adopted different strategies in order to engage with the new student community. One student in particular deliberately performed a change of persona on their SM profiles to construct their imagined student identity:

Before this first week, I was just a normal person on social media. I posted pictures of my cats and stuff, but then when I came to university that died down quite a lot and I sort of dropped that image of me. I wanted people to think 'oh she is someone I want to go out on a night out with'. You can see it's all nights out, pre-drinks I went to and partying in clubs and stuff. I wanted people to think that I was the life and soul of the party. I don't think I posted anything on Facebook that was about home because I didn't want to come across as boring. (Sara)

Here, Sara imagines a successful student community in conjunction with partying, socialising, and utilising SM to increase her social capital (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Wellman et al., 2001). In doing so, she drops her family side completely, and utilises SM technologies to keep her new and old communities separate, which also resonated with another participant:

For the first week my parents said, "For the first two or three weeks you shouldn't call us, you should try your best to get away from home life." I have completely gone against that now, but back then I did spend the first few weeks not really talking to people from home. (Charlie)

These forms of self-censorship are understandable, but they are conducted at some psychological cost and we can see in the later weeks of our study that participants then struggled to reconcile

different versions of themselves as they became more comfortable with friends. We only really began to see hints of successful integration when there was offline integration – e.g. when participants talked about uniting their friends from home with newly made housemates- usually by inviting old friends to stay at university:

One of the main things that happened that week was my friend from Edinburgh came down for the weekend. It had only been two weeks and we met again. We went out to a few bars. It was just nice to see an old friend again. I put those on Facebook just to show that I am still friends with my old friends. I like doing that old and new thing. (Charlie)

That fourth post is about my best friend coming up to see me for the first time. We're just saying we can't wait to see each other, because we were texting every day and ringing each other every single day, but it's not the same as being with them. (Abigail)

Very occasionally, we would see our students thinking ahead about the need for integration in the longer-term. One example is particularly salient – and concerns a student who was struggling to deal with the death of a sister and suffered from anxiety and depressive thoughts. She found the opportunity for honest SM disclosure in advance of meeting new people to be a huge positive:

My sister passed away a couple of years ago and I always find it's best to tell people before I meet them. But sometimes people find it really awkward when I just randomly bring it up. So I try and tell people beforehand, because then it gives them a chance to process it themselves. I find that I'm a lot more eloquent online. I might have found it hard to say to people in person ... "Oh, yes, my sister passed away a couple of years ago." Whereas online it gives people time to reflect on it and stuff. (Samantha)

4.4. Social media use and transition difficulties

Most students welcomed the convenience of SM in making introductions, but also worried about some of the social comparison processes taking place online. Here we found a very damaging cycle for any student who was struggling in the early weeks as they felt both the need to 'look happy' in their own posts, but were then inundated with similarly 'happy' posts from others. Particularly notable was the feeling that they couldn't share their true feelings online:

For me social media was really really helpful during the transition and meeting new people beforehand and getting rid of that awkwardness when you first meet one another. But you do have to make sure you're not totally wrapped up in social media, because I felt for quite a lot of people, they were trying to maintain this pretense of looking like they're having fun, but actually they're not. (Brooke)

So usually I just post things where I'm feeling happy, like I'm going out for dinner, I'm hanging out with my friends, but I don't really post stuff when I'm feeling down, because I don't want people back home seeing that ... I felt that I needed to show-off to my friends back home to show that I'm having an amazing time. (Ruby)

It is interesting to note such pressures, particularly in light of research that suggests that upward social comparisons (the perception that other people are doing better than oneself) might be associated with depression and feelings of failure (Feinstein et al., 2013; Jang, Park, & Song, 2016; Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli,

2014). Almost without exception our students felt the need to pretend that they were settling in well, even when they were experiencing difficulties including homesickness and anxiety about making new friendships, dealing with difficult flatmates and coping with the demands of their course. Some specific examples will illustrate this point. Firstly, let us consider Maria, who had briefly dropped out of university due to problems with her new housemates, before re-registering and moving into different accommodation:

I was very reserved about putting stuff up about missing home. I did occasionally, but on the whole I refrained from doing that, especially in fresher's week even though I was missing home like mad ... I just didn't want my family back home to be worried I guess, but then not being able to talk about it on social media made it worse and you felt even more isolated. I momentarily dropped out, pretty much stopped using social media altogether. I didn't want this sort of stuff being seen on Twitter or social media generally for that matter. (Maria)

