

Student Veterans' Shared Experience Using Social Media in Higher Education: A Pilot Study with a Hybrid Phenomenological Data Analysis Method

Kenneth Marsilio
Kjmst4@mail.rmu.edu
Robert Morris University
Moon Township, PA 15108, United States

Abstract

This study emphasized understanding how student veterans experience and what they do with social media. Student veterans typically have a much different college experience than nonmilitary students. A qualitative method was used to perform this research. The researcher adapted Colaizzi's and Moustakas's phenomenological methods to create a data analysis approach that fulfilled the needs of this study. Student veterans were interviewed with questions developed to attain their shared experiences. The research established that student veterans are using social media as a tool to communicate, build relationships, and seek assistance. They are having helpful experiences with social media to achieve their educational success.

Keywords: Student Veterans, Social Media, Higher Education, Phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is being used by students in the context of higher education. Researchers such as Neier & Zayer (2015), Bal, Grewal, Mills, & Ottley (2015), Alsurehi & Youbi (2014), Chauhan & Pillai (2013), and Knight, Rochon, & Hailey (2015), have highlighted the importance of understanding higher education students social media usage through their research. Yet there is limited research focused on how student veterans use social media to assist them in higher education. Student veterans can have a much different and difficult experience in higher education when compared to nonmilitary students (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell 2008; Jones, 2013; and Vesilind, 2013).

This distinctive experience is due to the challenging transition from military to college life. Therefore, it is critical to understand how student veterans' experience in higher education is affected by social media. The support that social media offers matches with the support that veterans can require (Wilson, 2014; Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013).

Research Questions

The central question that guided this study was:
RQ: What is the shared experience of student veterans who use social media in the context of higher education? The research question had three sub questions:

SQ1: How do student veterans use social media?
SQ2: How do student veterans perceive that they benefit or could benefit from using social media in the context of their higher education?
SQ3: How do student veterans' perceive peer networking through social media in higher education?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Veterans

Veterans earn their education benefits by serving in the military, but this service puts them at a disadvantage in the civilian academic world. Military service is a very unique experience; although many experiences are often positive, veterans typically find it more challenging pursue civilian education (Vacchi, 2012).

It is a significant culture shock to go from military culture to academic culture. Student veterans are not used to the level of self-responsibility that higher education requires for success. This transition can make veterans feel that going to school is the most stressful experience that they will have in their lives. The lack of a strong support structure and chain of command makes it more difficult for them to receive the support that they have been shown in the military. They typically do not fit in with the traditional students, as veterans can be older or more mature due to their military experiences (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell 2008; Olson, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014).

The cultural differences greatly impact this transition for military members. Hofstede's cultural dimension of Individualism vs. Collectivism has been used to show the conflicts of academic and military cultures. This dimension ranges from individualistic, where members of the group are highly independent, to collectivistic, where members of the group rely on one another. Academic and military cultures are ideal examples of these opposite ends of the dimension. Academic culture is one of individualism, where students are responsible for getting themselves to class and completing their assignments with little or no unsolicited assistance outside of the classroom. Conversely, military culture is collectivistic, where members are dependent on each other, look out for one another, and have a great deal of direction from authority. Additionally, student veterans typically cannot relate or interact well with traditional students who have the mentality of individualism since student veterans are used to working with those who have a team mentality (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Starr-Glass, 2013).

Social Media as the Support Bridge

Individuals are using social media to build peer support. It is helpful for peers who share similar challenges to support each other. It allows them to bond and feel a sense of group belonging. Those with brain injuries and mental illnesses use the Internet to blog and to bond with peers. Common themes emerged from this peer bonding method, including a minimized sense of isolation, coping with day-to-day problems related to mental ailments, finding support through peers, and sharing tips for medication and healthcare. The opportunity to share struggles, common experiences, and to have a network of people who have had similar experiences provides positive benefits through peer support (Naslund, Grande, Aschbrenner, & Elwyn, 2014).

Social media has allowed students to participate in a different type of learning experience. Cilesiz (2010), quoting Jonassen's research, states "since experiencing a mediated event is substantively different from direct experience of an event, the resulting phenomena or conscious perceptions must be substantively different" (p. 166). Social media has a distinct impact on the learning environment. While Cilesiz's research focuses specifically on using social media to instruct teachers on how to teach, he stresses how phenomenology is used in terms of understanding the academic world and students' experiences with social media. The learning theory created by Dewey (1938) emphasizes that learning takes place in experiences of the individual. Social media can influence individuals' learning experiences by altering their attitudes and preferences through a social media frame (Cilesiz, 2010).

