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HAS SOCIAL MEDIA HAD A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON MILLENNIAL MALES' ABILITY TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 5 Discussion

Chapter 6 Recommendations & Conclusion

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to determine if social media has had a negative effect on millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships. In Ireland the marriage rates have dropped, divorce rates have increased, and the millennial generation are waiting much later than previous generations to marry and have a family if at all. We are all aware of the negative side of social media and how it can impact a multitude of areas in our daily lives. Social media can affect mental health, identity and so in turn, our relationships. With the impact of social media and social media addiction apparent, this study deems to determine if these impacts have had a negative impression on the millennial male's ability to build and sustain romantic relationships.

The data derived from the literature and interviews revealed, although the millennial male is feeling the negative impact of social media in areas such as mental health, identity, hyperreality and social comparison, they also expressed their longing for long term monogamous relationships and a family. They also acknowledged the positive side to social media when it comes to dating including the use of dating apps. The data reveals that although they are aware and have been affected by the negative side of social media, they still value romantic relationships and a nuclear family. They value trust, loyalty, and personality over the superficial image portrayed on social media. The data suggests that there may be an alternative issue that has caused the shift in marriage and birth rates in the millennial generation. The data from this research highlights the impact of social media on this generation. Further education to youth around the effects of social media will be imperative to decreasing the effects on everyday life.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Focus of the Study

In this digital age where social media is at the forefront of daily life for everyone, academics and practitioners argue that life in the digital era, particularly with social media, has altered how society thinks and essentially functions. A recent report from Euromonitor International on Ireland's population in 2030 has revealed some interesting statics. The report revealed that Ireland's matrimonial rate is predicted to drop by 60% in 2030 compared to 1980, while the number of divorces in the nation is predicted to rise (Euromonitor International, 2018). The Central Statics Office reported that in 2018 the rates of opposite-sex marriage in Ireland had dropped to 20,389 in 2018 from 21,262 in 2017. A significant decline is predicted to continue (CSO.ie, 2018).

A generation segment consumed and shaped by the digital era is the millennial male. The role of the typical man in this climate is very different to that of a typical male before the digital era. Millennial males have grown up with social media in the forefront of their daily lives and have a different idea of male identity and role than previous generations. Previous generations had a solid and clear awareness of a very typical masculine male, where the more modern male is more metrosexual (Macnamara, 2006). Available studies and literature demonstrate the impact of social media on mental health and identity, particularly millennial males. With a significant change in marriage rates, people getting married later, and divorce increasing, it begs whether the digital era and social media had a role to play in this change in romantic relationships compared to previous generations. The millennial generation is fundamentally different from previous generations (Pew Research Centre, 2021).

We are aware of the massive impact that social media has on the consumer. Areas such as mental health, screen time, and social media addiction are all topics that are discussed openly in this digital era. However, the positives of social media have also been argued. "By giving people the power to share, we are making the world more transparent." (Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook CEO). The introduction of social media has made it easier for people to keep connected more than ever before, share ideas, and communicate with each other; it has never been easier to meet new people and new communities of like-minded individuals. Therefore,

suggesting a positive effect on relationships. Some argue that the introduction of dating apps has had a positive outcome in the modern dating world, making finding a partner for long-term relationships more feasible than an adverse effect or affecting long- term relationships and monogamy (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber, 2017). Current literature also suggests that social media is not to blame as other significant factors at play have caused this change for the millennial male, such as social norms, careers, education, and travel options (Pew Research Centre, 2021). The gap in the research exists in fundamentally pinpointing if social media has been the element to blame in millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships or have the other factors such as travel, education, and career opportunities in comparison with previous generations been the deciding factors for this generation (Pew Research Centre, 2021).

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

Young men are struggling with their identity in the digital era. Has social media had a negative effect on male identity and role. Have men lost their way in heterosexual romantic relationships?

This research aims to, under various relevant headings, explore if social media in the digital age has had a negative effect on millennial, heterosexual males intimate relationships. To examine whether young men have struggles defining identity and role due to the images portrayed in modern advertising, in particular social media. To investigate if millennial men find it challenging to form an identity in romantic relationships.

We are aware of the impact social media has had on society and how much social networks can affect psychological attributes, but have social platforms played a part in the dropping marriage rates of this generation and the increasing levels of divorce? In comparison to previous generations, millennial males' roles and identities are significantly different.

Has social media influence such as hyperreality changed the millennial heterosexual man's expectations towards relationships by altering these expectations to an unrealistic level?

The objective of this study is to determine if the effects of social media have affected these

men's ability to build and sustain romantic relationships. Being in a committed romantic relationship in this digital era has its negatives and positives. This study aims to depict if social media has more of a negative or positive effect on the quality of romantic relationships. Hyper-Reality is a relatively new phenomenon, enhanced by the excessive use of social media. Is hyper-reality creating an unrealistic expectation when it comes to relationships? And giving millennial males a false idealism?

Have social media and dating apps had a negative effect on romantic relationships? Alternatively, have they aided millennial males in seeking a partner? To determine the aid of social media dating apps amongst millennial males.

Evidence suggests that dating apps are a place where a culture has developed, creating a throwaway society and a hook-up culture (Hari, 2019). However, there is also significant literature to suggest otherwise. Some millennials find apps very useful in seeking a relationship and being connected with others with ease (Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg, 2017).

The digital era has essentially made millennial males unhappy and affected their mental health, affecting their views on the quality of their relationships.

To investigate if these men are suffering from social media related mental health issues and to determine if these issues cause a negative attitude towards romantic relations and/or affect the quality of their relationships.

1.3 Structure and Content

In order to carry out the explorative research on this subject, the study will be explored under the above-mentioned objectives through a series of structured steps set out over the six chapters.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In chapter one the focus of the study is broken down from the background to the current literature and statistics that have made this research question a particular topic of interest and details the gap in the research on the topic, driving the reason for this research project. The objectives of the research are listed with each particular statement and goal of the objective explained and broken down. The chapter advises the break down of this full research project and what the research aims to achieve.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, current literature is documented surrounding this broad topic focusing on millennial males, effects of social media, and romantic relationships. The chapter first outlines the behaviour of millennials, documenting current statistics and study results pinpointing how millennial males differ from previous generations under various headings. These showcase the statistics on marriage decline, divorce increases, and how the millennial will wait much longer to get married, unlike their predecessors. A critical analysis of the theory suggests that social media has caused this shift, revealing that millennials take more time to focus on careers, travel, and education, suggesting that there are other considerable factors at play here.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter details the chosen methodology for this particular research question. It outlines the specific reasons why the qualitative research method was selected as being the most suitable method. The chapter outlines why semi-structured interviews were chosen over other qualitative research methods such as focus groups and netnography, and why they were not as suited to the sensitive nature of the study. The segment selection of the participants of the semi- structured interviews is broken down and the segment selection process is explained. The interview process and structure are detailed, with a clear breakdown of the steps involved in gathering this research, the steps involved in the thematic analysis of the data, and the coding used to differentiate particular themes.

