

Effectiveness of Social Media Network-Instagram in Establishing Personal Branding Among Millennials

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Abstract

Today there are a variety of ways and channels through which a person can create and develop their personal brand, especially using social media. Many business units have realized the potential of this effective way of directly communicating with their target markets. But the flare is catching up amongst the youth. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how youth of today spend majority of time on social media, create and alter their identity through images and indulge in business activity. The study is focused on Instagram, the most widespread social media only focused on sharing photos and providing business. The study is based on postmodern perspective and focuses on symbolic interactionism, identity capital and psychological self. The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 220 Instagram users (15-25 years old youth), from Southern Delhi, India. The study was based on the Grounded Theory Method, which helps in understanding the world by interpreting human interaction, which occurs through the use of symbols. The findings suggest that individuals depict merely a selective, part of their identity on Instagram. By using photos in social media millennial are not as limited as they would otherwise be in the real world in terms of how they want to market identity and perform business. But there is also a frustration among many users of Instagram and other social media as many feel that nuanced and perfected image that many people convey is fake and annoying to see and this could thus have a negative impact on that person's personal brand. Images were seen to be more efficient than text for the purpose of personal branding and it also appeared that identity creation through images could create a more expressive society.

Keywords

Instagram, Images, Personal Branding, Social Interaction, Symbolic Interactionism.

Introduction

The role of images is of great importance and the interactive nature of social media can add new dimensions to the possibilities of projecting images. An Image is a mental representation of an object, person, place or happening which is not physically in front of the observer (Fridgen 1987). The role of images plays pertinent these days and the interactive nature of social media can accentuate new dimensions to the possibilities of projecting images. Image is differentiated with perception, both of which are part of environmental understanding and comprehension, by noticing the presence of environmental stimuli for justification of perception, whereas no such stimuli for image exist. This means image might or might not include perception. The practice of photography and Instagram can be conceptualized. Different people have different understandings, which they bring to the viewing of an image. Symbols within them will mean different things to different people at different times. Words quite fail to convey the singular beauty of photographer. To photograph something is in some way to acquire and possess it, and images are, or at least seem to be, a means of transcribing reality. The power of image sharing enables the photographer to interpret the image captured there on and to tell stories about it. Eventually, photography and image sharing is a ubiquitous phenomenon in society and a democratized practice. The most powerful or evocative aspects of some photographs can launch desire beyond what it permits us to see (Barthes 1981). In the case of Instagram the transparency of pictures launched another kind of visual desire. The elements of Instagram allow it's users to construct an image to communicate the world. The constitute act of taking a photograph is prominent and Instagram is now even more important as a tool for circulation on within social media.

Review of Literature

Personal branding is essentially the ongoing process of establishing a prescribed image or impression in the mind of others about an individual, group or organization. Personal branding often involves the application of one's name to various products. Social media sites are becoming the go-to-place for consumers who want to learn more about a business. In today's

globalised world, communication is the flare which is catching up amongst youth. Traditionally, the Word of Mouth (WOM) approach was popular decades back, but the Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) and Consumer's Online Brand Related Activities (COBRAs) reaches a wider horizon because it is based with internet access or a device.

Social media networks facilitate the building of social relationships and business among people of different races and provide opportunities.

Social media is less than two decades in existence; this was followed by Myspace and Facebook, in the year 2004. Due to characteristics of Facebook, it received a wider acceptance in social circles much ahead than others such as Blogging, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, Podcasting, Snapchat etc. All these have gained more than one billion users worldwide in just over other sites where individuals could socialize, meet old and new friends and interact with each other. Just as the internet was applied into business organizations became apparent and gained the attention of business managers and became the best friends of marketers in virtually all organization with presence on the adoption of social media networks by individuals, however, an organization leverage the ubiquitous usage of these sites and views them as platforms of services. This is a clear paradigm shift from the traditional methods of interacting with customers as more than one customer can be reached easily and instils smooth feeling of loyalty and questions are answered with ease.