Social Media and Student Veterans

Pittsburgh area student veterans, which were the area of study, most preferred method of communication for sharing benefit information was orally. Their response was different from non-student veterans. The student veterans' top three responses to usage questions did not contain social media as a preferred method, where other veterans did have social media in their top three preferred methods of communication (Stevens, 2012).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was used with a phenomenological framing and data analysis process. The phenomenological data analysis implemented was adapted from two different data analysis processes. The main data analysis methodology was founded in Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis process, depicted in Appendix C. The "construction of phenomena" data analysis steps were adapted from Moustakas's (1994) and Yuksel & Yildirim's (2015) approaches, illustrated in Appendix D, and combined with Colaizzi's data analysis process. This hybrid methodology, shown in Appendix B, was created to utilize Colaizzi's methodology while adding the textural and structural dimensions of Moustakas's (1994) and Yuksel & Yildirim's (2015) analysis processes, as that was determined to be the best method to analyze the data.

Population and Sample

The criterion purposive approach was thought to be the best suited purposive approach for this phenomenological study. The criterion purposive

approach ensures that the participant satisfies specific criteria (Cilesiz, 2010). The required criteria for this study were that participants were student veterans who use social media. The researcher worked with a university's Veteran Center, from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area, to ask for volunteers. The researcher used two sampling methods, starting with the criterion purposive approach, but had to turn to the snowball sampling method to obtain two more participants to reach the minimum sample size of 10 participants (Bryman, 2012; Cilesiz, 2010). The snowball sampling method is where current participants recommend other possible participants who meet the criteria (Emerson, 2015).

Data Collection Method

The data collection method was done through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The semi-structured interview protocol was used for this study. This protocol ensures general consistency during the interview process (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interview protocol for this study consisted of six questions and some probing questions to assist in the interview process. The interviews averaged 30 minutes, which is why they were not considered in-depth interviews. The interviews were recorded for transcription purposes.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process started with bracketing the researcher's subjectivity. This process is labeled bracketing, or epoché, and it refers to the researcher setting aside his biases of the phenomenon. Bracketing is a consistent theme in phenomenological research. Moustakas (1994) insists it is important for the researcher to remove his preconceptions of the phenomena in order to be able to truly understand the participants' experience of the phenomena. The researcher wrote down his experience of the phenomena in order to identify possible preconceptions. These preconceptions were reflections of how the researcher positively experienced using social media for higher education to build a support network.

The interview transcriptions were used to perform the data analysis. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis steps were utilized to begin the process. The first data analysis step the researcher took was to read and reread the transcripts. This process ensured the researcher had an overall understanding of the essence of the transcribed interviews. The next step was extracting the significant statements from each transcript that relate to the

phenomenological experience that is being investigated. Significant statements are the statements that depicted the essence of the experience from the participant's interview responses. The researcher then formulated themes or meanings from the significant statements. These themes or commonly shared perceptions were then categorized into clusters of themes.

At this point, the researcher found it more appropriate to combine the 5th and 6th step from Colaizzi (1978) and an adapted version of the fifth through seventh steps of Yuksel & Yildirim's (2015) and Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological data analysis procedures to construct the "what" and "how" of the experience to construct the phenomena. The researcher analyzed the clustered themes by what and how the phenomenon was experienced. These two construct composites were used to synthesize the shared experience of the phenomenon, which is described later in this study. This was the best method for the construction of the phenomenon and assisted in creating an in-depth description of the shared essence of the experience.

Validity and Reliability

The purposive sampling approach was used to ensure the participants have experience with the phenomena being investigated. The phenomenological bracketing process performed by the researcher also ensures validity of the data and data analysis by eliminating the researcher's bias (Neuman, 2003). The interview protocol was screened for its effectiveness through the face validity approach. Face validity is a method that examines the questions to see if they obviously measure the variables that they are supposed to measure (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The qualitative questionnaire data analysis was tested for reliability by the intercoder reliability test. This reliability test has a second coder review the data coding that was originally performed to determine if the data coding was done in a logical manner. The steps taken for validity for the piloted hybrid methodology was having the participants review the study results to ensure it accurately reflected what they wanted to relay. The participants did validate that the data analysis and results aptly depicted their experiences (Compton, Love, & Sell, 2012; Riege, 2003).

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

Demographics

The participant group was made up of three females and seven males. There were an even mix of undergraduates and doctoral students,

each category having five participants. The participants' age range was from 19 to 50 years old. All of the participants were Caucasian, which limited the diversity of the study in terms of race. While the request for participants was sent to a diverse population, as stated earlier, only 10 student veterans volunteered to participate for the study. Due to time restrictions, additional attempts to gain diverse participants could not be performed.

The Shared Experience.