Chapter 4 Findings

The findings chapter documents the actual conclusions and data from the researched literature and the semi-structured interviews. The chapter gives each of the selected segments and their details relevant to the research question, thus documenting a detailed report of the themes emerging from the data under particular headings such as mental health, identity, romantic relationships, and dating. The chapter details the results from the particular questions put to the participants and provides examples and quotes from their interviews.

Chapter 5 Discussion

The discussion chapter will compare the findings from both the literature and the semi-structured interviews in contrast to each other. Reporting the statistics and details behind this study in comparison with the new findings in this research.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The final chapter will conclude the findings of the study, along with recommendations.

Chapter 2 Current Literature

2.1 Behaviour of Millennials

An abundance of research has been carried out on millennials and their behaviour. A study on millennial behaviours and demographics discusses the considerable differences in this generation's attitudes and behaviours compared to previous generations (Davidson, 2020). Millennials have a more expansive choice and an abundance of varied options in terms of consumerism, where they like to have personalised products and to customise all their items. Millennials want instant results and instant responses and demand them. They expect immediate emails and message responses and will query these when they are not coming quickly enough. Sweeny refers to millennials as "digital natives" and argues that this generation expects everything to be online naturally, especially in education. They expect the use of high-tech computer equipment and everything to be documented online for speed and accuracy. They prefer online communication also over face to face. The study was revealing in conclusion that this generation is very different from previous more traditional generations. Their behaviours are so different in various areas, and this is not going to change (Sweeney, 2006).

Millennials marry three years later than previous generations and a staggering five years later than their grandparents. It has been documented that millennial males do value committed relationships but want to focus on their careers and lifestyle before committing to a partner (Barroso, Parker, and Bennett, 2020). Young men's mental health is an area where there has been serious discussion and research carried out, Barry (2021) depicts an interesting identity issue amongst young men in the United Kingdom. The survey looks into men's core values in 21st Century Britain and their general wellbeing reported findings that British men in the 21st century are possibly caught between the modern progressive man being more sensitive and open to taking on non-traditional male roles and the more traditional male values where men were considered to have to be strong in every aspect of life. The survey revealed that although 44% of men surveyed valued their mental health over their physical health, suggests that men are aware of their mental health. However, at the same time, they are still feeling the effects of older, more traditional notions of masculinity in contrast with the more modern depiction of what a 21st-century man should be. It suggests this confusion is causing unhappiness in young men, with the survey revealing that young men in the United Kingdom

are not as happy as older men (Barry, 2021).

In a recent study from Pew Research Centre (2021) on millennials and how they compare to previous generations, statistics show and see the decrease in millennials interest in marriage. The research shows that they are waiting longer to get married, or not getting married at all. A larger proportion of this generation are living in their family homes for considerably longer than previous generations; they are slower to start having their own family. The study shows that 42% of millennials between the ages of 25–37 were married, compared to 83% of the same age in 1968 (Pew Research Centre, 2021). This is a staggering decline in marriage. In 1968 the average age of a woman to get married was 21, and the average age for a man to be married in 1968 was 23 years old. In 2018 those average ages significantly rose. In 2018 the average age for a woman to be married had risen to 28, and for a man, this had risen to 30 years of age. The evidence shows that millennials are undoubtedly waiting to get married. There is also a large number who are not getting married at all. The research reports that the marriage level is decreasing with each generation and predicts that this will only continue, meaning that 1 in 4 of the young adults today will not be married by the time they hit their 40's. If this is the case, it will be a record low (Pew Research Centre, 2021). Other factors have been discussed, suggesting other factors that are contributing to the lowering rates in marriage. Banks (2019) discusses the other factors outside the discussed effects of the digital era. The article argues that millennials do not believe in marriage anymore and that the attitudes towards marriage are very different from those of the previous generations. Banks (2019) argues that millennials lack of interest in marriage is due to finances, careers, and studies. He argues that millennials have a more non-traditional view of marriage and they feel it is very dated and not in line with their beliefs on romance. With the rate of marriage dropping in millennials as opposed to previous generations such as baby boomers, it is an indication that this generation feels differently about marriage. Millennials have a fresh idea of romance and feel marriage is a social norm that is no longer financially or religiously fitting. For many millennials, marriage is associated with religion, and many millennials are atheists. Generation Y does not desire to be restricted. They are more in tune with their own needs and want freedom in all senses of the word, including sexually. They want to experiment sexually and are less likely to want to be restricted into monogamous relationships. Millennials are suggested to be a more selfish generation than previous generations, and so they are dedicating time to their careers, education, and so being self-

sufficient and financially stable. They are putting their own needs first, so marriage is not at the top of the list for this generation (Banks, 2019). A less obvious threat to relationships in the digital era is the easily accessible pornography, and explicit pornographic images also provoked on social media. With a click of a mouse, young men have unlimited access to pornography. An interesting study on the effects of pornography on abused women takes an in-depth look at the direct effects. The study looked at the probability of abused women also being sexually abused due to the pornography use of their partner. Thus, does pornography influence how men are behaving. The conclusion discussed how men who watched pornography and physically abused their partners were more likely to abuse their partners sexually, proving that there is a direct effect from the influence of pornography. This hyperreality of what a sexual relationship looks like could be affecting real-life sexual relationships (Shope, 2004)

2.2 Identity

Identity is an issue that has been discussed more frequently in the digital age, how the media and advertising portray the roles of males and females in the modern world as opposed to a more historical ideal of gender roles. (Klassen, Jasper and Schwartz, 1993) state that the advertising of men and women across all media shapes societal values and should be advertised with caution. They examine the effects of how men and women are photographed together. Previously, traditional male and female advertising would portray images as roles and identities for males and females, such as female homemakers and male breadwinners. In this modern age, advertisers have portrayed a more similar image of the male and female roles. This is still affecting society. In her book, Macnamara (2016) discusses how modern media, amongst other changing societal factors, have shaped male identity from traditional ideas of "workaholics" to a more modern idea of "metrosexuals." The issue of identity is argued by (Jagger, 2001). The study discusses the idea of men and women portraying themselves to conform to stereotypical roles. Women, showcasing physical beauty, and men showcasing wealth. The study on one hundred dating advertisements looks into the idea of self-selling and how men and women portray themselves while seeking a potential date. The study also looks at the changes in being masculine and what it means to be feminine. The study finds that the female role and portrayal have stayed relatively similar in modern society while masculinity is not as stable. Since the 1980s, it has become acceptable and the societal norm to find potential partners or friends via self-advertising, which has become even more

prominent in the digital era. With men and women self-advertising and broadcasting themselves to attract peers. The study aimed to explore how people are advertising themselves, what they feel are desirable qualities, especially for each gender. The study discusses that most males and females portray themselves to the traditional stereotype of male and female roles, with females showcasing beauty and body shape, while men would showcase financial stability and physical strength to impress a potential partner. However, postmodernism has changed this attitude slightly where both sexes are more fluid in terms of characteristics and what they find essential and/or attractive in the opposite sex. The study, however, finds that this change is not equal to both sexes and that males are exposed to hybrid versions of what it is to be a man while female attitudes to femininity have altered but stayed on a similar path. There are multiple ideals of masculinity where men are caught between portraying themselves traditionally and the more modern feminine attributes (Jagger, 2001).