To stand out in the digital intimacy and be unique, individuals have to be their own brand. Without a strong personal brand it can be problematic to position oneself in this competitive market. Social media platforms also mine data and compile fine-grained user profiles based on online activity, this information is being used for targeted marketing of commercial products however the digital divide does exclude specific demographics from participating in social media and while this divide appears to be rapidly disappearing, especially with the advent of cellphone to consideration current technological penetration in their locale when designing campaigns for specific audiences. As social media platform diversify, it is likely that a more fine-grained typology will emerge to describe the distinctive capabilities of each platform and the utility for specific personal branding business. There is a trend toward platform convergence, indicating that engaging with social media should be thought of as a complex and interrelated system: Twitter, feeds direct traffic to YouTube, widgets enable

connectivity to Facebook, and social bookmarking or aggregators transform users' interface with the web and with mobile devices.

Social media is becoming a powerful addition to business toolkit. Social media is currently utilized both as broadcasting platform to amplify messages from traditional media sources viz., radio, television, print media to demographics who are abandoning traditional broadcast technologies viz., telephones, television and as an entirely new way of collaborating and co-creating content with target audiences (Kress, Gunther, and Leeuwen 1996). Agencies are also taking advantage of user-generated feedback and commentary to improve message visibility and a variety of paid-media tools to spread messages 'virally' through entire platforms of users, potentially reaching millions of viewers in a relatively short period of time. Dramatic changes in the concept of celebrity from one related solely to mass and broadcast media to one that reflects a more diverse media landscape, for instance, reality television has both revealed the mundane day-to-day lives of popstars and sitcom actors as it simultaneously transforms ordinary people into celebrities. Media technologies like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram have enabled both famous and non-famous people to generate vast quantities of personal media, manipulate and distribute this content widely and reach out to audiences.

Objectives and Research Methodology of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how youth of today spend majority of time on social media, create and alter their identity through images and indulge in business activity. The study is focused on Instagram, the most widespread social media only focused on sharing photos and providing business. The study is based on postmodern perspective and focuses on symbolic interactionism, identity capital and psychological self. The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 220 Instagram users (15-25 years old youth), from Southern Delhi. The study was based on the Grounded Theory Method, which helps in understanding the world by interpreting human interaction, which occurs through the use of symbols.

The aim is to fill the theoretical gap in social media concerning the use of images in personal branding. By highlighting Instagram, this study, foreground the role of image making in this contemporary culture.

In doing so this study examines the dynamic way of communicating a person's identity and self. The approach for this research aims to add an

academic understanding to the relationship between social media, personal branding and images. This approach attempts to give the authors a way of conceptualizing the role of images.

In view of the above, the purpose of this paper is to investigate and analyse the role of images in the process of personal branding through Instagram.

Sample

The respondents in this study have been chosen in a non-representative way. A representative sample, where participants for the study are randomly chosen from a large population to ensure a high reliability is commonly used in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Bryman and Bell (2005) describe the convenience sampling method as common in qualitative studies mainly because researchers will often have to take information from whatever resource that becomes available, meaning that the narrower the research topic is the harder it is to find respondents who will bring useful information to the study. A convenience sampling based on their commitment to social media and Instagram in particular chose the respondents in this study. The initial respondents came through personal contacts and these in turn led to other respondents with the same interest and active use of Instagram. This type of sampling is referred to as snowballing (Bryman & Bell, 2005) and in this study it was chosen mainly due to a lack of resources but also because of its time efficiency. But when selecting the respondents it was of interest to find a rather heterogeneous group to find different viewpoints on the topic and to include different ways on how people use Instagram and how different background and identities are portrayed. Because of this most of the respondents only know not more than one other participant in the study and they therefore rarely belong to the same social group or share the exact same interests. Most of the respondents are young people living in the South Delhi area. A majority of the respondents are women and the ages range from 15 to 25.