The shared experience of student veterans employing social media in the context of their higher education was described by the two dimensions of "what" and "how" and then a synthesized description of those two dimensions. The "what" and "how" dimensions are similar to the two dimensions of a phenomenological experience discussed in Yuksel and Yildirim (2015): the textual component and the structural component. The "what" relates to the textual dimension, as in the objects of action, or what had occurred. The second dimension is "how," which relates to the structural, the act of the experience. The clusters were built from similar themes under one general category or cluster as part of the phenomenological data analysis standards (Moustakas, 1994; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

4.2.1 Cluster of "What" Themes. The main themes for what was experienced were: Communication, Information, Relationship Building, Collaboration, Recreation, and Usage. Communication was the most common cluster of themes. There were 115 of the 305 "what" theme occurrences of social media being used for communication by the student veterans, which are illustrated in Table 2. Participants discussed their social media experiences with communicating with peers, communicating with teachers, and communicating with other student veterans or veteran specific websites. Another theme that fit into this clustering was face-to-face communication. Participant 5 had a similar experience with social media to communicate with peers, stating:

"Twitter, I actually used it last semester. There's a girl in my class and we didn't have each other's numbers. We weren't friends on Facebook but we called each other on Twitter. So for assignments and stuff we would you know, tweet each other or PM each other about a quiz or projects. We didn't have a number, we never talked to get each other's number, and we just used Twitter basically to communicate."

The next cluster of themes was Information. Sharing information and accessing information about school were the two themes that discussed information the most. These themes identify participants' experiences where social media was used to share or retrieve information. This cluster relates to communication, but the experiences that the student veterans described here did not necessarily have to do with communicating back and forth. It could just be going on social media to retrieve information or simply to input information to the social media platform without a response. Participant 2 shared one of his experiences with sharing information stating that:

"I definitely use WhatsApp. That's more for me, an academia perspective. Typically, I'll use WhatsApp to communicate with my colleagues, and that's also a very professional site as well. It's one of those where we are sharing different things about our thesis or about ideas of professional papers that we would like to publish, but that as well crosses the boundaries of all media."

Relationship building themes was the third clustering of themes. The two themes of peer bonding and networking were clustered together as they both focused on relationship building. This cluster addresses research sub question 3, discussing how student veterans use social media to perform peer networking or bonding. Participant 3 describes one experience he had that enabled him to network and bond:

"There's a fraternity up here that contacted me. They are actually trying to restart this fraternity up here I think. They contacted me through social media and I am not really sure exactly if I wanted to do it but I did meet a few guys through social media through that. Another group, WeChat that I am in, that's another way that I made a few new friends up here talking to them through that."

Collaboration was the fourth theme that emerged from the data. This clustering of themes was comprised of the three themes, researching, assistance, and feedback. Student veterans used social media to perform research for higher education. This theme is for when students are expressly searching or communicating on social media for the purpose of getting help with school. Participant 5 was able to communicate and provide assistance and feedback with another student through social media. Participant 5 expressed this experience by stating:

"It was just easier to communicate through Facebook, we saw each other on our Facebook, 'Hey, I just wrote this. Does this sound good?' And she would respond right away like, 'Yes, that sounds great.' 'Hey, check out this website. It has a lot of information about the essay that we need to write' and vice versa. Instead of texting or any of that, we could use Facebook for us to see each other online at the same time."

Recreation was another theme that emerged when having a discussion with the participants on "what" they did on social media. Recreation was typically not an experience that was done to help with schoolwork, but was done due to attending school. Participant 8 described some of the types of recreational activities that can be experienced. This is just one of the significant statements that were made, exhibiting that student veterans use social media to take a break from higher education responsibilities.

"I've used Facebook and Snapchat as kind of a break for when I'm studying. Like if I've been studying for a maybe an hour to one end I'll take a ten or so minute break every so often just to help my mind relax and help myself absorb information that I'm studying or researching."

Usage was the last major theme that participants discussed in the interviews. It was comprised of the significant statements that described their experiences with the general use of social media, not a specific feature of it. The common usage theme of security concerns was very well illustrated by Participant 6's comments on the experience of security, stating that:

"I'm so used to having security clearances. I'm so used to living in the shadows and being that protected communications person. Operation security at all time. You don't let anybody know anything that's going on. Even though I'm in the civilian world, I have a tendency to do that now. Using the social media for anything and even my VA benefits, anything to find out information. I think I'm a little guarded about it, because the ability of others to see the communications, they may not mean to see it."

4.2.2 Clusters of "How" Themes. After identifying the emerging "how" themes, the next step was to cluster these themes of how student veterans experienced social media usage. The four clusters that emerged from this step of the analysis were helpful, peer-related themes, relaxing, and informational.