2.3 Impact of social media

Social media addiction is a widely reported issue. There is evidence that social media addiction is a real issue and especially amongst the millennial generation. Studies show a direct correlation between age and social media usage. Younger people tend to have multiple social media accounts across an array of platforms used daily compared to older people.

Screen time daily and the need to check devices multiple times a day have brought about the idea that these unhealthy addictions can negatively affect relationships (Cabral, 2011). Social media usage has increased dramatically in recent years and continues to climb. The impact of social media is also more prominent in males than in females. In a recent study by Kuss and Griffiths (2017) 82% of men had multiple social media accounts compared to 75% of females. It was also found that typically men have more friends on social media than women and are less reluctant to share personal information. The impact of social media on society has been widely discussed. An interesting study revealed the impacts of social media on society under several headings (Amedie, 2016), where social media was revealed to have a negative impact regarding false connections and superficial friendships/relationships online. People are making superficial connections which are having a negative effect on them physiologically. There have also been significant links to depression, and worryingly, social media has been identified as a place for easy access to victims and recruitment for criminal activity (Amedie, 2016). Social Media addiction has been widely discussed and documented

9

and proven to alter mood, thoughts, and behaviour and, in turn, influence relationships (Demircioğlu and Göncü Köse, 2018). An interesting study Cabral (2011) revealed surveyed components were suffering from three and a half of the five measured components of addiction to social media and made it a top priority. The study was focused mainly on the social media platforms of Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn using "Griffiths six components." These components measure behavioural addiction. The six components are salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The study concluded that the components were proven to be suffering from a staggering three of the six, tolerance, salience, and relapse. This addiction was due to Generation Y's need to keep connections with peers. Technology continues to change and evolve, causing a direct effect on how we communicate and, in turn, affects how we form and maintain our relationships. This proves that the group needed more usage to feel satisfied and, although they were aware of the possible addiction, they were unable to cut down the usage levels (Cabral, 2011).

2.4 Impact of social media on psychological attributes

The worrying increase in mental health issues in this country, in particular, has excelled in recent years. Hari (2019) suggests a direct correlation between this increase and the surge in social media usage. The Health Service Executive in Ireland reports that mental health issues are exceptionally high in young men. Suicide rates are notably higher in males aged between 15 and 24 years of age (Health Service Executive, 2018). Modern marketing methods have been and continue to saturate the audiences using digital platforms, mainly social media. It has been argued that these constant advertisements have created a "junk values" culture in society, creating the attitude that everything is replaceable, including relationships. Hari (2019) discusses that hyperreality, attention span, and instant gratification are all new areas of concern in the digital age. Hari (2019) suggests a direct correlation between mental health issues and social media usage, suggesting an apparent effect and demonstrates the power of the internet to potentially influence in negative ways and have a negative impact on one's mental health. Social media can influence people to tend to put their value into material items and their acclamation. Hari discusses how the modern, western world society is placing their identity and status on materialistic items. Society in this modern media age has focused on extrinsic values rather than intrinsic values. By focusing on these values, humans have moved away from what makes them internally happy and satisfied. Hari (2019) argues that we, as consumers, are now putting our value on material items and their accumulation. We find our

value and identity in materialistic objects. This attitude is being constantly reinforced with modern marketing and social media. Using constant streams of imagery of materialism, especially on social media. This attitude and lifestyle, teamed with people feeling disconnected from each other while having many online friends, have increased depression.

People feel more disconnected than previous generations, although suggested to be more connected with social media, causing increased levels of depression compared to previous generations (Hari, 2019). There has been an increased interest in the connection between Internet addiction and depression. A study that examined the relationship between internet addiction symptoms and depression revealed some interesting findings. There is a direct link between internet addiction and depression. Young people were showing to be considerably more susceptible to depression and anxiety if they also overuse the internet in their daily lives (Kandell, 1998). Facebook depression is a term that has been mentioned in recent years. The frequent and obsessive use of social media platforms and others must be taking some toll on society. A study by Morrison and Gore (2010) discusses the results of a study finding that social media platforms, including Facebook, are causing depression in users. Users find it challenging to control time spent on devices and social media platforms, resulting in large amounts of time being wasted daily. The study was carried out on 1,319 people between the ages of 16 – 51. The study finds that users utilising more social media and other online interactions such as porn and gaming were more likely to be depressed. Young people were more likely to be suffering from this than older users. The average age of increased depression symptoms suggested to be from social media was 21 years of age. The Internet-addicted parties were much more likely to have depression and to socialise online rather than in person. Interestingly, there was also a significant difference between genders. Men were more likely to suffer depression symptoms, and younger people were also more likely to show depressive symptoms than the older participants. (Morrison and Gore, 2010)

2.5 The millennial dating scene

Like the digital era changing communication with social media, the digital age has also created a new level of human fantasy. Hyperreality is also a product of the digital age, giving people an escape from real life, altering reality and giving consumers the ability to enter into a fantasy world with the click of a button. An interesting take on this by Miranti (2017) discusses social media offering a hyperreality experience where consumers can escape from

real life. However, it warns that this can cause isolation, discussing the vast increase in young people communicating mainly with pictures, which portray a hyperreality of real-life by using filters and broadcasting the most attractive photos to peers. This fake world is feeding into the issue of identity. The real identity vs. the virtual identity is a new issue with the rise of social media usage and hyperreality. People tend to have multiple selves online. Some of the direct effects discussed in the conclusion of the paper are wasted time online, too much self-imaging, and interaction issues leading to self-isolation (Miranti, 2017).

2.6 Impact of social media on romantic relationships

An interesting study on the effects of social media on relationships revealed that while having social media platforms can create jealousy in relationships due to friends and or reactions to posts and images, the majority of the surveyed group felt that having social media while in a relationship makes them happy when their partner showcases the relationship with posts and/or images. This suggests that social media can be a positive tool when in a relationship (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Millennials preferred social media platform is Snapchat. Snapchat is leading other networks in daily usages, such as Facebook. Jealousy is an area of particular concern when it comes to romantic relationships. As this app is relatively new, there is a lack of detail regarding physiological effects. Studies show Snapchat is typically an application for finding love interests and flirting compared to Instagram and Facebook, which are used to keep connected with friends. With Snapchat being the preferred application of the millennial, this suggests more room for jealousy when it comes to romantic relationships with millennials (Utz, Muscanell and Khalid, 2015). The issue is typically more dominant in younger people as they have more social media platforms than the older generation. A study by Abasi (2018) of 252 married and romantically partnered couples aged between 18 and 73 years old revealed notable findings. The study concluded that age was a significant problem, revealing that younger participants in the group had more social media accounts and were more susceptible to social media addiction, which negatively impacted romantic commitment.

Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber (2017) examine the idea that apps and the digital era have changed long-term relationships by "liquefying." Examining whether dating app users feel that this new digital dating age has had a negative effect on long-term relationships. Has this digital age created a more casual attitude towards relationships and a "hook up" culture? The paper argues that people have a wrong attitude to dating apps and negatively perceive them. The

positives have possibly been overlooked. Has the availability of numerous sexual partners changed our expectation of long-term relationships and monogamy? The document in the findings of their study is that most participants found dating apps to be an excellent tool for finding their potential life partner and did not feel that dating apps are negatively affecting monogamy or commitments to long-term relationships (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber; 2017). Users reported that dating apps such as Tinder were an excellent way to meet people for relationships, friendships, or sexual encounters. In today's busy society, it is increasingly difficult to meet new people without using online assistance. Users felt that the introduction of dating apps had given them more choice than previous generations that traditionally found peers and partners. Dating issues are also discussed around identity, intimacy, and selection based on initial physical attraction. However, these issues are as apparent in the physical dating world as they are online. Overall, users felt that online dating and apps are tools to make potential dating and finding partners for relationships, friendships, or hook-ups and are not detrimental or hostile to traditional long-term relationships. An online survey of 18 - 30 year old Dutch young adults who use the popular social media dating application Tinder revealed that in contrast to the popular idea that Tinder is used for hook-ups, users are generally looking for meaningful relationships and find Tinder to be helpful for the purpose to meet new people and converse with ease quickly. They had six main reasons or drivers to use the app, revealed to be the following: Love, Casual Sex, Ease of Communication, Self-Worth Validation, Thrill of Excitement, and Trendiness but the study concluded their end goal is a no strings hook up but to find and secure a committed relationship (Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg, 2017).

2.7 Conclusion

There is considerable evidence to prove that millennials (Generation Y) have more social media accounts and screen time than previous generations. There is substantial literature available to suggest the impact of social media on society and how it has affected mental health. There is also evidence that young millennial males in Ireland have a poor state of mental health in comparison to previous generations. Social media addiction is a reality of the millennial generation, and it has been documented that such can have adverse effects on commitment, wellbeing, and overall happiness. However, the literature also suggests that social media has made finding and sustaining happy and committed romantic relationships

easier due to its ability to keep people connected, share loved ones in posts and imagery online. People are actively using social media applications such as Tinder to find committed long-term romantic relationships. Statistics in comparison with previous generations on marriage is lower, and divorce is on the rise. However, while there is literature to suggest that the effects of social media on Generation Y have been significantly adverse and may be responsible for the decrease in marriage rates, there is also evidence that social media has had a positive effect on romance and that there are other significant factors at play in the millennial male world to cause the change in romantic relationships compared to previous generations such as careers, finances, and education. There is a research gap in the current literature, where more studies are needed to determine if social media has had a negative effect on millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships. Thus, this study seeks to minimise the gap by researching further into this area.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Aim of Research

Due to the nature of this exploitive study, after consideration of all the alternative methodology, qualitative research is the best type of research to carry out in order to obtain the broadest and most accurate data on the subject. Carrying out semi-structured interviews across five millennial male participants was the best option for maximum and accurate results.

This research aims to investigate the following four objectives:

Objectives

1. **Young men are struggling with their identity in the digital era. Has social media had a negative effect on male identity and role? Have men lost their way in heterosexual romantic relationships?**

2. **Has social media influence such as hyperreality changed the millennial heterosexual man's expectations towards relationships by altering these expectations to an unrealistic level?**

3. **Have social media and dating apps had a negative effect on romantic relation-ships? Alternatively, have they aided millennial males in seeking a partner?**

4. **The digital era has essentially made millennial males unhappy and effected their mental health and so effected their views on the quality of their relationships.**

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Five millennial males were selected carefully from diverse religions, social circumstances, careers, education, and backgrounds to ensure the maximum sample of the generation was achieved. Selecting participants with diverse backgrounds allowed the data to be broad and gave the most authentic and varied opinions. The age group varied between the millennial generation, born from 1981 to 1996. This segmentation allows for the broadest opinion in exploratory research of the topic across the millennial male generation. Two of the parties were personal contacts of the researcher, and the remaining participants were third-party nominations. The selection of millennial males gave a broad sample of the millennial male

generation with diverse and individual life paths, as seen in the below:

Participant	Sex	Age	Relationship Status	Occupation	Religion
1	Male	27	In a Relationship	Teacher	Roman Catholic
2	Male	33	In a Relationship	Barber	Atheist
3	Male	31	Single	Barman	Roman Catholic
4	Male	29	Single	Accountant	Presbyterian
5	Male	30	Single	Civil Servant	Roman Catholic

3.3 Qualitative Approach

The nature of this explorative research was suited best to qualitative research. The questions are personal and based solely on the individual opinion and experience of each individual. So it was imperative that the questions were not leading but allowed the participants to express their personal experience, understanding, and opinion openly. After considering the alternative qualitative research methods available, semi-structured interviews are the most effective methodology for this particular research. Alternative methods of qualitative research were also considered for the data collection of this research. Focus groups and Netnography were two alternative methods considered in this research.

3.3.1 Focus groups

Focus groups are a very effective and informative method of gathering data on a particular subject. Focus groups are influential as they allow the mediator to go with the flow and gather more insightful and profound attitudes and experiences. They are also a time-saving method when it comes to gathering data. Focus groups allow people to reveal in-debt conversation in the comfortable environment of a group that is less intense than a one-on-one. Due to the sensitive nature of the research question, a focus group would be a challenging space for millennial males to express their true feelings on subjects such as mental health, relationships, and in particular, identity. The one-to-one inter- view will allow participants to in confidence, express their true feelings on these sensitive subjects. They may alter their expression to fit a particular narrative while in the company of other males, which eliminated focus groups as a method of research for this study.

3.3.2 Netnography

The method of netnography had been considered as a research option for this particular study. Netnography is an online research method derived from ethnography studying people's cultural differences examining their cultures and customs (Bowler,2014) Netnography involves monitoring and researching online interactions in digital communications. This practice allows the researcher to pick up on the general feeling of the select sample group on particular topics. However, due to the sensitive nature of this explorative study, netnography, it is assumed would not be a suitable or reliable source of data.

With this in mind, it is possible that the millennial male's actual feelings or opinions on related and relevant topics such as mental health, identity, romantic relationships, and social media addiction may not be expressed online.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-Structured Interviews were decided to be the most valuable and accurate form of research for this particular study. Semi-structured interviews are an effective qualitative research method for explorative research. Semi-structured interviews allow a series of structured, specific questions to be put to each participant. These questions, however, are open-ended and so allow for a deeper free-flowing conversation to develop under the structured questions (Drever, 2006) this allows the researcher to gather more in-depth data from the participant while apposing to probe deeper from the original question. Eleven questions derived from the four main objectives were put to each participant. Allowing the semi-structured interview gave the freedom to explain their feelings and experience in a private environment. This allows the freedom for the conversion to flow into other avenues. It also allows the interviewer to ask further questions as the conversation flows to gather more information. Thus, this allowed the collection of more in-depth and insightful information.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection for this study was carried out in August 2021. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded with the participant's consent. All five interviews were fully transcribed. Participants undertook the interviews inside their own homes, and they were

alone while they answered the questions. This allowed a confidential and free-flowing conversation. Conducting a semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to dig deeper into the participant's initial answers to gather more data (Drever, 2006). The questions were varied under the four main objectives, and due to the subject's sensitive nature, they were varied between both potentially positive and negative outcomes. A pilot interview was also carried out before the selected sample interviews to iron out any potential issues with the questions or flow of the interviews. This interview was not included in the data recorded.

