

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF INSTAGRAM
ON YOUNG SOUTH AFRICAN ADULTS
SELF-ESTEEM**

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Abstract

The growth in smartphone penetration and access to social networking sites has seen an emergence of online personal brands as people with social media presence are knowingly or unknowingly communicating a crafted brand identity to an audience. This research paper is guided by the theory of social comparison and will examine the psychological effects of Instagram use on young South African adults in relation to Aakers Brand Identity model. The current academic research on psychological effects of social media presence is limited to one social networking site, Facebook. This study fills in the obvious gap by studying the visual SNS's, Instagram which is a photo and video sharing platform where over 300 million of personal brands converge. An online survey that included a 40 young people between the ages of 20-30 was conducted. The survey was followed by in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 10 respondents to gain deeper insights and understanding of the common themes around Instagram usage, behaviours and psychological implications. Results from the research study reveal that the need for relevance is a key driver for Instagram use and that the aesthetic nature of Instagram drives young adults to seek perfection and validation. Visual brand that compete on social media drive competition and upward social comparison. Instead of being impacted negatively this has a positive effect by motivating young adults to improve their lives.

CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Many corporations have used Aaker's Brand Identity model as one of the four pillars of creating strong brands According to Aaker and Joachimstaler (2000) a brand should have "a rich and clear brand identity that the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain". The concept of branding has traditionally been associated with products and services, however, the growth in smartphone penetration and social networking sites (SNS) in the past decade has created a platform for a different kind of branding; "online personal branding" (Labrecque, Ereni and Milne, 2010). A personal brand is defined as "the public projection of certain aspects of a person's personality, skills or values that stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for." (Peter Montoya, 2002).

Brands are built with the intention of achieving financial and non-financial success for organisations, and according to Aaker (1997) a strong brand will have financial benefits (Aaker, 1997, pg. 274). Similarly, there are many factors that drive personal online social media presence (Labrecque, Ereni and Milne, 2010) and with the growth in online social media presence, the psychological implications of being online has generated considerable attention. Some studies (Kim, LaRose and Peng, 2009, p.451–455.) reveal a positive psychological effect on self-esteem whilst other studies (Mesch and Talmud 2006, p. 137–148) indicate a negative effect. According to Rains and Brunner (2014), the obvious gap in the existing academic literature on the psychological implications of social media is that 80% of the research has been focused on a single SNS, Facebook (FB) and according to Rains and Brunner (2014) academics need to research more broadly. This study addresses Rains and Brunners' (2014) call to investigate other platforms by evaluating the psychological effects on young South African adult, of the more visual social networking site, Instagram.

1.2 RATIONALE

Branding is not just for companies anymore (Peter, 1997); having a strong personal brand, especially an online one has become just as important in an age where we spend more time online and where an online world is an important place to be seen (Lindahl and Ohlund, 2013). Instagram has been a great facilitator of personal branding through images which are used as a tool in identity creation (Lindahl and Ohlund, 2013). “Today we live in a photo-graphic image saturated world and visually using images are powerful ways of communicating oneself” (Lindahl and Ohlund, 2013). Through its features, Instagram gives personal brands the control to create and communicate the perfect and desirable identity to its audience through images. With Instagram being a “market place” where personal brands share visual content competition can arise and personal brands lend themselves to comparison as brands compete. This competition and comparison could have a detrimental impact on self-esteem. Research has been undertaken to understand the psychological impacts of SNS use; however 80% of this research has been limited to one social networking site, Instagram (Rains and Brunner, 2014). The aim of this study is to address a gap in the limited research and documentation on Instagram and its psychological impacts (Lindahl and Ohlund, 2013) by understanding the relationship between Instagram, personal brands and self-esteem.

1.3 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1.3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to survey and interview forty young between the ages of 20- 30 to better understand the psychological impacts of IG use on their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

1.3.2 Research problem

This intention of this research is to establish the psychological impacts of Instagram on young adult's self-esteem – *Does the use of Instagram impact online personal brands negatively or positively?*

1.3.3 Research Questions

Existing literature examines the psychological effects of SNS use, yet the phenomenon of the psychological effects on the newer, more visual SNS, such as Instagram has not been researched despite its growing popularity. This study addresses this research gap by investigating the following questions:

Research question 1: Why do young South African adults use Instagram?

Research questions 2: How do young South African adults use Instagram?

Research question 3: How do young South African adults feel when they are on and off Instagram?

1.3 .4 Research design and methodology

This section presents a brief outline of the research approach adopted in the study, together with the research design and methodology.

This study followed a mixed method research strategy. A quantitative on-line survey was administered to generate numerical data on the research problem. The online survey was emailed to a convenience sample of people 50 people and achieved an 80% response rate from 20 – 20 year old young adults.

Subsequent to the online surveys, semi structured one on one in-depth interviews were conducted with randomly selected respondents from the online survey. The interviews were conducted to derive common themes and deep and meaningful insights from the online survey findings.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are a few limitations in this study that need to be considered.

Due to the time constraints in which the study had to be conducted one of the limitations to the study is that the sample that participated in the survey and one on one interviews is a convenience sample. It may not be entirely representative of young South African adults.