The most dominant "how" theme was helpful. This cluster of themes was comprised of how students experienced social media as helpful for their higher education. Overall, 144 out of 210 themes that emerged were concerning how social media made their experiences performing different actions as helpful, specifically for class situations, convenient for their experiences with higher education, and was useful in these doing actions through for some aspect of school. Participant 1 describes his helpful experience with social media, alluding to multiple "what" themes, including collaboration, communicating, and finding information. Participant 1 described the experience by saying:

"You could get in touch with people that you wouldn't be able to otherwise. It's a little bit anonymous too, because you can create a profile that all you do is write papers and post them and if you cover your name and all your information, nobody knows who you are. So, it's a little bit easier to seek out help, I think, than coming here to campus and asking faculty members to meet with you part time about this, maybe, I don't know. It's 24/7 and you can get - it's easier to solicit information from here than I would be just meeting somebody. I would say, it's definitely very helpful to me educational-wise and I'm still trying to find something."

Peer-related was an element of "how" social media was experienced in the process of communicating. Whether it was communicating with peers or sharing information with them, participants described these experiences as essential to keep in touch with peers. Participant 7 was able to relate to peers through social media sites. Participant 7's perception was that:

"I think social media, particularly, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, which I use, personally, since I do not have a Facebook account that really helps me keep in touch with other classmates for our educational program, which is an executive style format. We don't meet on a weekly basis or a daily basis all through the semester. We meet only once a month face to face. And so I think that the use of social media is a great benefit to keep in touch, to talk with other people and to see what's going on, what troubles they're having, both personally and academically. You have somebody stuck, that they don't understand an assignment or they can't find a reference, and they need some motivation or some instruction or a pathway to get to wherever they need to go; a reference. Then, you can use social media that way."

Social media was able to make the experience of higher education more enjoyable. Student veterans discussed their need to take the time to do something they enjoy, which happens to be utilizing social media sometimes just to be entertained. Participant 3 describes their experience with using social media for enjoyment:

"I was doing a project for my business class and one night I was up pretty late doing it, I was having a lot of trouble with it and I just found myself, I wasn't focusing on the project anymore. I couldn't even stay focused and think anymore, so I took about a half hour, 45 minute break just to let my mind recuperate. I went on Snapchat, different social media."

Participants made significant statements that revealed that their perceptions of their experience using social media to access, share, and retrieve information was informational. Typically they perceived they were able to gain knowledge or come away from the experience more informed. Participant 7 described how social media was able to create informational experiences. Participant 7 stated that:

"I use social media most recently to look up videos for research tools such as Nvivo or SPSS. Those are the most recent examples. Other examples, go back if I needed to watch a lecture or a snippet on any particular topic of interest that I have either for my own educational purposes or for a classroom assignment. For example, I was asked to participate in another survey for another doctoral candidate, and they were talking about Peter Singe's The Fifth Discipline. I went on YouTube to see if there was any lectures on The Fifth Discipline, and there were. I was able to view those and get some background of what The Fifth Discipline was. That's one example. I also used SlideShare, which, I guess, is also a social media tool to get some slides on The Fifth Discipline."

The next stage of the analysis was synthesizing these two different dimensions of the shared experiences into one comprehensive narrative that describes the student veterans' synthesized experience with social media. The researcher combined the shared common themes of "what" student veterans used social media to do with the common themes of "how" student veterans experienced social media. The narrative of this synthesis is then supported through significant statements made by the participants.

4.2.3 Synthesized Experience. The synthesized experience described how social media was able

to provide student veterans with beneficial experiences in communicating, building relationships, dealing with information, and getting direct help with school work. These experiences were helpful and brought them closer with their peers. Student veterans felt relief from stress and connectedness by being able to have such convenient access to the support social media could provide to them. Participant 9 made a significant statement that illustrated social media's impact to a student veteran's experiences. In regards to social media's potential, Participant 9 shared:

"Having access in this, even ties into LinkedIn through unique groups that focus on veteran's transition. You realize that – not necessarily realize, but you come to the understanding that you're not the only person who's facing whatever occurrence, or struggle, or transition that you're going through. You realize that, 'Hey there's some hundred thousand people going through this transition as well,' and you have access to them with a keyboard or a touchscreen. And you can engage them in conversation, find resources, find ways to share what works for you."

5.0 Discussion

The emerging themes from the qualitative interviews provide an understanding of the shared experience of student veterans using social media. These "what" and "how" themes were synthesized to provide a detailed rich description of this experience by student veterans. The interviews clearly show that student veterans perceive they are definitely benefitting from the use of social media in higher education. Their experiences with using social media have made their transition and progress in higher education easier. All of the participants in this study have experiences with all at least one social media site daily. The essence of the shared experience by student veterans highlights the unique tools that social media provides to this population to help them succeed in higher education. This transitional experience can be stressful. As their experiences have alluded to, social media has improved the transition by providing a sound means of communication. Table 3 illustrates these main "what" themes along with the main "how" themes in the Findings section to describe the experiences described in the Section 4. This displays the main themes that were discovered in this research, supporting that student veterans were able to gain these beneficial experiences through the use of social media.