3.5 Data Analysis

The particular type of data analysis used for this study was thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). Following the interviews being fully transcribed, they were then familiarised and listened to repeatedly. The interviews are then coded under particular keywords to indicate particular themes across the interviews. The code words are used to categorise the complete data. Themes are recognised, and then further sub-themes can then emerge. After re-occurring themes are identified, the next step is to verify the data by re-checking and re-listening to the interviews allowing any changes to the hypothesis.

3.6 Limitations

There were some limitations in this research. Due to the research question, it would be typical in any research project to examine a much larger number of participants to gain accurate data from across a generation. However, due to the subject's sensitivity, semi-structured interviews provided the ability to get broad and in-depth details and opinions on the subject. Another considerable limitation would be researcher bias which cannot be eliminated. However, for the benefit of this study, the researcher's bias was kept open-minded and balanced.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The research supervisor approved the research question proposal. Due to the sensitive personal nature of the research question, all participants were advised that they did not have to answer any particular question that they felt uncomfortable answering. The information and data gathered were done so with full permission and compliance verbally communicated and recorded by each participant. All participants were briefed on the research question and were made aware of the subject of the interview and the personal nature of the questions. As mental health was a compassionate and personal aspect of the interview, the participants were

reminded once again on this particular question that they were not obligated to answer the question if they felt at all uncomfortable discussing such a personal subject.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Participants

Below, there is a profile of each of the five participants and the main themes derived from the data of the impact of social media on millennial males' romantic relationships. Several themes emerged from the data analysis of the five semi-structured interviews. The main themes under how social media has affected millennial males in romantic relationships are identity, mental health, marriage, algorithms, and dating apps. From analysing the data produced in these interviews, it is clear that social media has had a significant impact on the millennial male's life; however, there are many complex and exciting opinions on romantic relationships for this specific generation.

- **Participant 1** – Is a thirty three year old millennial male from inner city Dublin. He is working as a barber in the City Centre for the last ten years. He has multiple social media accounts, the most popular of which is Instagram. He spends what he would describe as a considerable amount of time on this app daily. He has suffered from his mental health and relates this experience to social media. He has been in a relationship for nine years, and he met his partner in person. He would be open to using a dating app if he was single.

- **Participant 2** – Is a twenty seven year old secondary school teacher from North Dublin City. He is in a relationship for the past seven years. He is a regular social media user but feels he has a healthy relationship with his screen time. He would be open to using a dating app if he was single. He has a clear idea of his role as a modern man in society.

- **Participant 3** – Is a thirty one year old male from Dublin City. He has one three year old son and a new baby on the way. He is no longer in a relationship with the children's mother. He works as a civil servant for the Irish Government and owns his gym, a part-time personal trainer. He has two social media platforms, which are used very selectively as he feels they have had a considerable negative impact on his mental health. He met his ex-partner in person and would not be open to using a dating app to find a potential partner. He is against marriage in this modern society and feels very confused about his identity as a modern man.

• **Participant 4** – Is a twenty nine year old male who is currently single with no children. He is from Belfast and lives in Dublin. He works as an accountant. He has been single for over nine years. He uses social media anonymously for informative reasons only. He is aware that excessive screen time is negative in his life and is trying to cut down on that. He has a traditional idea of his role and identity as a male in modern society; however, he can recognise blurred lines. Marriage and children are an aspiration, and he is currently using a dating app to find a potential partner online. He sees this to be a mediocre experience and would rather meet new people in person. He has not linked social media to feelings of negativity however is very aware of the potential. He feels that dating apps and social media do make dating difficult due to the idea of endless choice.

• **Participant 5** – Is a thirty one year old male from Carlow, living and working in Dublin. He is a barman and is currently single for about six years. He met his ex-partner online and is currently using dating apps, although he would prefer not to. He uses social media as little as possible as he has openly and with certainty linked his ongoing struggles with mental health to the pressures of social media. He has a clear idea of what it means to be a man in modern society. However, He feels it's very different from previous generations in this digital age and suggests it is more challenging to form monogamous relationships. He would have considered himself addicted to social media at a point in his life that seriously impacted his mental health.

4.2 Social Media Addiction

This theme emerged clearly from the outset of the interviews. All participants felt that social media addiction was a very prevalent issue in modern society and significantly impacted millennial males' daily lives. Four out of the five participants admitted to currently experiencing or previously experiencing social media addiction to one or many different platforms. Across the data, Instagram was most prevalent, with both participants having the app and or using the app religiously. They all were aware of their screen time. One participant needed to buy a different type of android to avoid logging into a location tagging social media device. The data revealed that social media addiction was something they were aware of and most had experienced across all of the applicants. Suggesting that checking in on social media multiple times a day is now a very regular and almost automatic part of our day.

"It got to a level where I turn off locations like I had to turn it off to, to free myself"
*(**Participant 4**)*

Participant 1 was very aware of his screen time by its effect on his life and had to make a conscious decision to reduce the screen time and take social media out of his morning routine suggesting social media has a significant impact on his regular daily life.

"I do know what's bad. Like, I do know. Like, I do know, it's definitely above average anyway. Like, only recently, I did make the decision, you know, to kind of tell myself to, you know, lower my social media time because I know that it affected me because I constantly have my phone in my hand. I'm trying to, for example, one of the worst things you can probably do is open your phone first thing in the morning, and I'm trying not to do that. Sometimes I forget. It's like an automatic thing I do. And then I realise I'm doing it, and I'm like, Nope, just you know, so I am trying to limit it, so I do obviously know that the time is bad. If I'm thinking that way. You know what I mean?"
(Participant 1)

Participant 4 was so aware of the damage that excessive screen can do to his productivity that he uses Twitter anonymously only to follow sport and current affairs and only uses a ghost profile on Instagram to verify potential Tinder date authenticity—suggesting that millennial males are all too aware of the effects of social media in one's daily life.

"I have an Instagram account. But there are no followers not following any, and I would log in, and it's only if I come across someone on a dating app to search the just to sort of check them out and see if there are any photos there to verify"
 (Participant 4)

Participant 3 was very tuned into how quickly social media can become addictive and was aware that he was spending an unhealthy amount of time on social media, which was to have a negative effect on his life. As a result, he now just uses social media for his child's pictures and his personal gym business.

"So, at the minute, I only have two. And I, believe me, I just use the one for the baby. So friends family can see pictures because I thought I was too much on social media for a long time"
(Participant 5)

From the literature, there is the suggestion that social media addiction is becoming a worldwide issue in this modern society. People having multiple social media accounts across

various platforms and feeling the need to check in on these apps numerous times a day are real issues. (Cabral, 2011).