Method of analysis

There is according to Bryman and Bell (2005) no single structure of analysis of qualitative data that is universally accepted but the most common one is Grounded Theory. The other majorly applied method of analysis is analytical induction. Analytical induction starts with a rough definition of a scientific question and then tries to find hypothetical explanations to this. It continues by collecting data but if there is a case or a fact that does not fit the hypothesis

when collecting the data the hypothesis will be redefined. One drawback with this method of analysis and collection of data is that it fails to define any guidelines for how many cases that should be studied until the hypothesis can be validated, there is no set figure for how many cases conform to the hypothesis that should be studied until the hypothesis can be confirmed. This issue is not present in Grounded Theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define grounded theory as theory that has emerged from data that has been collected and analysed in a systematic way during the research process. In this method there is a close link between the data collection, analysis and the resulting theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The grounded theory method starts in a theoretical sample, which is contrary to a representative sample, and it is a collection of data with the purpose of generating theory where the researcher collects, codes and analyses data while deciding which information that should be collected and where it is to be found (Bryman & Bell, 2005). This is done in order to develop the final theory or theories during the entire research process when patterns start to be visible. In this thesis, grounded theory as defined by Bryman and Bell (2005) serves as an inspiring method with some of its steps used when analysing the data but certain parts of analytical induction will also be applied, as they are interactive.

Effectiveness of Social Media Network in Personal Branding

Traditional celebrities have created direct, unmediated bonding with fans, but stars like Lady Gaga, Kim Kardashian, Sonam Kapoor provide snapshots of their lives and interactions with followers that furnish the impression of candid, unfettered access. Social media also enables micro-celebrity, a self-presentation technique, the drive for seeking attention through the internet has since become the new insatiable hunger for a lot of people nowadays. The particular cultural shift from TV to Internet is an exciting new form of dynamics. Alongside the shifting elements, the aesthetics evolve too. Quite obviously, society's perspective of a celebrity has evolved in reflection to the sudden emergence of YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook stars. The concept of self-branding has become so prevalent. It parallels the growth of digital technology embedded in the current political climate: Neoliberal individualism. The concept of self-branding is imbued with a business perspective and show how the 'celebrities' of self-branding manifest at a marketing media nexus distinct to the opening decades of the 21st century. A cultural shift is happening. Fame is no longer an out-of-touch dream. Hence there is no denying that 70-80 percent of the general media consumers now

a days believe that the internet has got to be the new media for stardom. The ‘likes’ of Instagram are exactly the new measures for success in the celebrity industry. All these are such because, **Internet is the New Black.**

Instagram was launched in 6th October, 2010 and it now has 600 million monthly active users and visualizes 91.07% of Instagram posts that are photos per day (Forbes 2016). This visual social networking service had its debut, because the technology used on smart phones finally allowed high-quality photos, fast processing of the photos and special effects on them. Users could now take a picture, video and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) and send it to the world. Even the name capture the purpose of the app. Instagram describes itself as a fast, fun and beautiful way to share life with friends through a series of pictures or stories. Steven Bertoni (Forbes 2013) showed the power of Instagram during hurricane Sandy when the social media phenomenon captured the storm. It is this utility and entertainment app that makes Instagram such a social force for major occasions. Though this creative activity has put a question mark on the meaning of authenticity. Authenticity has been argued as a significant aspect of consumer interaction with brands. The aesthetics of act provides a margin to create a desirable image of life where every experience is visualized. The phenomenon of Instagram is significantly innovative and this is why it is imperative to see its implication the issue of personal branding through identity creation. Instagram leads with 60% of girls using it for personal branding as comparison with boys (Refer Table1).