Findings

Student veterans are having positive experiences with social media. It should be a priority of the schools and student veterans to utilize social media. Schools should have social media sites that help students to connect with peers and build a school community. Student veterans should be using social media to build social networks that can provide support or use a social network for assistance. As there are different features from social media, schools should focus on the emphasizing the use of social media sites that connect students and build networks. Examples of these sites would be Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other sites that are geared towards building networks.

Student veterans are using social media to retrieve useful information from social media; they believe this is one of the most convenient methods of communication. Schools should ensure that they are making an effort to allow students veterans to benefit from social media. Other veteran services should also raise awareness of their social media services offered to student veterans and alleviate the concerns veterans have in using these services. The veterans' agencies that work with schools such as the VA should ensure that they promote the use of their social media to engage students. Social media is innovating learning and sharing information; student veterans need to be utilizing these innovative means of learning.

Significance of Study

This research contributes to the current body of knowledge of student veterans. It provides the understanding of student veterans' experience of using social media. Social media offers opportunities that can assist student veterans to hurdle the challenges that are encountered during transition. These challenges of isolation, difficulties bonding with peers, and the lack of communication and support can be conquered through communication and peer bonding experiences via sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. This research shows that student veterans perceive that they can receive several layers of necessary support through social media. Understanding student veterans' perceptions of social media could lead to better engagement, if they are having a positive social media experience. Therefore, student veterans should be engaged to utilize social media in higher education.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of diversity for the student veterans. While the

group was various ages and almost equally represented genders, there were only Caucasians as participants. Also, there were no graduate level student veterans, only undergraduate and doctoral level. A more diverse set of participants could have led to more accurate data representing student veterans.

Recommendations

One of the next steps that would supplement this research would be to do a comparative study on the experiences of nontraditional and traditional students. This would explore if there were significant variances in the perceived benefits and experiences with social media use between the two populations. Further research could also focus on understanding the differences in perceptions from the different age groups of student veterans using social media. As this research uncovered, there may be different perceptions among age groups of student veterans when it came to some of the different features of social media used in higher education. This understanding could provide more information to institutes of higher education to better promote social media use to student veterans.

Conclusion

The student veterans interviewed expressed they have very constructive experiences with social media. They addressed how they view social media usage differently based on their military experiences, for the example the distinctive mindset for controlling information security that comes from military duty. These experiences are often times helpful and convenient to the student veterans' needs and schedules. The 10 student veterans were able to take advantage of the benefits that social media offers to the realm of higher education. These student veterans were able to rely on social media to extend their support network. This enabled them to relieve some of the stressors of transitioning into higher education and helped them flourish throughout their educational journey. With additional exploration, research could establish if there is a significant variant between student veterans and the other subpopulations of students in respect to the benefits they feel they receive using social media in higher education. I would speculate that the type of benefits would be similar, but student veterans could gain more from the experience, as they tend to have a greater need for support structures and social networks in the academic environment.

6.0 REFERENCES

- Alsurehi, H., & Youbi, A. (2014). Towards applying social networking in higher education. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 6(5), 221-229.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cilesiz, S. (2010). A phenomenological approach to experiences with technology: Current state, promise, and future directions for research. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 59(4), 487-510.
- Chauhan, K., & Pillai, A. (2013). Role of content strategy in social media brand communities: A case of higher education institutes in India. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 22(1), 40-51.
- Compton, D., Love, T., & Sell, J. (2012). Developing and assessing intercoder reliability in studies of group interaction. *Sociological Methodology* 42(1), 348-364.
- Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In R.S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (48-71). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R. L. (2008). From combat to campus: Voices of student-veterans. *NASPA Journal*, 45(1), 73-102.
- Doody, O. & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(5), 28-32.
- Gravetter, F. & Forzano, L. (2012). *Research methods for the behavioral sciences*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 78.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Jones, K. (2013). Understanding student veterans in transition. *The Qualitative Report* 2013, 18(74), 1-14.
- Knight, J., Rochon, R., & Hailey, B. (2015). Lessons learned from four years of using social media to support transition to higher education. *Academic Conferences & Publishing International Ltd*, 242-246.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Naslund J., Grande S., Aschbrenner K., & Elwyn G. (2014). Naturally occurring peer support through social media: The experiences of individuals with severe mental illness using YouTube. *PLoS ONE* 9(10):e110171. doi:0.1371/journal.pone.0110171.
- Neuman, W. (2003). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Olson, T., Badger, K., & McCuddy, D. (2014). Understanding the student veterans' college experience: An exploratory study. *U.S. Army Medical Department Journal*, 101-108.
- Riege, A. (2003). Validity and reliability tests in case study research: A literature review with "hands-on" applications for each research phase. *Qualitative Market Research*, 6(2), 75-86.
- Starr-Glass, D. (2013). Experiences with military online learners: Toward a mindful practice. *Journal of Online Learning & Teaching*, 9(3), 353-364.
- Stevens, B. (2012). *Knowing is half the battle: How veterans in Southwest Pennsylvania learn and share benefit information, and the role of social media in the process*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest. (Accession Order No. 3646059)
- Svatosová, V. (2012). Social media such as the phenomenon of modern business. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 6(4), 62-84.
- Vacchi, D. (2012). Considering student veterans on the twenty-first-century college campus. *About Campus*, 17(2), 15-22.
- Vesilind, E. (2013). Serving those who serve. *Community College Journal*, 83(5), 48-53.
- Wilson, K. (2014). Perspectives in HRD—thank you for your service: Military initiatives on college campuses. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 26(3), 54-60.