4.3 Mental Health

All the participants addressed the effect that social media can have on mental health. The majority of the participants admitted to suffering from lapses and ongoing struggles with their mental health in the last five years. According to the literature, there is a mental health epidemic in Ireland with young men with suicide rates increasing in this millennial male age group (HSE.ie). An interesting study by has found a direct correlation between social media addiction and mental health. Proving that the effects of social media can change and alter mood in individuals (Vannucci, Flannery and Ohannessian, 2017). Excessive use of social media has been linked to a negative change in people's moods and attitudes to life (Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis, 2015). Although the participants of the interview all addressed the topic of mental health, not all participants linked this to social media directly. The findings highlighted that not all participants felt social media was to blame for low mood or lapses in mental health. Others were absolute and definite that social media was very much to blame for their lapses in mental health. Participants reported feeling the need to gain validation from pictures and comments and low mood when the validation is not achieved. They also reported a considerable negative effect from social comparison, particularly around holidays and material items.

Participant 3 reported struggling with mental health for the last ten years. He relates the previous five years to social media consumption and the adverse effects of social comparison. He has suffered low moods and feelings of worthlessness due to the consumption of social media.

"Well, see, it starts off here, like, I think we're the generation where social media began. So like, we got the initial Bebo, Facebook that sort of thing, like, and that was all fine and dandy at the start. But yeah, when it comes in the modern-day, like, Instagram, and then in the past four or five years, things have changed from what they used to be, you're comparing your body, you're comparing everything to what somebody else has. It festers in your brain because you think I should have that. I need that. You might not want those, but you think you do. And that's what social media now does. And it's just a spiral. It's a pit. And then once you get that flicker of something in your head saying you're not good enough, you'd never be good. You just fall down. Wonderland, and that's it, and it's very hard to get out. I'm dealing with a decade of mental health. I'm very functional. I can function in society. No problem. But it's just it's, it's there. It's like, and for a guy especially, it's like, you have to keep it a secret. You have to pretend everything when it's not"

23

(Participant 3)

Participant 1 felt that he often has low feelings of where he is in his life and that social media has a role in bringing up those feelings.

"There are days where I look around, and I say, Jesus, I've so much compared to other people. And then there are days where I'm completely low, and I'm like, Why don't I have these things? And I do think social media has a hand in that; it does!"
(Participant 1)

However, participant 5, while expressing his mental health issues are absolutely linked to social media and perhaps heightened by social media; interestingly, participant 5 also describes how social media's new wave of showcasing a more authentic side of their life still brings up feelings of inadequacy.

"You look on social media, and you see people being all like oh, this guys is a great dad, isn't he wonderful. But they're not showing you like the other side, and you know that you are allowed to get annoyed at kids? You are allowed to be annoyed at yourself. You are allowed to miss gym sessions on everyone always says these things. And, you know, this is a new thing on social media where people are trying these things. It's okay to miss a gym session. This is what I look like without the filter. And that's all great. That's just attention-grabbing in its own shape or form. What's really hard is so I can understand that. I could understand that for a long time, on an intellectual level. I found it very hard to understand that on an emotional level that I never actually, so I'd say these things, and I said the things. I could quote your summary of a book or psychology article or whatever it is, you know, the, you know, the affirmations, this person does this, all that power of now stuff whatever when it actually comes to internalising those feelings and sitting with them. Very it's a very different world because when, instead of sitting with feelings most of the time, we'd go down a YouTube rabbit hole or social media rabbit hole and distract from the actual point of, you know, what happens if I miss a few gym sessions? You know, what happens if I eat that burger if we get annoyed or don't want to do something more? Whereas if we don't, you know, have some particular brand or some particular whatever it is car? What's that? What does that mean about me? And that adds up. And that's like a ticking time bomb for most people"
(Participant 5)

It has been argued that these constant advertisements have created a "junk values" culture in society, creating the attitude that everything is replaceable, including relationships. Hari (2019) discusses that hyperreality, attention span, and instant gratification are all new areas of concern that have arisen in the digital age. Hari (2019) suggests a direct correlation between mental health issues and social media usage, suggesting that there is an apparent effect and demonstrates the power of the Internet to potentially influence in negative ways and have a negative impact on one's mental health.

24

Participant 1 felt that he had lapses in his mental health in the last five years, especially the previous two, and while naming social media as a factor and admitting his conscious efforts to reduce his screen time, he also did reveal that there were other factors at play such as being unable to change his career due to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

"I'm very aware of what's happening with myself with social media. So I'm trying to, you know, cut my social media time and change careers, and find them hard to kind of motivate myself, especially from COVID 19".
(Participant 1)

4.4 Identity

All participants had a more traditional sense of identity and felt that that the more "Alpha" male role was what they were expected to be. They felt this role included being a bread earner and having a traditional family unit with children, which they all did express a desire to execute in the general sense. They said overall that this sense of a male role had trickled down through families and social expectations; however, some participants revealed that the idea of what a man should be has been blurred in this modern age. Macnamara (2016) discusses how modern media, amongst other changing societal factors, have shaped male identity from traditional ideas of "workaholics" to a more modern concept of "metrosexuals." One participant felt that he had no real sense of his identity, feeling that the expectations are mixed with a hangover from the past blended with the modern metrosexual male.

"Men, new modern men are supposed to be domesticated. But still angry, but not angry in a way that's supposed to intimidate people but angry enough to in the right circumstance you're supposed to do the right thing. So you're supposed to be athletic with the ability to fight, but not fight. And then you're supposed to be domesticated but not too domesticated because that could be misconstrued differently. But women don't like men who are a little bit too soft or anything like that. So then you're supposed to be emotional. We're not too emotional. And then it's distant, but not too distant. And even more so now than ever, I think the real problem because women get again to get snippets of whatever reality is shown to go over this person's, it's all there just get an idea of something completely fake, and then you think you want something you don't you can't get it because there's no balance in what it is."
(Participant 5)

Interestingly, all the participants agreed that if and when they have had an online presence,

the image they portrayed of their identity online was not a full or true representation of their true identity. They admitted to feeling pressure to perform a particular identity online. When Participant 4 was asked if his social media would have represented his true identity, he was sure it did not and could not for anyone.

"I think people will just present themselves the way at the time they think they are they want to be seen. So no, I don't think it would have been, it wouldn't have been like a wildly inaccurate representation, but certain aspects of yourself, you're going to hype up and others you're going to play down."
(Participant 4)

4.5 Dating and Romantic Relationships

The findings in the interviews revealed some interesting facts about millennial males when it comes to dating and romance. The majority of the group were in committed long-term relationships, with two of the participants being single. However, those two single participants were both actively seeking love. The millennial males all believed in monogamy and set that as their ideal goal. They were all seeking a typical traditional romantic relationship in life and felt the importance of that. The literature suggested that the millennial male has much more freedom of choice and easy access to sexual selection due to social media and the modern digital age creating a "hook up" culture among the generation (Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber, 2017). However, the semi-structured interview findings challenged this theory, with the participants seeing real value in long-term committed relationships and using social media and dating apps as one tool in achieving this ideal.