The limitation of a this convenience sample is that respondents may not have been entirely truthful due to the fact that they know the interviewer and didn't want to be judged.

The study does not take the emotional state of the respondents into account before they use IG. The effects of Instagram use could be preceded by a negative or positive emotional state, which the study does not take into account.

Lyubomirsky and Ross (1997) and Lyubomirsky et al. (2001) state that unhappy people make more spontaneous frequent social comparisons than happy people and that people who make frequent social comparisons are not only likely to be unhappy, but also they are more vulnerable to an effective response—more positive affect when they make a downward social comparison.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will begin by outlining the psychological constructs; social comparison and self-esteem. Social comparison is the theoretical framework that will be used through the study to understand the relationship between personal brands, IG and self-esteem. It will then proceed to look at branding concepts and will introduce Aaker's brand building theory how it can be used to build online personal brands. The study will then go on to explain social media and the motivations and theories behind social media usage. This study will evaluate the relationship through an analysis of the theory linking excessive social media usage, emotional investment and self-esteem.

2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS

2.2.1 Social comparison

Zuo (2014) states that social comparison is a natural and expected part of the human experience and that people compare themselves to others every day, whether they mean to do so or not. The social comparison theory was introduced by Festinger (1954) who stated that individuals are naturally driven to evaluate their own opinions and abilities against others opinions and abilities, and that these evaluations affect how they behave.

Social comparison theory states that "we seek to compare ourselves to others we believe are similar to ourselves, particularly to determine our own levels of abilities and successes" (Festinger, 1954). Festinger (1954) proposed two types of social comparison; downward and upward comparison (Festinger, 1954). Research on social comparison processes has assumed that a comparison in a given direction (upward or downward) will lead to an emotional reaction (Bunk, 1990). According to Gibbons and Gerard (1995) upward comparison is comparison to others we perceive to be socially better than us, generally leading to a negative mood and threatening

self-evaluation, and downward comparison is when a person looks to another individual or group that they consider to be worse off than themselves generally leading to a positive mood and feeling better about themselves or personal situation (Amoroso & Walters, 1969).

Contemporary theory suggests that social comparison can produce either positive or negative feelings about oneself, independent of its direction and that this is motivated by several factors such as mood and perception of risk when making social comparison (Zuo, 2014). Contemporary theory proposes that a contrast effect can occur when people explicitly evaluate the comparison target and use it as a reference point for evaluating the self (Mussweiler and Strack, 2000; Stapel and Koomen, 2000) and that assimilating effects have been shown to occur in the following conditions: (a) when people do not explicitly evaluate the comparison target (Stapel and Koomen, 2000), (b) when people believe their traits are flexible enough to rise or sink to the level of the person they are comparing themselves to (Lockwood, 2002; Wood and Kunda, 1997; Stapel and Koomen, 2000), and (c) when people share a lot in common with the comparison target (Brewer and Weber, 1994; Brown et al., 1992; Collins, 1996; Stapel and Koomen, 2001; Tesser, 1988).

(White, Langer, Yariv, and Welch, 2006), however have proposed that “it is the act of frequently socially comparing oneself to others rather than the direction of social comparison that is related to long-term destructive emotions”

Instagram is platform where people or personal brands interact through content generation and consumption, if the social comparison theory is to be applied then it can be inferred that social comparison takes place on the platform as it is a natural and expected part of the human experience (Zuo 2014). Because the literature on IGis still in its infancy (Ref) there is no studies on the relationship between IGuse, social comparison and self-esteem on Instagram comparison is an upward or downward comparison and how it impacts self-esteem.

2.2.2 Self Esteem

The relation between self-esteem and social comparison is complex as there is no clear distinction on whether self-esteem is a predictor or an outcome (Zuo, 2014). Self-esteem refers most generally to an individual's overall positive evaluation of the self (Gecas 1982; Rosebner 1990; Rosenberg et al. 1995). It is composed of two dimensions: competence and worth (Gecas 1982, Gecas & Schwalbe 1983). Competence refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and the worth dimension refers to the degree to which individuals feel they are persons of value (Cast and Burke, 2002).

(Burke and Cast, 2002,) state that there is no overall theory on self-esteem, and that research has generally proceeded on the presumption of one of three conceptualisations with each being treated independently. First, self-esteem has been investigated as an outcome. Academics taking that approach have focused on processes that produce or inhibit self-esteem (Coopersimth 1967; Harter 1993; Peterson and Rollins 1987; Rosenberg 1979). Second, self-esteem has been investigated as a self-motive, meaning that people tend to behave in ways that maintain or increase positive evaluations of the self (Kaplan, 1975 and Tesser, 1988). Finally, self-esteem has been investigated as a shield for the self, providing protection from experiences that are harmful (Longmore and DeMaria 1997; Pearlin and Scholler 1978; Spencer, Josephs and Steele 1993; Thoits 1994). This study will proceed on the presumption that self-esteem is an outcome, because, it is commonly used as an outcome variable in studies of psychiatric rehabilitation (Torrey, Kim, Mueser, McHugo, Drake, 2000).