We see a similar story with Sara, who also experienced accommodation struggles and experienced a number of anxieties about being judged by her close peers:

I represented myself, especially on the Facebook posts, as someone who I'm maybe not when you get to know me as a person. The majority of my boards are from posts on Facebook and me going on nights out and partying and portraying myself as that sort of person. It didn't show that I didn't get into any accommodation on campus, and it didn't show that bad side and that my accommodation was awful. I don't think I wanted other people to see me struggle and I didn't want other people to think that of me Especially to distant family members and even my parents, I didn't want them to see me struggle. I just wanted them to check on Facebook and see that I'm having fun. (Sara)

Not all of the struggles were tied to accommodation. In some cases students experienced problems with the academic aspects of their work, or struggled to make friends with others on their same course. Two students provide a case in point - Rachel and Brittany, both of whom struggled to integrate with coursemates, although for different reasons, Rachel because of the lack of an offline group that was course specific and Brittany because she'd changed course after the first week at university and struggled to integrate subsequently:

I didn't really feel connected to my course mates, because we didn't have a society, like the Law Society, so I didn't feel like there was any way for us to meet. I wished that we had a society at the start of fresher's, because I think I would have felt more comfortable with my course mates. (Rachel)

It was really rushed to find a new course. I was also quite sad about leaving some of the friends I'd made on the [old] course. So I remember that week being really stressful and kind of tainted my time at [university]. I think I was ringing my parents at like three in the morning ... So I decided to go home the weekend after to talk to my parents ... [But] I still don't think I've settled from an academic perspective ... If I'd done another [Pinterest] board of the last week, I think it would be all of home ... I don't know many people because I joined the course late and everyone has formed their own little friendship groups. (Brittany)

This raises some interesting questions about the extent to which SM can only really support assimilation and integration processes if

the offline processes of community building are working well. When we consider both accommodation and course integration, it becomes clear that those students who are lucky and placed with a compatible group (liking those they live with or those they sit with in class) generally do well. The others often struggle to repair an early setback and SM doesn't seem like the right tool to fix these problems. In many cases some kind of face-to-face intervention is required, but not always available. In addition, for some students, SM can actually act to hold back the process of assimilation:

Social media has actually made it worse at times. My friendship group at home has a big Facebook group chat so they are all always chatting away on this group about what they're getting up to in [city]. So when they post pictures of being all together it's just a constant reminder of what you're missing at home. (Brittany)

This is when my boyfriend came up to visit me for the first time. So he was really wanting me to hammer home to people on social media that I had a boyfriend. So I put quite a lot of pictures up. I was trying to do well in university and still maintain my social relationships back home and it was really hard to balance. (Samantha)

Clearly, in times of transition and particularly for those experiencing difficulties with that transition, SM has proved to be a double-edged sword. That said, we should note that not all forms of SM were viewed in the same way. For example, while Facebook could sometimes exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation, some students found that Twitter offered an outlet that allowed people to be more open and honest:

I was struggling with my emotions quite a lot- whether I wanted to be here or not. I tweeted it. Most of my closest friends are on Twitter. They are having the same struggles as you. So I think being able to look and see people tweeting, seeing people say the same sort of things as you, you know you're not the only one struggling. (Alexis)

Interestingly, Facebook and Instagram provided greater challenges in terms of the way they collapsed audiences and blurred the boundaries between family, friends, work colleagues, and so forth. We found that the students were more careful disclosing private matters or personal worries and concerns on those platforms. However, for more serious matters and potential emergencies, our students inevitably turned to offline interactions for immediate support.

5. Final discussion and conclusions

We began our study with a focus on two ways in which SM may have a strong role to play for students making the transition to university. Firstly, we talked of the kinds of identity work at play in SM and the comparison processes that can undermine or support an individual who is judging their place in the new social order. Secondly, we talked about the role of technology in community building and reflected on the ways that students are encouraged to develop and share a SM presence in the weeks prior to coming to university and in the period thereafter. Our study also set out to explore the demands of balancing online and offline communities, and the management of 'context collapse' on SM for new university students. In pulling together the thematic analysis we were struck by the importance of different stages in the transition to a new community and described in some detail the way SM was used to support three different stages of affirmation, assimilation, and integration. These phases have been identified as prevalent when

people cross borders or cultures, as in the example of expatriates living abroad (Mao & Shen, 2015), and we can see similarities between themes in the literature on people coping with acculturation- the *maintenance* of connections to the past, as well as *assimilation* with new environments (see Lingel et al., 2014; Zhang, Jiang, & Carroll, 2012). In the following section, we will say a little more about how identity work and community building plays out across the three stages of affirmation, assimilation, and integration.