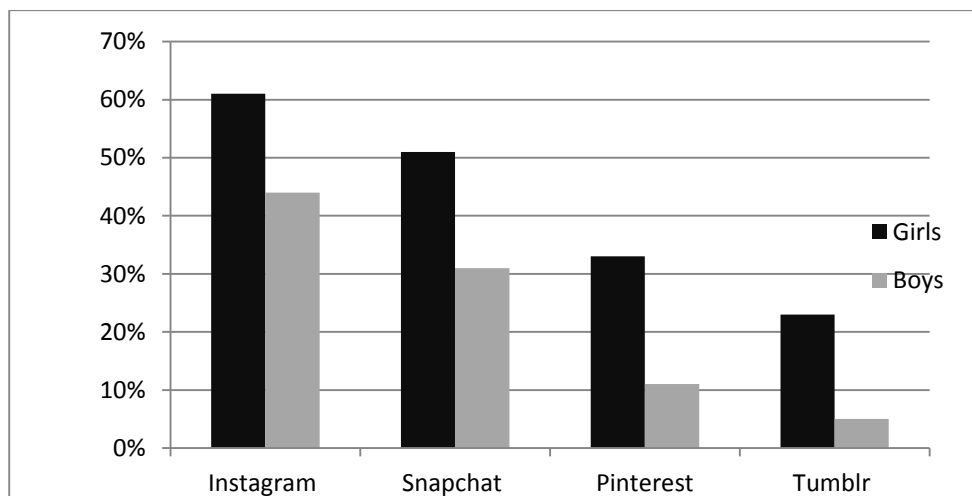


Table 1: Percent of Youths Who Use Social Networking Sites In South Delhi

Social Media and Instagram

Social media is a rather new phenomenon and due to its fast spread and its importance on major subjects and events, it has attracted the attention of the research. Correa, T., Hinsley, W.A, & Gil de Zúñiga, H., (2009) defines social media as digital media, as opposed to traditional media, where people connect, communicate and interact with others (Correa et al, 2009). Another definition is a “group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). They also claim that the participation in social media is driven by a wish to create an image that is consistent with one's personal identity (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). Instagram is a form of social media that also contains these elements with the only particularity that it is solely focused on image sharing, even though the photos shared can be “tagged”, different words can be attached to the photos and identified with different words related to the image. Casual simplicity is Instagram's biggest attraction and when communicating through words is difficult, photos sometimes make the task easier. Instagram images tend toward abstraction and are more powerful to viewers because they have to work harder to interpret the images. And, as they do so, 14 viewers escape to whatever feelings, memories, and experiences the images evoke at that particular point in time. This is also an essential element of symbolic interactionism. Social media and Instagram provide among other things an unparalleled platform for consumers to publicize their personal evaluations of purchased products or services and thus facilitate word-of-mouth communication. This on-going shift to social media means that user generated content is now making an unprecedented role in people's life. Individuals have a natural need for knowledge that drives them searching for content (Winston & Huaxia, 2010). Thus the more content available, the better such need is satisfied. On the other hand, by using Instagram the attention from others might be valuable and it is likely that individuals get satisfaction from this peer recognition. The imagined audience affects how people use Instagram. Following the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, identity on Instagram is constructed through this act of sharing images. Furthermore, consciousness implies an on-going front stage identity performance that balances the desire to maintain positive impressions with the need to seem true or authentic to others. Notions of identity hold a central place in an understanding of the role of social media in the everyday life of contemporary society. As mentioned above Instagram is one form of social media but other significant social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, will not be disregarded. Thus, these are only three out

of a wide range of similar platforms people use in an attempt to accentuate and convey a particular impression of themselves. That is to say, these are all elements that people use in order to build themselves, to be themselves, share what they are and what they are doing. Additionally, establishing social connections is positively linked with establishing a social identity. Since social media, in the sense that has previously been defined, is a relatively new phenomenon that has only existed for a few years there is still not much research carried out within this area. The research that has been done often focuses on marketing of brands and products in social media, social media as a way of breaking geographic barriers and social media as a contributor to democratic processes in certain societies. Social media as a means of identity creation has not been thoroughly studied.