2.2.3 Relationship between social comparison, social media and self esteem

Previous literature has found that combining social comparison and media exposure tends to produce a strong psychological effect, (Agliata and Dunn, 2004; Bessenhoff, 2006; Mulgrew, 2013). Haferkamp and Kramer (2011) postulate that online profiles on SNS offer a perfect basis for social comparison with friends, family or strangers. Haferkamp and Kramer (2011) further argued that by looking at profile photographs, the user gains an impression of a person's physical attractiveness and the career and that one obvious process that will happen when confronted with a diversity of information on other's is social comparison. Zuo (2014) found that SNS

users are often exposed to details about their peers' lives that were not actively sought out. This exposure to other people's social activities can lead to users' comparing their own social lives with that of their peers, and subsequently, may have harmful effects (Zuo, 2014)

Existing studies on the media and social comparison processes are based on the assumption that the media portrays a distorted picture of rich, successful and attractive people (Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011), which ultimately leads to people making upward social comparisons and leaving them feeling dissatisfied with their lives, because what is presented in the media appears to be unattainable (Kunda and Lockwood, 1997). Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011 state that "given that SNSs provide users with a rich diversity of self-relevant information (photographs, videos, personal information) it is plausible to assume that these profile elements can be used for comparisons"

Instagram, a photo-sharing social network created in 2010, has particular characteristics that may make users susceptible to negative consequences (Lup, Katerina, Trub, Leora, Rosenthal, Lisa, 2015). It can therefore be inferred that with Instagram being a SNS that enables users to create on line profiles and content, it is highly plausible that it could lend itself to social comparison by a user which in turn could have negative consequences.

2.3 BRANDING CONCEPTS

2.3.1 Aakers Brand Identity Model

A brand identity is the cornerstone of brand strategy and brand building. It is a set of aspirational associations that an organisation seeks to create or maintain in the eyes of consumers and employees (Aaker, pg. 40). According to Aaker (year), a brand should consist of a core and extended identity with the core representing the essence of a brand and the extended identity providing texture and wholeness to the brand. At the heart of Aaker's Brand Identity model is a four-fold perspective on the

concept of a brand. Aaker (year) advises brand strategists to consider the brand as: (1) a product, (2) an organisation (3) a person and (4) a symbol.

Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model is a framework used by brand strategists to building successful brands. A brand identity is implemented through the development and measurement of brand building programs. As figure 1 outlines, there are four components to the implementation of the brand: brand identity elaboration, brand positioning, brand building programs and tracking (Aaker, year).

Once a brand identity has been established, the brand position needs to be established. A "Brand position is the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates and advantage over competing brands." (Aaker 1996, 176.). Once the brand identity and brand position have been established a brand needs to be communicated through brand building programs, which are communication points between the brand and the audience (Aaker, year). These need to be actively tracked over time to ensure that the brand achieves what it had originally set out to achieve.

2.3.2 Person as a brand

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies on seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. (American Marketing Association, 2012.)

The concept of branding is traditionally associated with the branding of products and services; however, with the rise of self-help books and social media, this concept has expanded to include people (Hietajärvi, 2012). Positioning and marketing a personal brand is well known amongst celebrities and entrepreneurs such as Paris Hilton and Richard Branson, however we are starting to see "ordinary" people build their personal brands through social networking sites like Instagram whether they are aware of it or not (Hietajärvi, 2012).

The premise for personal branding is that everyone has the power to be a brand and that an individual is their best marketer (Peters 1997). Many personal brand advocates see the process as akin to product branding (Kaputa 2005; Schwabel 2009), which begins by defining a brand identity and then actively communicating it to the marketplace through brand positioning. The ability of a person on Instagram to; create a profile, create a biography and distribute selected content on to their IG page supports the notion by Montoya (2002) that personal branding is a strategic process, it is about intentionally taking control of how others perceive you and managing those perceptions strategically to help you achieve your goals. A personal brand on Instagram can therefore be defined as “the public projection of certain aspects of a person’s personality, skills or values that stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for.” (Montoya (2002).

32.4. SOCIAL MEDIA

3.1 Social networking sites

With over 20 million Smartphones users in South Africa, consumers have a convenient and affordable way to access digital content wherever they are, and this

can be seen in the upsurge in social networking site (SNS) usage (Business Tech, 2014). SNS's have grown to become the world's fastest developing personal networking tool (Lin and Lu, 2011). They are virtual platforms on which over 2 billion personal brands converge and interact (Statista, 2014). They are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to; (1) create a public or semi-public profile, (2) communicate with a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). The latter function was revised to include producing and interacting with streams of content (Boyd and Ellison, 2013). "SNS's have created platforms that capture users' attention and create loyalty, due to the fact that most of their social contacts are on these networks" (Bumgarner, 2007).