Firstly, we can see clearly that the need to both affirm identity with a previous community and to create a new identity and loyalties to a new community can create a number of tensions. In related work, young adults expressed concern with building and adding to an online persona, and the implications for shaping digital identity (Orzech et al., 2016). We are reminded here of the work of Goffman (1959) in articulating the need for an individual to perform on different and discrete social stages and the way that this then translates in SM terms into the problems we experience in managing different aspects of self when different SM worlds collide (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Indeed, impression management was evident for our new students, and caused them to think about their use of SM in the lead up to, and the first few weeks of student life, to ensure they posted or tailored their details to convey a particular impression to others- even if this impression was not of their authentic self (Schoenebeck et al., 2016). However, the motivations for such impression management were complex as our participants wanted to affirm connections to their previous life while assimilating into their new life. They carefully managed their belonging to their new place through photographs of their new city or university as well as changing social media to confirm their student status, while taking care over their posts involving other people.

One thing that emerges from our own study is the way that the temporal dimensions of context collapse are changing. So, for example, it is relatively new for universities to encourage fresher's to enroll on their SM platform to learn about their new housemates or course colleagues *in advance*. Does this ease the transition to university? In some ways it may help to reduce uncertainty, but it also brings social comparison processes forward, beginning before the university term starts. We can see clear evidence, in our own data, that these comparison processes are a little fraught. At a time when individuals should be celebrating and affirming the life they currently lead, they are also trying to 'tweak' their SM profiles such that they look a little better to an outsider. A single identity is no longer feasible or desirable (Belk, 2014) and the celebration of an established life is tainted with the thought that this might not stand up to scrutiny. This can result in anxieties tied to the presentation of self - a phenomenon already seen in offline communication (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989), but now emerging online (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016).

Note that this process is similar to, but also markedly different from the process of online dating, whereby people can review the SM profiles of other people before meeting face to face. Online dating is also fraught with identity management issues (Zytka, Grandhi, & Jones, 2014), but at least it gives participants the option to 'opt-out'. However, our students cannot alter the outcome of these early peer 'previews' - their course mates and the roommates are already fixed and an ultimate face-to-face relationship is inevitable. In the examples where we do see tensions arise with living situations, the result may be at best a change of residence, and at worst, a factor in the decision to leave university.

In subsequent weeks, where students are seeking to integrate with their new communities, the management of two disparate SM identities takes on a different challenge - as people try to play to at least two audiences upon one stage. Again, there is a temporal component to this. For international students, the challenge of balancing home and university identities is helped by the fact that

they are acting in two different time-zones and we found many examples in which students would carefully consider the time of day that posts were made in order to play first to one audience and then the other- something which has caused exhaustion for others in studies of cultural transitions (Lingel et al., 2014). We note that whilst we use the term 'social media' to describe the kind of platforms students use to manage their online identities, it is clear from our data that different SM sites are employed strategically in different ways. As we have highlighted, Facebook was often used as the broader platform to reach out to a wider audience once comfortable with new friends, whereas more nuanced SM such as Tumblr and Twitter allowed students to ensure different audiences received different information in times of crisis.

For all students, the transition to university involved some self-editing and this was accompanied by a range of anxieties about whether or not they would fit in. Early impressions did not always reflect the 'authentic self' and the pressure to appear successful and happy brought its own pressures. Recent work exploring self presentation on Facebook has highlighted there are psychological benefits to being authentic on Facebook (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014), yet we saw a number of disparities between participants' true selves and their Facebook selves, possibly affecting psychological health. Many of our participants were lonely or homesick at points during these early weeks and for some, particularly those who had unsuccessful accommodation or course experiences, these feelings were acute. Yet few felt that they could meaningfully share this with others. There is an emerging body of research which focuses on *transient* loneliness (e.g. Lawson, Vines, Wilson, Barnett, & Barreto, 2014) dealing with those, such as university students, who are temporarily separated from their home community. We feel that further work in this space would be worthwhile as the success of such a transition may contribute to feelings of loneliness in young people at a time when they are at their most vulnerable. From our work we are now beginning to question whether the university induction model, as it stands, is the most appropriate for young people who heavily rely on SM for guidance and making friends.