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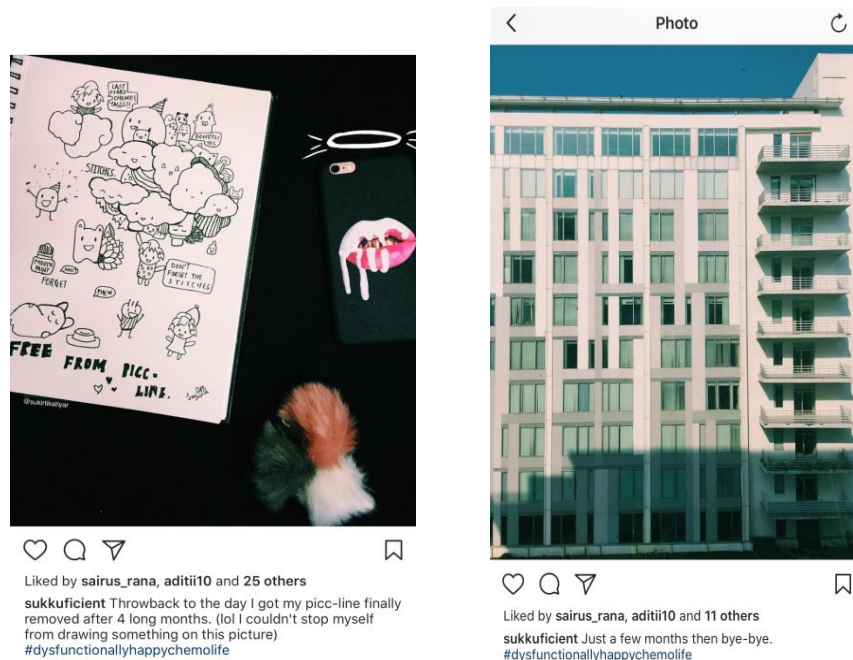


Figure 1: Identity performance by youth through Instagram

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that emphasizes how interactions between individuals help people create their own identity. A central idea in symbolic interactionism is the self (Charon, 2009). Interaction consists of both interaction with oneself, and social interaction (Charon, 2009). The human being must then be understood as a social person. It is an on-going constant lifelong social interaction, which leads people to do what they do. Symbolic interactionism focuses on activities that take place among and between individuals. That is to say, when people interact with many others, they will have different perspectives, which in turn determine how a person interprets a situation, and eventually, how they act (Charon, 2009). Individuals present their identities to others in interactions and consequently label others in interaction.