Wilson, K., Smith, L., Lee, A., & Stevenson, M. (2013). When the Army post is the campus: Understanding the social and academic integration of soldiers attending college. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(6), 628-642.

Yuksel, P. & Yildirim, S. (2015). Theoretical frameworks, methods, and procedures for conducting phenomenological studies in educational settings. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry, 6*(1), 1-20

Appendix A: Table 1

Participant Number	Age	Degree Pursuing	Gender
Participant 1	30	undergrad	m
Participant 2	50	doctoral	m
Participant 3	19	undergrad	m
Participant 4	20	undergrad	f
Participant 5	20	undergrad	f
Participant 6	49	doctoral	m
Participant 7	48	doctoral	m
Participant 8	24	undergrad	m
Participant 9	36	doctoral	m
Participant 10	35	doctoral	f

Table 1. Participant Demographics Table.

Appendix B: Figure 1

<u>Hybrid Data Analysis Process</u>	
BRACKETING	1. Read and reread each transcript to ensure researcher has an overall understanding of content
	2. Extract each significant statement from the transcript that relates to the phenomenon being investigated
	3. Formulate Meanings from these significant statements
	4. Sort these meanings into categories or clusters of themes
	5. Construct the "how" of the experience from the themes
	6. Construct the "what" of the experience from the themes
	7. Synthesize Combine the 2 construct composites to create the shared experience of the phenomenon, take the synthesized findings and describe in-depth in the study.

Figure 1. Data Analysis – Hybrid Data Analysis Process Figure.