This upsurge in global social connectivity has seen the average internet user spending 16 hours online with 27% of that time spent on social networking sites (ECC, 2014). With over 2 billion users (Statista, 2014), Wilcox and Stephen (2014) argue that despite the growing popularity and increasingly frequent usage, an understanding of how social network use affects users psychologically remains elusive as most studies have focused on "identity, network building, or privacy issues" (Chen and Lee, 2013). Some studies (Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe (2008) and Kim, Lee(2011)) have revealed that greater SNS engagement was associated with psychological well-being such as feeling good about oneself or feeling closer to other people, whilst other studies have found that SNSs created negative experiences (Chen and Lee, 2013, p728). In addition, a few studies have proposed that Internet use was not related to psychological well-being at all (Chen and Person, 2002). Although literature indicates that SNS may affect users psychologically, there isn't a clear picture of what is driving these effects.

"The literature has considered several social and psychological mechanisms that may link the relationship between Internet/SNS use and psychological distress" (Chen and Lee, 2012). The first theory is the time-displacement hypothesis. In the late 1990's the relationship between internet use and psychological well-being was found to be negative, because of a trade-off between time spending online and face-

to-face with family and friends (Nie, Erbring, 2000 and Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark V, et al 1998). A more contemporary body of literature on time-displacement hypothesis has shown that the relationship between Internet use and sociability is positive or neutral (Nie, Erbring, 2000 and Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark V, et al 1998). The second school of thought is that digital communication reduces non-verbal cues, which may result in stress (Kraut, Kiesler Boneva B, et al, 2002). The most recent school of thought on the relationship between internet usage and psychological well-being is what is known as “Facebook envy” (Chen and Lee, 2013). Chen and Lee (2013) state that SNS users often share their best and most appealing experiences on social media in the effort of constructing an appealing online persona to their followers. Studies have shown that although good for their happiness, this self-presentation is bad for their self-esteem (Mehdizad 2010, and Carpenter, 2011). Chou and Edge (2012) further state that the more exposure personal brands have to other brands positive self-presentation, the more likely it is to result in upward social comparison and lowered self-esteem as they feel that the other brands have better lives than themselves.

Whilst research has been done on social media and its psychological impacts, Rains and Brunner (2014) warn that more than two-thirds of SNS studies were limited to a single brand, FB which is examined in approximately 80% of these studies. According to Rains and Brunner (2014) the obvious gaps that emerge with research skewed toward FB are (1) Generalisability, (2) the potential to privilege a particular group, culture, or set of cultural practices, (3) undue influence of corporates being studied, (4) research that focuses on features that are unique to that brand and finally (5) the potential for a brand of SNS to become extinct is ever present.

3.2 Motivations for social networking site use

Since the introduction of SNS's, billions of users have adopted and registered to these sites and integrating them into their daily lives (Fredrick Leica Oloo, 2013). In order to understand the psychological effects of SNS usage we have to first look at the motivation behind the use of the platforms.

3.2.1 Social goals:

With the growth in smartphone and internet use, SNS have become an important platform for self-expression and self-presentation, as well as a means to connect and learn more about people without physically meeting them (Vazire and Gosling 2004). Self-presentation is a way for an individual to convey information about themselves to others (Goffman 1959), is the mechanism that allows a person to create and maintain her brand identity. The social network platform enables the user to create a profile and a biography. When they take pictures they can choose to of picture they want to take, the backdrop and the colours through the use of filters and brightening features. With self-presentation a person is in control of the information that they choose to communicate. “SNS enable them to project a desired identity to an audience through complex self-negotiations, making adjustments in an effort to maintain a consistent identity” (Goffman 1959). “Elements within social networking profiles such as personal information, photographs, design, and layout choices are akin to the wardrobe and props of the theatrical metaphor”. Consumers use brands, institutions, and other commercial enterprises as vehicles to establish and communicate aspects of their identity to others through these online “visual collages” (Schau and Gilly 2003, p. 386). Oftentimes social motives are the impetus for their creation, as people use sites as a communication tool to reach friends and strangers alike (Schau and Gilly 2003), thus satisfying needs for affiliation and social connectedness (Zinkhan et al. 1999).

3.2.2 Non Social Goals

Social goals are not the only reasons that people use social media; the primary motivation is not always centered on being seen by others, but for self-realization (Hemetsberger 2005). Other non-social motives include satisfying a need for power through skill development and mastery of technology and environment (Zinkhan et al. 1999), and as a stimulating way to pass time and provide entertainment (Papacharissi 2002; Zinkhan et al. 1999). (Schau and Gilly 2003) state that others are driven by brand advocacy and on information regarding a favorite band, activity, or social cause, as opposed to oneself

3.2.3 Prolonged Social networking site use

Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between heavy internet and SNS use and its psychological impacts.

Earlier studies by Kraut et al. (1998) found that heavier Internet use was associated with loneliness, depression and stress. They argue that this was because weaker ties generated online were replacing stronger offline ties with family and friends. In a follow-up study, Kraut et al. (2002) found that when examined over a longer period of time, Internet use was no longer associated with decreased communication and involvement with family and that, the effects were generally positive.

Studies on the psychological effects of the frequent usage of SNS (mainly Facebook) have found that users that use SNS frequently and for longer periods of time felt that others were happier than them, had better lives and were generally dissatisfied with their lives (Chou and Edge, 2012 and Krous et al., 2013). Zuo (2014) found that the amount of time users spent on Facebook, and, both active and passive use were correlated with greater amounts of social comparison. In turn, high levels of social comparison predicted lower self-esteem and poor mental health (Zuo 2014).