Participant 4 explained how he wants to seek natural, long-lasting love.

"I'm very, I'm very like, I like you. I like you. I love you. I love you. And being content being with the same person, until we pick out each other's coffins. Just like waking up to the same face every day. Fighting with the same is over stupid things. Like it's, I'm very into monogamy. I'm very into growing old with someone. And it's comfortable with someone so long that you can show your wrinkles, you can show a bit of belly. You can just love someone. Because you love them, not because of what they look like."
(Participant 4)

While in the literature, hyper-reality came up as a topic of interest in the modern age, where social media portrays a certain image or relationship goal that can influence people, making them feel that they need things to be a certain way in a relationship (Vogel and Rose, 2017)

26

When asked, all participants expressed their "must-haves" in a relationship as trust, companionship, similar values, and life aspirations over the superficial idea of what a partner should be.

"Openness, trust, respect. And shared vision for the future. Doesn't have to be exact, but generally in agreement on principles, how you live your life and all that sort of thing."
(Participant 4)

"My must have's? It's not never really been anything to do with looks. I'm more personality, and I always have been personality. But the big thing for us trust is my make or breaker."
(Participant 3)

4.6 Marriage

Marriage rates have gone down in Ireland, and divorce rates are increasing in comparison to previous generations (CSO.ie, 2018). The study shows that 42% of millennials between the ages of 25 – 37 were married, compared to 83% of the same age who were married in 1968. This is a staggering decline in marriage (Pew Research Centre, 2021) Four out of the five participants see marriage as an aspiration, and three of the five also would see children as an aspiration. Participant 5 admitted an interesting angle on marriage, admitting that while he has two children, marriage is of no interest to him because it is no longer an equal playing field for men and women. Social media has made people feel disposable.

"I like the idea of marriage. I like the concept, but too many horror stories out there. It's not a level playing field for men as far as marriage is concerned. I feel like marriage in itself isn't what it used to be. The reason why, with social media and people, seem more disposable. So I don't think marriage is what it was. It was kind of more of a team effort. Absolutely. But it seems to be less and less of a team effort now than it was in the past. Yeah. I don't know; some people probably just don't have to stay together now. Because there's money out there. And there's options and assistance, but I don't agree with it, I'd rather just not do it"
(Participant 5)

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Understanding the Findings

The study's objective was to define if social media has had a negative effect on millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships. The common thread through the findings of the semi-structured interviews was the definite and apparent impact of social media on the lives of millennials as a whole. They are touching on all areas of their lives in a multitude of different aspects. Social media seems to affect the participants differently. However, it has had an apparent effect on each participant. They are defining if social media has had a negative effect on romantic relationships in particular.

5.2 Social Media

Social media addiction was very apparent across the interviews. The participants were all social media users, albeit, on different platforms and capacities, but they all had and used social media in some form frequently. All participants were aware of social media addiction, reporting having had or currently engaging with these platforms throughout the day every day. This was to such an extent that some participants had deleted certain apps and accounts to deter themselves from overuse which they felt was impacting their lives. Participants were aware of their screen time and the amount of time wasted in real life while online and were very mindful of this. An unexpected finding in the interviews was that one of the participants had an anonymous social media account where he could look at news and sport online. This finding showcases the enormity of the social media addiction issue and the impact on the day-to-day lives of the millennial male. The need for information is there, however, the participant is very mindful of his presence online and potential screen time that he has taken it upon himself to input restrictions on them in order for him to live a more productive life.

5.3 Mental Health

The area of mental health is a thread that appeared throughout the research. It was clear from the interview findings that most of the participants would describe themselves as having had or are currently experiencing lapses in their mental health. This has affected their day-to-day lives and, in turn, as a default, their relationships, both current relationships and in the pursuit of seeking relationships. The consensus between the participants was that social media could

undoubtedly negatively affect your mental health. Participants reported physiologically damaging issues from social media such as needing likes on pictures, looking for validation online, materialism, and social comparison. These needs in millennial males were reported across the interviews as negatively affecting their overall mental well- being. An area for genuine concern was in social comparison. The millennial male participants felt that comparing their lives to the "highlight reel" of others left them feeling less than in their own lives and caused them to look inward, provoking feelings that made them question who they were in life and where they were going in life. Across the interviews, this social comparison appeared in careers, holidays, friends, material items including cars and fashion, and romantic relationships. It should be noted that the findings revealed that social media was not the sole and specific reason for these lapses in mental health but indeed a considerable aspect.

5.4 Identity

The issue of identity was a significant discovery in the research. The subject of identity is relative to the study regarding previous generations typically having a more traditional idea of life, including romantic relationships. Modern media depicts a more modern, metrosexual man, whereas, in the past, the more traditional workaholic man was depicted, argued by Jagger (2001). The interviews revealed in fact; that while the majority of the participants felt that the role of the male in modern society is quite unclear and that they do not have a real sense of their role in modern society, they still do aspire to the more traditional values around male identity and their role in society. The participants aspired to long- term monogamous relationships, marriage and most would like to have children. They were aware that the male identity and role is quite different to previous generations where men were considered to be emotionally more secure than women and had to protect their family, and felt that in the current digital climate, men were much more metrosexual and are encouraged to share their feelings and show more emotion. Interestingly, while they are very aware of this shift and still feel the impulse to dress, act and purchase materialistic items to portray a specific masculine image online, they are very much still aspiring to the more traditional male role in a romantic relationship and aspire to settle down and have a family. The participants admitted to their online social media being an untrue and exaggerated version of themselves. Almost a different identity online. Although being confused around identity with the influence of the modern age, the participants still aspire to the more traditional male identity and role, especially when it comes to romantic relationships and family.

29

5.5 Dating

The issue of dating was at the centre of this research; the literature suggests that the millennial male, with the aid of dating apps and social media, has become very open-minded to a fault when it comes to dating. Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber (2017) examine the theory that dating apps have created a hook-up culture. The findings were quite the contrary. They found that dating apps have been a positive tool when seeking a partner in the long-term capacity. Interestingly, the semi-structured interviews revealed that the majority of the millennial males have met their partners, or would instead meet potential partners in person, rather than online. The idea of identity and online perceptions arose here again, with the participants realising that when seeking a partner, the online platforms are not the best place to meet as people tend to showcase a highlight reel of themselves and also touched on the idea of catfishing, where a person will use photographs that are enhanced with filters which are not an accurate representation of people online. The participants were not all opposed to using the apps but would meet a potential partner in person.

5.6 Hyperreality

The issue of hyperreality was a factor in this study. With millennials being so used to how people and relationships are showcased, have they experienced so much nonreality that their expectations are heightened compared to previous generations? The literature suggests that social media has brought overstimulation to people's lives by altering one's expectations for everyday life. The findings from the interviews unveiled that millennial males had very realistic and straightforward expectations for a romantic relationship. The participants named very noble and profound 'must have's' in their interviews, such as trust, honesty, and similar life values and goals as their expectations. This suggests that they have a realistic expectation of what is needed to make a happy long-term relationship work. One participant spoke of having a dating app and actively looking for a partner with whom he can grow old. Although the opportunity for many options is there, they still crave the traditional, nuclear relationship and family as previous generations.