Appendix C: Figure 2

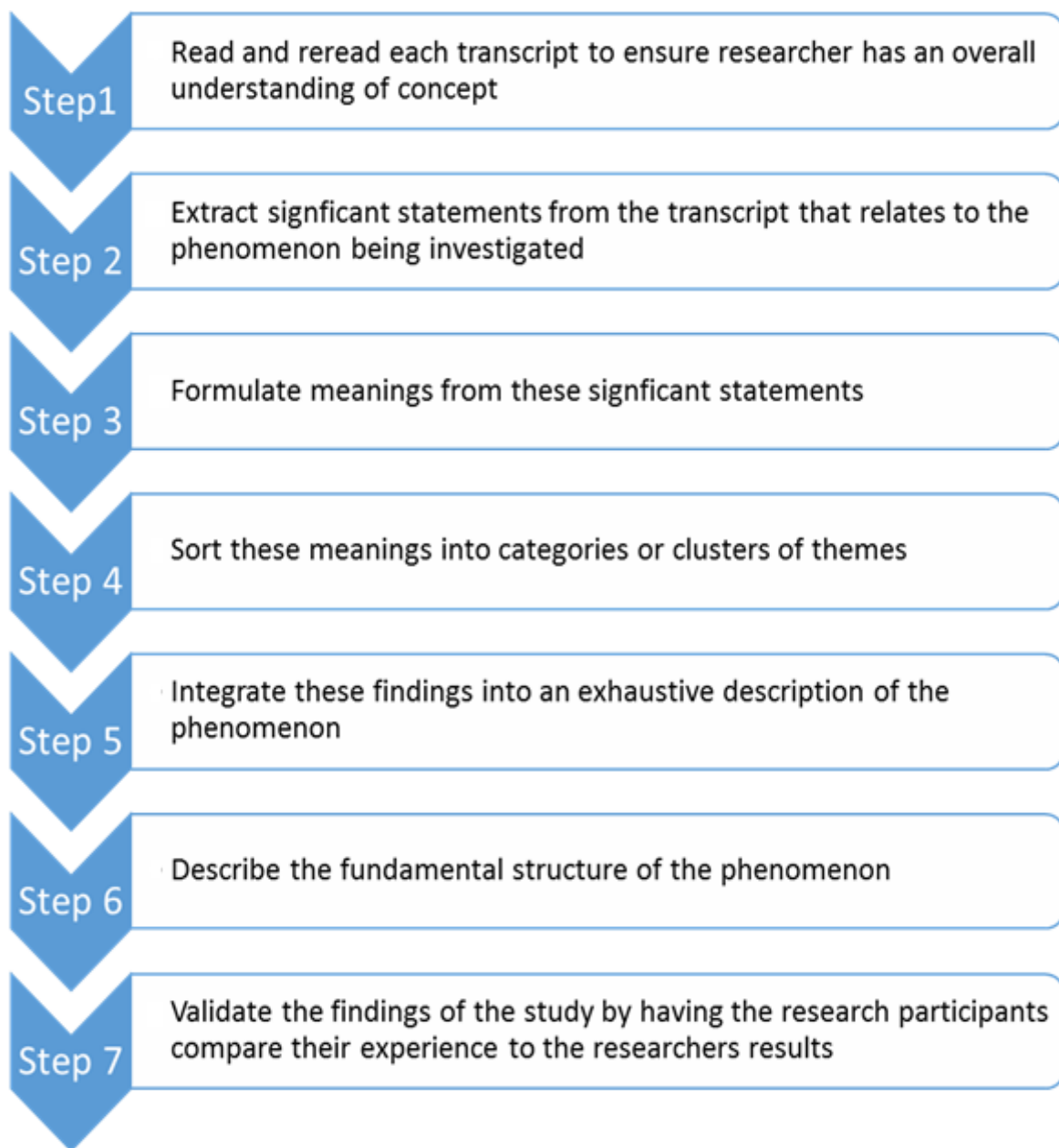


Figure 2. Adapted from Illustration of Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis steps.