Zuo's (2014) findings revealed the more time individuals spent on social networking sites per day; the more likely they were to make comparisons about appearances.

Finally Zuo (2014) found that when controlled for social comparison, the associations between Facebook use per day and self-esteem and mental health outcomes were not as strong. It can therefore be inferred that upward social comparison on SNSs does indeed result in lower psychological well-being.

Emotional investment in social media

Studies have revealed that individuals that use social media feel that it has become so integrated into their lives that it has become a continuation of offline activities (Yang and Brown, 2013)

(Kittinger et al., 2013) found that individuals who used social networking site FB excessively had a strong attachment and negative experiences as a result of the excessive use. They further go on to state that despite the negative experiences users find that it would be very difficult to stop.

Zuo (2014) reveals that individuals who feel that SNS FB is more integral to their social lives make more social comparisons than individuals who do not feel that Facebook is very important to their social lives.

3.3 Instagram

With the advances in camera phone and digital sharing technologies, mobile photo-sharing has become an important communication activity and an integral part of many people's social lives (Chang, 2014). Since the launch of the first SNS "Six Degrees" in 1997 (Digital trends, 2014), we have since seen a proliferation of successful SNSs (Lin and Lu, 2011) with the mobile photo and video sharing tool Instagram being the most recent to achieve global success with over 200 million users worldwide (Hempel, 2014).

Instagram is a Facebook-owned mobile photo-sharing application that was launched in 2010 (Chang, 2015). At only 3 years old it became the fastest growing social networking site (Chang, 2014). Instagram's most distinctive feature is the photo filter. "It is a digital layer that, when added to the original photo, gives the photo an appearance of professional look" (Chang, 2014). With the Instagram filter photo-editing software is not required. The Instagram filter functionality has over twenty digital filters that you can use, they can be used to; adjust the brightness, enhance colours, and give a soft glow to the photos. Once the photo has been filtered it can be posted on Instagram or to other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr (Instagram in Statistics, 2012)

The success of Instagram can be attributed to the interactivity it enables users. The ability to not only post but to be able to like, comment and repost other people's pictures is the key to its success (Instagram, 2012) who can create, filter, comment

and post pictures on the platform and other social networking sites like Twitter and FB.

In any brand building process, there can be negative or positive outcomes. Using Aaker's brand building identity model and the social comparison theory this study will outline the possible implications of social comparison at each brand building phase.

3.3.1 Instagram and brand building

Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) stated that people should not only be cognisant of a medium's obvious properties but should also be aware of how it subtly influences culture (Steers, Wichkam and Acitelli, 2014, p.741). He argued that the advances in technology would create global villages which, would have the potential to become extensions of the people using them and, in turn, may redefine human interpersonal relationships for better or worse (Steers, Wichkam and Acitelli, 2014, p.702). Nearly five decades later and with over two billion SNS users, McLuhan's idea of a global village has been brought to fruition, fundamentally altering the dynamics of human interaction (Steers, Wichkam and Acitelli, 2014, p.702).

3.3.2 Strategic brand analysis

"To be effective, a brand identity needs to resonate with customers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and represent what the organisation can and will do over time" (Aaker pg. 40). For a personal brand to be effective on Instagram it needs to ensure that its images are differentiated from competitors so that they can resonate with consumers. The personal brand will be required to do an analysis of other brand on Instagram (Aaker, pg. 41) and based on social comparison theory, the analysis of other brands on social media can give rise to social comparison which in turn lowers self-esteem.

Observing and looking at competitor pictures can result in envy (Ref) and have detrimental effects to self- esteem.

3.3.3. Brand Identity and Brand Identity Elaboration

With the growth in smartphone penetration and social media, brand value creation has shifted from a company centric top-down approach to consumers to an online sharing of personalised customer experiences (Chang, 2014). Chang, 2014 argues that the brand building process is no longer the sole responsibility of the brand and that it is a co-creation between the brand and the customer, in this instance Instagram followers. Brand and customer are an integral part of the brand creation process and Chang (2014) draws from theoretical frameworks of Prosumerism and the studies of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), to argue that a brand's Instagram presence is co-created by the images posted on the brand's official accounts and by the images that followers with either post or "reposts" and "hashtags" (#) the brand's name.

According to Aaker (year) a core identity is what the brand stands for. It needs to be aspirational so that it can appeal to customers and employees. The pressure to have the perfect visual image that can appeal to current and potential followers can have immense psychological effects on a personal brand. To get "likes", "reposts" and more followers a brand on Instagram needs to ensure that its images appeal to potential customers and it is this pressure for the picture perfect image that can have detrimental effects. To add richness to the core identity a brand would be akin to adding filters and changing the levels of brightness of a picture.

3.3. 4 Brand Positioning

Brand positioning is the part of the Brand Identity that is to be actively communicated to the target audience. Once an Instagram picture has been taken and applied to filters. The brand needs to satisfy itself that this is the perfect picture that is ready to be shared on the platform. The anxiety of wondering what competitors and what the audience will think can have psychological implications.