5.7 Marriage

As detailed in the literature review, marriage rates have dropped in Ireland in comparison to previous generations. Divorce rates have increased, and further studies on millennials have

found that this generation is getting married much later than previous generations, having fewer children, and having them later than previous generations (Pew Research Centre, 2021). However, the studies' findings interestingly show that most of the participants want to get married and create a traditional nuclear family. Marriage and children are an aspiration for these millennial male's contrary to the statistics. Looking deeper, the study found that there may be other issues at play because the rates for marriage have dropped in Ireland. The interviews show evidence that marriage is, in fact, in this generation felt not to be an equal playing field. Marriage to the millennial male is not assumed to be what it was in previous generations. Davidson (2020) revealed the differences in millennials in comparison to previous generations in a multitude of areas. Due to their dependency on social media, they would instead communicate through online portals rather than face to face, which has had a significant impact on relationships. However, the interviews have shown that despite the findings in the literature review, the millennial male would still prefer to meet people face to face suggesting they may not be as dissimilar to previous generations as expected. Interestingly, an unexpected finding from the interview was that one participant was very aware that this generation does have difficulty speaking face to face and finds it easier to speak online. Despite this, they still describe preferring people to meet for romantic potential face to face and aspire to marriage and a traditional family unit.

Chapter 6 Recommendations & Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

The impact of social media and the digital age, in general, has a significant impact on the daily lives of the millennial male. Impacting every aspect of life as they know it. The evidence is there that the psychological impact has been notable and has shaped the daily lives and attitudes of the millennial male. Previous generations did not have the constant intervention of social media in their daily lives. The study revealed the impact of effects from social comparison, validation, and identity pressure. Having almost too much information and choice is an extensive amount of pressure for the millennial male. The participants did acknowledge the fact that they were aware of the potential adverse effects of social media. They also expressed the advantages of social media for socialising and news in their specific areas of interest. However, on the whole, the negative impact outweighed the positives. In terms of recommendations, with the digital effect being an ever-present and growing area, I would recommend more education around this field of study. Children especially entering the world of social media should be more educated in the potential adverse effects of social media. Being aware of using social media more healthily would be highly beneficial to society. Children are now members of the online community from a young age. If they were educated in identity and social comparison, they might not be impacted as severely as the millennial males. This particular generation has had to face this new digital area alone. Subsequently, they learnt the effects after they had personal experience of the negative impact.

Further recommendations on this research would include the need to expand the sample size. The limitations of this research were the size of the sample. Although the sample size was sufficient for this research project, the findings were fundamentally varied, and so a larger sample size across the millennial male generation would be very beneficial. Research in this area would benefit from a large-scale survey where specific questions are confidentially asked to pinpoint if social media has had a negative effect on millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships. Focus groups would not be effective on this subject due to the personal nature of the research question. Subjects such as mental health, identity, and romantic relationships are very personal, and the data may be skewed due to the social pressures that millennial males feel, especially if they are in the company of other males.

This research has suggested multiple reasons why marriage rates have dropped, and divorce

rates are on the increase in Ireland. Identifying that the millennial males, while very aware of social media's effect on them and their relationships, are still fundamentally looking for love, marriage, and family. This suggests that other factors at play have changed romantic relationships for millennial males compared to previous generations. Further research in this field would be fascinating. To determine what other factors are at play to have changed the dynamics of this particular generation in comparison to their predecessors. Millennials have more opportunities than previous generations in fields such as travel, education, and finance. There is a gap in the research for further study to determine where the millennial males have changed. An exciting lead of research would be to widen the research to include millennial women also. Millennial women are also very different from their previous generations. They are notably different when it comes to reproduction. Millennial women are having fewer children and later in their lives than their predecessors. The millennial woman is as responsible for the changes in marriage rates as men. Opening the research to females may also produce a more precise image to determine if these changes in millennial males are due to social media impact alone and the other factors at play in this generation.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research question 'Has social media had a negative effect on millennial males' ability to build and sustain romantic relationships has been uncertain. From the findings in the literature and the semi-structured interviews, social media has inevitably had a significant impact on the lives of millennial males. Social media addiction has been widely reported in the literature and was also apparent from the interviews. Participants reported a negative psychological effect from social media, so much so that they took steps to reduce social media's presence in their lives. Reporting low mood due to seeking validation online and pressure from social comparison. There is a change in role and identity for the millennial male portrayed online; the more metrosexual male in modern society is conflicting with the hangover of the more traditional alpha male from previous generations. The millennial male in the literature has been described as having created a hook-up culture with social media and the introduction of dating apps.

The idea of hyperreality in the digital age has been questioned, and while the participants did feel pressure for material items, they did not appear to have unrealistic expectations of life when it comes to romantic relationships. The statistics show the reduction in marriage rates; millennials are waiting longer than previous generations to get married and have children

later than previous generations. However, the findings in this research reveal that although the millennial male has experienced the impact of social media in a more negative light than positive, they do use social media and dating apps for the greater good in finding potential romantic partners and these participants have a fundamental need to find a long-term monogamous relationship and to start a family. The majority of the participants were in long-term relationships, and those that are single were actively seeking them. The research suggests that there is a gap for further research to determine and look deeper into the other possible reasons for the change in the romantic relationships of the millennial male. When asked the overall research question, each participant felt that they could not give a firm yes or no as to whether social media was negatively affecting their roman- tic relationships. They all agreed that social media has its benefits in seeking and maintaining romantic relationships but also they were very aware of the adverse effects over and also while in and seeking romantic relationships.

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<center>**Appendices**</center>

Objectives

1. **Young men are struggling with their identity in the digital era. Has modern marketing on social media had a negative effect on male identity and role. Have men lost their way in heterosexual romantic relationships?**

2. **Has the digital climate, advertising and social media influence such as hyper reality has changed the millennial heterosexual man's expectations towards relationships by altering these expectations to an unrealistic level?**

3. **Have social media and dating apps had a negative effect on romantic relationships? Or have they aided millennial males in seeking a partner?**

4. **The digital era has essentially made millennial males unhappy and effected their mental health and so effected their views on the quality of their relationships.**

Questions

1. How many social media platforms do you have and what would be your average weekly screen time? among all social media platforms, which one(s) you are most active on? What do you do on this platform?

2. Are you in a relationship right now? If yes, ask for the duration. If no, then ask if you have been in a relationship, for how long? And how long ago was that relationship.

3. Did you meet your partner online? Using a dating app or alternative social media platform.

4. Would you say you have a clear idea of your role as a man in modern society?

5. Is marriage / Family an aspiration?

6. What is your expectation / must haves in a romantic relationship?

7. Have you experienced lapses in your mental health in the last five years?

8. What do you think of monogamy/commitment to one partner in a relationship?

9. Have you had negative experience involving social media? Does social media ever evoke negative feelings for you in your relationship or as a single man?

10. What image do you think you are portraying on social media? Does that image match with your true personality?

11. Do you think social media is beneficial or a disadvantage to you when it comes to romantic relationships?