Appendix D: Figure 3

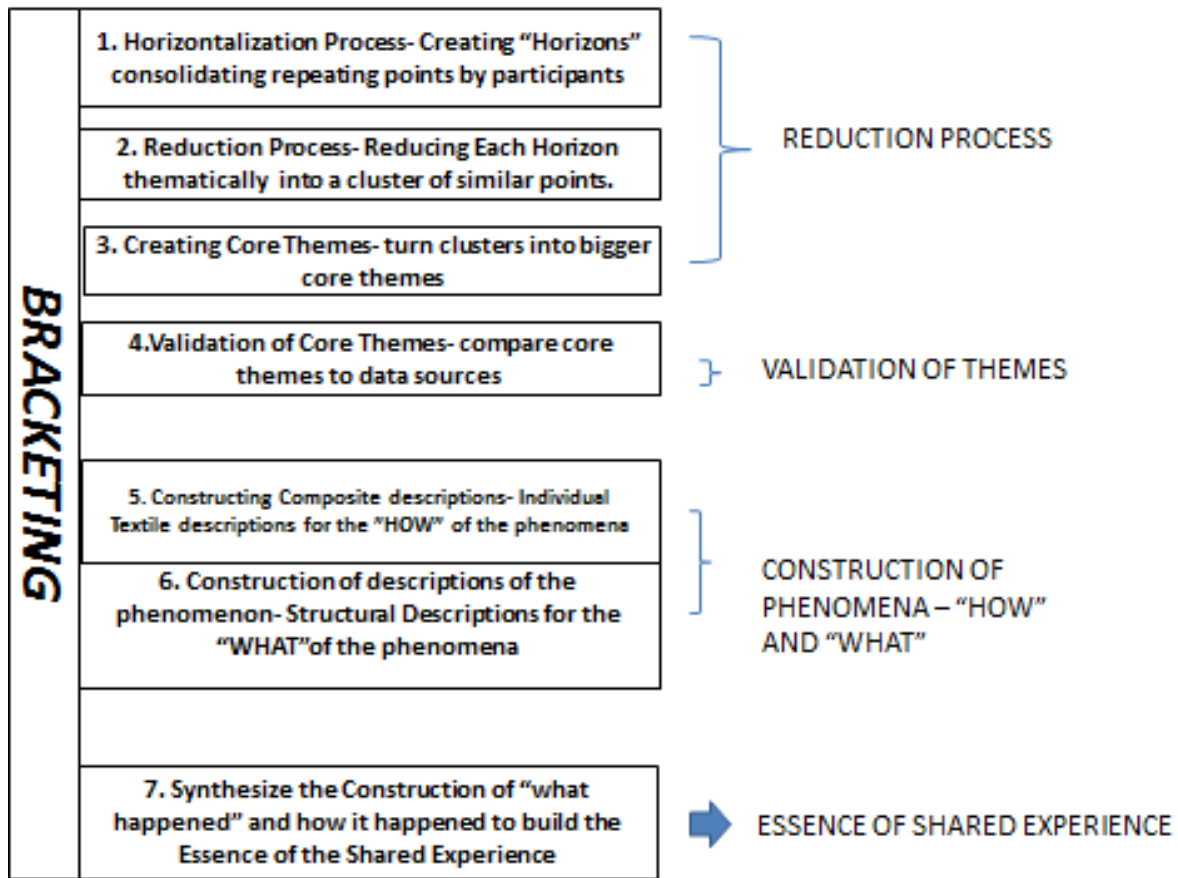


Figure 3. The steps of data analysis (adapted from Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015, p. 1).

Appendix E: Table 2

COMMON THEMES OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS												
What Experience Theme	How Experience Theme	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Totals
Communicating with Peers		5	6	9	4	11	10	10	6	10	9	80
	helpful	1	5	5			1	3	2	2	2	21
	helpful specific to a class				1	7	4	2	2		3	19
	convenient	2	1		1	1	1					6
	essential for communication with peers	2		1	1			2	2	2		10
	supporting peers					3		1	2	1	1	8
	keeping in touch			2		2		2	2		3	11
	can intensify demographic segregation						4					4
Sharing Information		7	8		4	8	4	8	1	3		43
	informational	3	3		1	2		2		1		12
	barely helpful	1										1
	advocates	1	2					2				5
	beneficial for school					6	2			1		9
	helpful	1	3		1	1	2	4	1	1		14
Peer Bonding		2	2		5		1	4	1	5	5	25
	perceived difficult initiation separated by demographics	1	1									2
	potential for bonding with veterans	1										1
	sense of belonging		1							1	2	4
	easier				1							1
	essential for peer bonding				1					1	2	4
	helpful				3			4	1	2	2	12
	connecting with other veterans				1					2		3
	essential for peer bonding, in private forums						1					1
Assistance		2	2	1	3	3	3	6		2	3	25
	helpful	1	2	1	1	3	3	6		2	3	22
	request is easier anonymously	1										1
	college life				2							2
	ability to use for assistance relieves stress										1	1
Recreation		3	3	5	1	2	1	4	4		1	24
	enjoyment	2	2	2					2			8
	stress relieving	1	2	4		2	1	4	3			17
Feedback		1	2			1	3	2				9
	helpful	1	2			1	3	2				9
Networking		4	4	4	2	1		4	1	2	1	23
	convenient	1	2									3
	potentially beneficial	2	2	2								6
	helpful	1			2	1		4		2	1	11
	helpful in finding similar peers				2				1			3

COMMON THEMES OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS Continued												
Accessing Information about School				6		8	3	1	2	2	1	23
	convenient			1		2						3
	required			1					2		1	4
	essential for accessing school information			1		2				2		5
	perceived standard for traditional student			1								1
	beneficial					4		1		2		7
	useless						3				1	4
Communicating Veteran Specific Issues/Sites		2	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	2	1	16
	prefers face to face	1					1		3			5
	lack of awareness of social media capabilities	2		2	1						1	6
	researching help		1			1						2
	perceives potential for benefits			1		1		1				3
	access to vet specific relieves stress									2		2
Researching		3				2		8	1			14
	helpful	3				2		5	1			11
	great help							1				1
Usage		2	1		1	2	2		3	1	1	13
	perceived usefulness	1					1					2
	security concerns	1					1		2	1		5
	potential for great helpfulness	1			1	2						4
	distracting		1		1				1		1	4
	social media sites vary in usefulness				1							1
	social media is useful in private settings						6					6
	perceived negative stigma over unconstructive use									1		1
Communicating with Teachers		2	1		2	1	1	4	1			12
	convenient	2	1		1	1		2				6
	useful				1	1	1	2	1			6
	helpful							1				1
Communicating Face to Face		1	1	1	3			1				7
	occurs more natural when shared demographic background	1										1
	easier to communicate clearly		1	1	3			1				6

Table 2. Common Themes of Significant Statement.

Appendix F: Table 3

Themes Discovered in Student Veterans' Experiences with Social Media	
"What" was Experienced Themes	"How" it was Experienced Themes
1. Communication	1. Helpful
2. Information Sharing/Retrieval	2. Peer Related
3. Relationship Building	3. Relaxing/Stress Relieving
4. Collaboration	4. Informational
5. Recreation	
6. Usage	

Table 3. What and How Themes Table.