We recognise there are some limitations to our study, and also avenues for future research. Our method to engage with participants by firstly asking them to curate their experiences on a Pinterest platform was novel, and ensured that our data were not tied to any one specific SM account or type of action and that our interviews were based on exchanges that genuinely took place during the six week transition period (i.e. were not entirely retrospective). However, the interviews themselves did take place 4 months after the start of university, and relied on students own curation of their most 'valuable' social media posts- it may be helpful in future studies of this type to recruit participants to 'pin' their SM content at the start of the period of interest rather than ask them to pin retrospectively.

In the next stage of our work we will use this analysis to design a set of near-future university induction scenarios. We plan to use these in a series of workshops that will help us to further explore digital solutions to the issues facing new students. We also plan to collate SM use in the final six weeks of university where students may be preparing for yet another transition - to the world of work or further study.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a growing body of work on the ways that young people use SM to manage their identities- at a stage where they are undergoing a period of adjustment and identity management. In recent years, this work has started to show that young people are quite accomplished at juggling identities and maintaining their privacy, although they are still vulnerable when there is context collapse between online and offline selves or between different versions of self on different SM

platforms. We found particular social pressures at play in the presentation of self during times of transition- most worrying of these was the sense that the 'authentic self' could not emerge too early in the process of transition. We found a number of young people struggling to make the transition work, but not having the personal resources available (online or offline) to seek help within the new community.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, UK (EP/L004062/1).