3.3.3.5 Brand Building programs

A personal brand on Instagram needs to make the decision of where to post the pictures which is akin to asking “who will see” it (Ref). The brand has the option to post the picture on Instagram and other social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

3.3.3.6 Brand Tracking

The performance of the brand on Instagram can be tracked through the number of likes, reposts, comments and followers. If these tracking measures hold value to the

7.4.3

I therefore hypothesise that:

H3: Individuals who feel that social networking site Instagram is an integral part of their lives (emotionally invested) are more likely to make social comparisons than individuals who do not feel that IG is very important to their lives

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe how the study was conducted including explaining the procedures and methods used to carry out the study. This chapter will also describe the participants in the study, the process by which the data was collected, and the questions that were presented to participants. The primary tool in this study was an online survey completed by a convenience sample of 20- 30 year olds. The online survey was followed by an in-depth semi-structured one-one interview with 10 respondents from the online survey.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Young South African adults form the core of this study, because they use digital technology and online social media within their everyday lives (Hynan, Murray and Goldbart, 2014) and provide great insight into this subject matter.

To qualify for participation in the quantitative online survey and semi-structured one-on-one interviews, respondents had to be between the ages of 20 – 30 and have at least one active Instagram account. The survey was emailed to a convenience sample of 50 people of which 80% were between the ages of 20 -30 with 95 % having 1 Instagram (IG) account. The survey was followed up by an in-depth one on one interview of 10 people randomly selected from the quantitative survey.

The subject group was dominated by females over the age of 25.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

The survey population was drawn from SABMiller, OLX and Blacknation brand marketing employees who were sent the survey link via email. The survey link was also emailed to two University of KZN students and the VEGA relationship manager who subsequently distributed the survey to respective students. Family members and friends falling within the targeted age group were also requested to participate in the online survey

Participants in the online survey were randomly selected to participate in on-one semi-structured interviews. 5 interviews were conducted telephonically with the remaining 5 interviews site down one on ones. All interviews were transcribes and the one on one interviews were recorded.

3.4 METHODOLOGY USED

A mixed method research strategy was employed in this study. “Mixed methods research is used to describe research that combines or integrates quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single project” (Reference: Research methodology text book. Chapter 3. Page 62)

3.4.1 Quantitative Research

The first phase of the project was quantitative research. A survey was administered via QuestionPro, which is an online survey tool used to create and collect surveys. The survey began with questions that determined whether the respondents fell within the targeted age group and had an Instagram account. Respondents were then asked to provide demographic information such as, race, and gender. The series of questions that followed were related to Instagram use. Respondents were asked about their motivations for Instagram use and activity on Instagram. They were able to select responses from options such as; “to post selfies” and “to post holiday pictures”, with an option to also select “other” and outline what the “other” use is for. The purpose of asking about usage was to gage the motivations behind Instagram use and whether consumers use Instagram as a personal blog or marketing platform to showcase their personal brand or view other brands. Respondents were also asked about whether they post perfect pictures and moments only to assess whether the Instagram platform is the perfect platform for users to create their persona brands in whichever way they want to.

Following Ellison et al. (2007), the study employed a measure of Intensity of use which Ellison et al. refers to as “Facebook Intensity”. The Facebook Intensity measure contains a set of attitudinal items designed to assess the degree to which the respondent feel emotionally connected to social network and the extent to which the social network is integrated into daily activities (Ellicon et al. (2007). The

measure includes the number of friends and followers respondents have and the amount of time spent on the social networking site on a typical day. The measure also included questions to assess how respondents would feel if Instagram shut down.

Respondents were asked whether they compare themselves to others when on the social networking site and what was the basis of comparison. The study measured the impact of social comparison on self-esteem by using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (check). Respondents were asked to answer between strongly disagree to strongly agree on whether being on the social networking site impacted self-esteem and whether once they had logged off they still felt the impacts negative or positive.

3.4.2 Qualitative Interview: Semi structured one on one interviews

The quantitative survey prepared the ground for the qualitative research through the random selection of people to be interviewed to explore some of the main findings from the survey. The qualitative interviews were one on one and telephonic interviews. They were in depth, semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The study could not rely on the findings of quantitative research alone and was supplemented by the qualitative research to ensure that sufficient insights and themes were drawn.

The qualitative interviews picked on the general patterns from the quantitative interviews and sought to gain common themes and an in depth understanding on Instagram use and the motivations behind it, social comparison on Instagram and impacts of Instagram on self-esteem.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data was conducted, collected and analysed by the Questionpro software. Respondents were sent a link to the survey which they downloaded and completed. The QuestionPro software presented the results in a pie-chart format.

3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

Questions that were posed to respondents we transcribed on to an excel spread sheet. All the questions were placed on a column with the 10 names of respondents across the top row. Once the responses were given by the respondent's common themes were observed.

3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

3.7 ETHICS

3.6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results from the mixed methods research conducted in June 2015. This study was conducted to understand whether the use of Instagram by young adults has a psychological effect. The survey was sent out to 50 South Africans of which 80% were between the ages of 20 - 30 and 90% of the targeted respondents had one Instagram account.