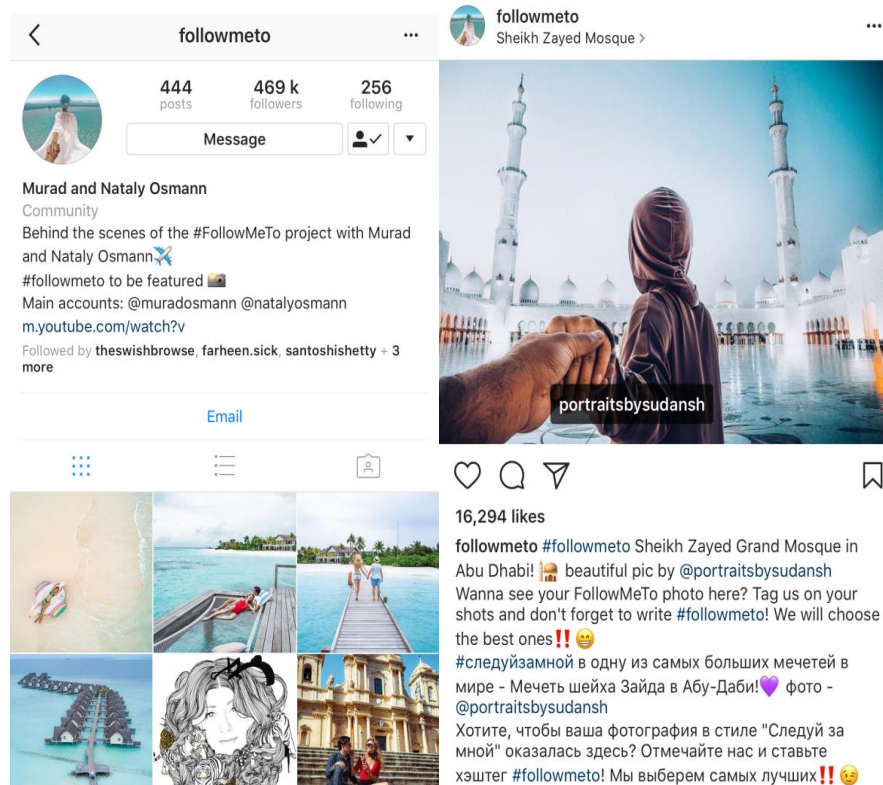


Figure 2 Picture posted by youth depicting Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism sees human society as individuals engaged and dynamic in living, an ongoing activity in which individuals are developing lines of action, different ways of behaving (Blumer, 1969). This general process should be seen in the differentiated character which it necessarily has by virtue of the fact that people cluster in divergent groups, belong to different ties, and hold different positions. Individuals approach each other differently, live in different cultures, and guide themselves by different sets of meanings. Nevertheless, when dealing with social media and Instagram, one must see the activity of the collectively as being formed through a process of interpretation. The idea of symbolic interactionism as a mediator of self-definition from the consumption of products to the consumer (Solomon, 1983) is well explained. Products possess a social meaning, which are used to define social reality to both the consumer and its environment. Thus this is often more important than the actual functionality of the product (Solomon, 1983). The idea of products containing a social meaning has been studied for a long time but the theory cannot only be applied to consumption

of products. In social media, and especially Instagram, people share information regarding their lives and everything that goes on within it. Many of the things people share can be seen as having a social meaning rather than a functional one. The basic premise of Instagram is that people share information with others, whether it regards a new product we have bought or an event we attended. This means that by definition, it is a social meaning, or at least that the one who shares the information believes that there is a social meaning, in the things he or she posts. So when a person posts a photo of a product she just bought, a party she just attended or a degree certificate she was just awarded, symbolic interactionism is taking place. As symbolic interactionism is part of building a person's identity this by consequence means that using social media is part of building a person's identity and the social meaning he or she conveys about him or herself to others. That is to say, meaning is dependent on the interactions with others while sharing our symbolic interpretation; while passing through interpretive proofs are modified with the sequential process of firstly creating meaning internally, then checking it externally: the self-concept in all its complexity is developed while interacting with others. Furthermore, the social structures raise the nature of our social interactions. In other words, self presentation is collaborative. Individuals work together to uphold preferred self-images of themselves and their conversation with others through strategies like collectively encouraging social norms, or negotiating power differences and disagreements. It becomes a process of 'impression management', (Goffman 1959) where individuals habitually monitor how people respond to them when presenting themselves. The individual is likely to present him or herself in a light that is favourable to him or her. He claims that humans create 'favourable' impressions at variance with the reality they purport to represent. Hence, living in a social world consisting of constant efforts to manage impressions. The fundamental idea is that impression management is essential for social interaction. That is to say, it is an appropriate lens to use regarding the creation of identity through images when using Instagram. Now that first impressions are often made through social media, not face-to-face, individuals are not only strategizing about how to virtually convey who they are, but also how to craft an Instagram version of themselves in order to appeal to multiple audiences. Majority of youth (60%) rely on Instagram for personal branding (Refer Table 2).