References

- Ackerman, M., Huysman, M., Carroll, J. M., Wellman, B., DeMichelis, G., & Wulf, V. (2004). Communities and technologies: An approach to foster social capital?. In *Proceedings of the ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 406–408). CSCW. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1031607.1031675>.
- Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Baumeister, R. F., Tice, D. M., & Hutton, D. G. (1989). Self-presentational motivations and personality differences in self-esteem. *Journal of Personality*, 57(3), 547–579. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1989.tb02384.x>.
- Belk, R. (2014). Digital consumption and the extended self. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(11–12), 1101–1118. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.939217>.
- Bell, C. (2009). *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions*. Oxford University Press.
- Boyd, D. (2007). Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. In *MacArthur foundation series on digital learning – youth, identity, and digital media* (Vol. 7641, pp. 1–26). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/dmal.9780262524834.119>.
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.
- Buote, V. M., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., et al. (2007). The importance of friends. Friendship and adjustment among 1st-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(6), 665–689. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0743558407306344>.
- Chua, T. H. H., & Chang, L. (2016). Follow me and like my beautiful selfies: Singapore teenage girls' engagement in self-presentation and peer comparison on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 190–197. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.09.011>.
- Collins, R. L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(1), 51–69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.1.51>.
- DeAndrea, D. C., Ellison, N. B., LaRose, R., Steinfield, C., & Fiore, A. (2012). Serious social media: On the use of social media for improving students' adjustment to college. *Internet and Higher Education*, 15(1), 15–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.05.009>.
- Duggan, M., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2015). *Social media update 2014*.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends": social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2011). Connection strategies: Social capital implications of Facebook-enabled communication practices. *New Media & Society*, 13(6), 873–892. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444810385389>.
- Feinstein, B. A., Hershenberg, R., Bhatia, V., Latack, J. A., Meuwly, N., & Davila, J. (2013). Negative social comparison on Facebook and depressive symptoms: Rumination as a mechanism. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 2(3), 161–170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0033111>.
- Ferguson, C., DiGiacomo, M., Saliba, B., Green, J., Moorley, C., Wyllie, A., et al. (2016). First year nursing students' experiences of social media during the transition to university: A focus group study. *Contemporary Nurse*, 52(5), 625–635. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2016.1205458>.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140.
- Fraiberg, S., & Cui, X. (2016). Weaving relationship Webs: Tracing how IMing practices mediate the trajectories of Chinese international students. *Computers and Composition*, 39, 83–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2015.11.005>.
- Gaver, B., Dunne, T., & Pacenti, E. (1999). *Cultural Probes*. Interactions (January–February), 21–29.
- Gerritsen, D. B., Tasse, D., Olsen, J. K., Vlahovic, T. A., Gulotta, R., Odom, W., ... Zimmerman, J. (2016). Mailing archived emails as Postcards: Probing the value of virtual collections. *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1187–1199. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858541>.
- Gibbons, F. X., & Gerrard, M. (1989). Effects of upward and downward social comparison on mood states. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 8(1), 14–31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1989.8.1.14>.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Grieve, R., & Watkinson, J. (2016). The psychological benefits of being authentic on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19(7), 420–425. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0010>.
- Guerrero, L. K., & Afifi, W. A. (1995). What parents don't know: Taboo topics and topic avoidance in parent-child relationships. In T. J. Socha, & G. H. Stamp (Eds.), *Parents, children, and communication: Frontiers of theory and research* (pp. 219–245). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hsu, M. H., Ju, T. L., Yen, C. H., & Chang, C. M. (2007). Knowledge sharing behavior in virtual communities: The relationship between trust, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations. *International Journal of Human Computer Studies*, 65, 153–169. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2006.09.003>.
- Indian, M., & Grieve, R. (2014). When Facebook is easier than face-to-face: Social support derived from Facebook in socially anxious individuals. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 59, 102–106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.11.016>.
- Jang, K., Park, N., & Song, H. (2016). Social comparison on Facebook: Its antecedents and psychological outcomes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 147–154. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.082>.
- Johnson, B. K., & Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2014). Glancing up or down: Mood management and selective social comparisons on social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41, 33–39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.09.009>.
- Kerrigan, F., & Hart, A. (2016). Theorising digital personhood: A dramaturgical approach. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(17–18), 1701–1721. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2016.1260630>.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Hastall, M. R. (2006). Social comparisons with news Personae: Selective exposure to news portrayals of same-sex and same-age characters. *Communication Research*, 33(4), 262–284.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Hastall, M. R. (2010). Please your self: Social identity effects on selective exposure to news about in- and out-groups. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 515–535. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01495.x>.
- Lampe, C., Ellison, N., & Steinfield, C. (2006). A face(book) in the Crowd: Social searching vs. Social browsing. In *Proceedings of the 2006 20th anniversary conference on computer-supported cooperative work CSCW '06* (pp. 167–170). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1180875.1180901>.
- Lang, C., & Barton, H. (2015). Just untag it: Exploring the management of undesirable Facebook photos. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 43, 147–155. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.10.051>.
- Lawson, S., Vines, J., Wilson, M., Barnett, J., & Barreto, M. (2014). Loneliness in the digital Age: Building strategies for empathy and trust. In *Proceedings of the CHI 2014 workshop on enabling empathy in health and care*.
- Leary, M., & Kowalski, R. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34–47. Retrieved from <http://doi.apa.org/psycinfo/1990-12233-001>.
- Lee, H., Park, H., & Kim, J. (2013). Why do people share their context information on social network services? A qualitative study and an experimental study on users' behavior of balancing perceived benefit and risk. *International Journal of Human Computer Studies*, 71, 862–877. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2013.01.005>.
- Leonardi, P. M. (2014). Social media, knowledge sharing, and Innovation: Toward a theory of communication visibility. *Information Systems Research*, 25(4), 796–816. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/isre.2014.0536>.
- Lingel, J., Naaman, M., & Boyd, D. (2014). City, self, Network: Transnational migrants and online identity work. In *Proceedings of the ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social computing* (pp. 1502–1510).
- Lockwood, P., & Kunda, Z. (1997). Superstars and me: Predicting the impact of role models on the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(1), 91–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.1.91>.
- Malinen, S. (2015). Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 46, 228–238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.004>.
- Mao, J., & Shen, Y. (2015). Cultural identity change in expatriates: A social network perspective. *Human Relations*, 68(10), 1533–1556. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726714561699>.
- Marder, B., Joinson, A., Shankar, A., & Houghton, D. (2016). The extended "chilling" effect of Facebook: The cold reality of ubiquitous social networking. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 60, 582–592. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.097>.
- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–133. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313>.
- Marwick, A., & Boyd, D. (2011). *The drama! Teen conflict, gossip, and bullying in networked publics*. *Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked ...* (pp. 1–25). Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Papers.cfm?abstract_id=1926349.
- Orzech, K. M., Moncur, W., Durrant, A., & Trujillo-Pisanty, D. (2016). Opportunities and challenges of the digital lifespans: Views of service providers and citizens in the UK. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1257043>.
- Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30(3), 227–238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.12.010>.