The results are organised by the three questions that the research set to answer. The quantitative data was collected using an online survey on QuestionPro and analysed by the QuestionPro Software. The qualitative data was transcribes and recorded. Responses were then imported on to excel and analysed by looking at the common themes across responses.

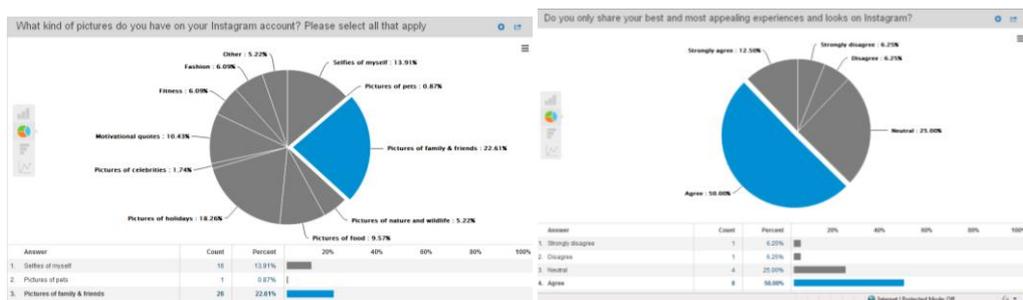
3.6.1 The First Research Question: How do young SA adults use Instagram?

In order to understand the psychological implications of Instagram it is important to understand how much time respondents spend on IG, what they do when they are on IG and how emotionally invested they are in the SNS.

The survey revealed that 80% of respondents use Instagram daily with the majority of respondents stating that they spend less than an hour a day on the site. 90% of

the respondents from the one on one interview logged on daily and also spent less than 30 minutes a day. Although respondents go onto Instagram daily they do not spend a lot of time on the site. They log on to get the latest updates and once they have satisfied themselves that they are up to date they log off.

22.61 % of the respondents in the said that they post pictures of their family and friends followed by 18.26% who said they post picture of their holidays. Regardless of what respondents posted, they felt that they had to post their best and most appealing pictures on the SNS. 62 % of the online survey respondents said they post their best and most appealing experiences with 100% of the 10 young adult’s interviews stating that they post their post best and most appealing pictures on IG. One of the respondents from the one on one interview stated that “Instagram is like an album, you only show your best pictures”.

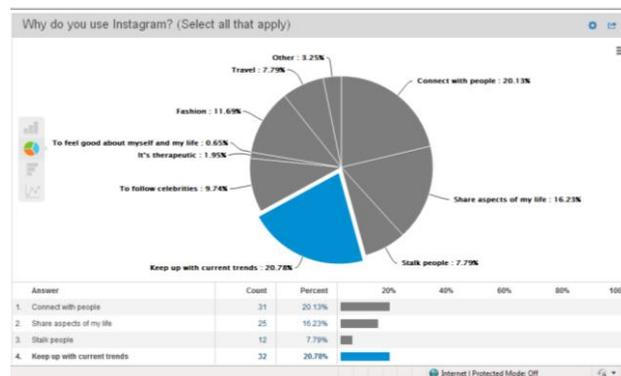


3.6.2 The second research question: Why do young South African adults use IG:

It is imperative to understand the motivations and drivers behind young adult IG use to determine the psychological effect of they were not to be able to use IG for the reasons given.

20.78% of the online survey respondents stated that they use Instagram to keep up with current trends, 20.13 % said to connect with friends and family and 16.23 said it was to share aspects of their lives. The results from the one on one interviews supported the survey results. 90% of the respondents log on to Instagram daily, because of the instant gratification they got from keeping up to date with current trends in technology, fashion, fitness and food and they are able to connect with family and friends and keep up to date with what they are up to without having to be physically present. The interview respondents stated that unlike SNS’s like FB and

Twitter, IG was a visual representation of the latest information, they felt that as a result of this it was easier to consumer information on IG.



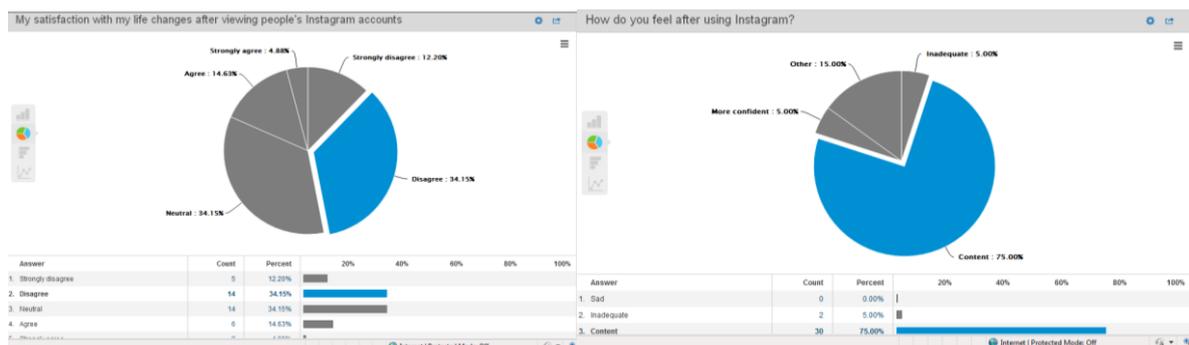
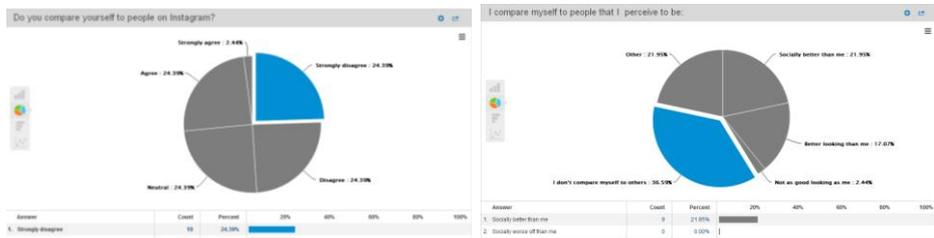
3.6.3 Research question 3: How do they feel when they are on Instagram?

This question was asked in relation to the social comparison theory to ascertain whether they felt pressured to compare themselves on Instagram and if this comparison had a psychological effect.

In the quantitative survey only 26% of respondents stated that they compare themselves to people on Instagram. Of those that said they engage in comparison 17.7% said that they compared themselves to people that are better looking than them and 21.9% said they compared themselves to people that are socially better off than them. When questioned further in the one on one semi-structured interviews the use of IG results in upward social comparison, with 90% of the respondents stating that they compare themselves to people that they know and to people that they have similar interests with. 10% of the respondents that don't compare on IG state that its, because they follow celebrities whose lives are unattainable and therefore there is no need to compare. The respondents who compared themselves with their peers or people with similar interests felt that the pressure that resulted from the comparison motivated and inspired them to improve their lives as their peers were showing them what is possible. The content and not the amount of time spent on Instagram had psychological impacts on respondents with 80% feeling motivated to improve their lives. One of the respondent from the one on one interview

stated that “Because I am a health conscious person, if I see a person with a great body going to gym, I immediately put down what I’m eating down and put on my gym gear” another respondent who is an entrepreneur stated that he compares himself to his peers that he went to school with, to see if they are doing better than them and

why”



CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Being relevant is key for young South African adults and Instagram keeps them relevant. Instagram enables them to stay connected and by being connected and in the know it is good for their self-esteem. IG is a visual application and the reason young adult respondents only post their best and most appealing pictures is , cause there is a need to be perceived to be living the perfect life . No one wants to appear weak or to be living the imperfect life, especially by their peers. In the eyes of young

adult South Africans it is totally unacceptable to be anything but your best on Instagram. By posting perfect pictures and getting a lot of likes for the perfect pictures it is validation from your peers that you are living a perfect life. People are more likely to compare upwardly compare themselves to people that they know and that the upward comparison acts as a motivator to do more, be more and achieve more. It rarely has negative consequences.

The final concluding remark is that Instagram does indeed result in upward social comparison, however this this motivates users to do and be better. Upward social comparison does not result in lowered self-esteem. In fact it results improvement in esteem.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations made in this study are for product and service brands to have more social media presence for the following reasons:

With IG being South Africa's fastest growing SNS; organisations should take advantage of this trend by being present and engaging personal brands on the social networking site. The motivation for consumers to be on IG is that they are looking for the latest trends in fashion, technology and all spheres. Organisations should ensure that their new product launches are on IG so that when consumers look for the "next big thing" their brands are top of mind. Brands should also ensure that they are on IG to scout out for new trends. Aspirational organisational brands should take advantage of the fact that personal brands gain motivation by being on Instagram by inspiring brands.

Finally, respondents like IG, because it appeals to their senses. In their communication strategies, organisations should use Instagram to communicate their products in a way that appeals to all or almost all of their senses.

6. RATIONAL FOR ACTIVATION

6.1 Insight gained from research study

The core insights that I obtained from the research study and applied to my activation was that the presence of consumers on IG is driven by the need for relevance, validation and motivation.

6.2 The objectives of the activation

The objective of the activation is to communicate the message that personal brands on IG are carefully crafted to portray a particular message to its audience. On IG people do not see all the good and bad moments but rather they see the moments that the personal brand has chosen to portray.

6.3 The activation idea

The activation is a real life study of my “real” personal brand on the social networking site. The idea was to create a new IG account titled “The Real Miss Hene” that would run in parallel with my current IG account “MissHene”. On the “RealMissHene” IG account I documented all my moments as they were with no filters. I then documented my feelings throughout this process to assess what the psychological impacts of posting “real” pictures were on my self esteem.

6.4 The Findings/Results

Posting unfiltered, unaltered pictures on my IG account was extremely difficult. Not having control over how you portray your image was demotivating. The constant fear that people would find the “The Real Miss Hene” account was daunting.

6.5 Insights from activation

The insights that I obtained from the activation were that posting and viewing “perfect” pictures was motivating and that posting “real” pictures on the “MissHene” account was daunting and depressing.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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