- Petrelli, D., & Light, A. (2014). Family rituals and the potential for interaction design: A study of Christmas. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 21(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2617571>.
- Pounders, K., Kowalczyk, C. M., & Stowers, K. (2016). Insight into the motivation of selfie postings: Impression management and self-esteem. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(9/10), 1879–1892. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EJM-07-2015-0502>.
- Reinecke, L., & Trepte, S. (2014). Authenticity and well-being on social network sites: A two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of online authenticity and the positivity bias in SNS communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 30, 95–102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.07.030>.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 769–802). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Saw, G., Abbott, W., Donaghey, J., & McDonald, C. (2013). Social media for international students – it's not all about Facebook. *Library Management*, 34(3), 156–174. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435121311310860>.
- Scanlon, L., Rowling, L., & Weber, Z. (2007). "You don't have like an identity ... you are just lost in a crowd": Forming a Student Identity in the First-year Transition to University. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10(2), 223–241. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676260600983684>.
- Schoenebeck, S., Ellison, N. B., Blackwell, L., Bayer, J. B., & Falk, E. B. (2016). Playful backstalking and serious impression Management: How young adults reflect on their past identities on Facebook. In *Proceedings of the 19th ACM conference on computer-supported cooperative work & social computing* (Vol. 27, pp. 1473–1485). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2818048.2819923>.
- Sleeper, M., Melicher, W., Habib, H., Bauer, L., Cranor, L. F., & Mazurek, M. L. (2016). Sharing personal content Online: Exploring channel choice and multi-channel behaviors. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 101–112). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858170>.
- Sosik, V. S., & Bazarova, N. N. (2014). Relational maintenance on social network sites: How Facebook communication predicts relational escalation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 35, 124–131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.044>.
- Steers, M.-L. N., Wickham, R. E., & Acitelli, L. K. (2014). Seeing everyone else's highlight reels: How Facebook usage is linked to depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 33(8), 701–731. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2014.33.8.701>.
- Subrahmanyam, K., Reich, S. M., Waechter, N., & Espinoza, G. (2008). Online and offline social networks: Use of social networking sites by emerging adults. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 420–433. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.003>.
- Svensson, L. (2015). Empowering rural youth with Facebook: Lessons from a local Swedish case-study. *Community Development Journal*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsv024>. August, 1–16.
- Swenson, L. M., Nordstrom, A., & Hiester, M. (2008). The role of peer relationships in adjustment to college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(6), 551–567. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0038>.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125.
- Trottier, D. (2012). Interpersonal surveillance on social media. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 37(2), 319–332.
- Tuch, A. N., Presslauer, E. E., Stöcklin, M., Opwis, K., & Bargas-Avila, J. A. (2012). The role of visual complexity and prototypicality regarding first impression of websites: Working towards understanding aesthetic judgments. *International Journal of Human Computer Studies*, 70, 794–811. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2012.06.003>.
- Utz, S. (2015). The function of self-disclosure on social networking sites: Not only intimate, but also positive and entertaining self-disclosures increase the feeling of connection. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 45, 1–10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.076>.
- Valtchanov, B. L., Parry, D. C., Glover, T. D., & Mulcahy, C. M. (2014). Neighborhood at your Fingertips: Transforming community online through a Canadian social networking site for mothers. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 18(2), 187–217. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0971852414529481>.
- Wang, Y., Hinsberger, H., & Kraut, R. E. (2016). Does saying this make me look good?. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 125–129). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858502>.
- Wellman, B., Haase, A. Q., Witte, J., & Hampton, K. (2001). Does the internet increase, decrease, or supplement social capital? *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3), 436–455. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00027640121957286>.
- Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90(2), 245–271.
- Xie, W., & Kang, C. (2015). See you, see me: Teenagers' self-disclosure and regret of posting on social network site. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 52, 398–407. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.059>.
- Yang, C., & Brown, B. B. (2013). Motives for using Facebook, patterns of Facebook activities, and late adolescents' social adjustment to college. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(3), 403–416. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9836-x>.
- Yang, C., & Brown, B. B. (2016). Online self-presentation on Facebook and self development during the college transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(2), 402–416. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0385-y>.
- Ye, J. (2006). Traditional and online support networks in the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11, 863–876. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00039.x>.
- Zhang, S., Jiang, H., & Carroll, J. M. (2012). Babel or great Wall: Social media use among Chinese students in the United States. In *Proceedings of the 30th ACM international conference on design of communication - SIGDOC '12* (p. 37). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2379057.2379067>.
- Zhao, X., Salehi, N., Naranjit, S., Alwalaan, S., Volda, S., & Cosley, D. (2013). The many faces of Facebook: Experiencing social media as performance, exhibition, and personal archive. In *Proceedings of the 2013 ACM SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1–10). ACM Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2470654.2470656>.
- Zytka, D., Grandhi, S. A., & Jones, Q. (2014). Impression management struggles in online dating. In *Proceedings of the 18th international conference on supporting group work* (pp. 53–62). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2660398.2660410>.