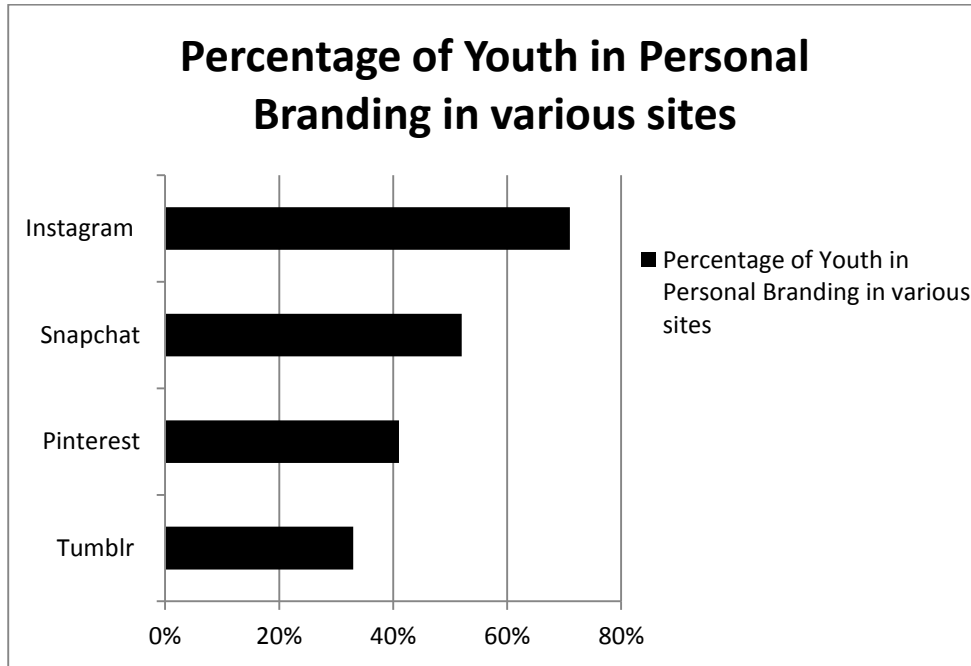


Table 2: Percentage of youth in Personal Branding in various Sites

Psychological self and Identity

Identity and the idea of a psychological “self” has been the subject of research for a long time and there are, because of this, many different definitions of what they actually are. According to Rosenberg (1979) the self is the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings that refers to him or herself as an object of thought. Leary and Tangney relate self to the behaviour of a person and describe the self as a unifying construct of self-esteem, self-awareness, self-consciousness, self- 15 evaluation and self-presentation among others (Leary & Tangney, 2003). Tesser on the other hand defines the self as a “collection of abilities, temperament, goals, values and preferences that distinguish one individual from another” (Tesser, 2002) while simply defines it as a person’s “behavioural potentials.” (Refer Figure 3)



Figure 3: Behavioural Potential shown by youth

The self is thus a word defined in many different ways (Wicklund and Eckert 1993). In this study the self is looked at as equal to the identity and the research is based on the definition made by Tesser. Studies of identity presentation on social media have demonstrated that profile owners are attentive to audience (Ellison et al., 2006). In symbolic interactionism the self is defined as “an object of the actor’s own actions” (Charon, 2009). The self is a dynamic process that is constantly defined and redefined. Thus, every individual is an actor that move toward internal environment; the self. Charon (2009) further asserts that the self is a social object, which arises from social interaction and to understand the meaning of self as an object he argues that one should consider emotions.

Postmodernism

When discussing symbolic interactionism, identity and psychological self it is important to notice it in the light of postmodernism as they are related to each other. One of the main ideas in postmodernism is the disbelief in absolute truth and it instead says that everything around us is constructed and that everything depends on its context (Featherstone, 2007). One central theory of postmodernism is fragmentation, which is applied to many different areas, one example being identity. The postmodernist view is that the world we live in today is media-centered and consumer-oriented and

individuals because of this find it difficult to develop their “real” identity, and instead create an identity based on what they are told to be by society (Featherstone, 1995). Because of the lack of belief in absolute truth or a predestined future the people in a postmodern culture become more individualistic (Featherstone, 2007) and more eager to develop their own self and their own identity, since this can have an impact on their life in a way they did not think that it previously could have. The postmodern human being more than before wants to develop her personal objectives and goals and this in turn affects how her identity is partly constructed. In a sense, the entire idea of social media, and especially the type of social media that Instagram is, a media where there is mainly a one way communication based on portraying the daily life of the user, could only exist in a postmodern society where the individual and her dreams and aspirations and way of coming across to others is in the center. This is also related to social interactionism.

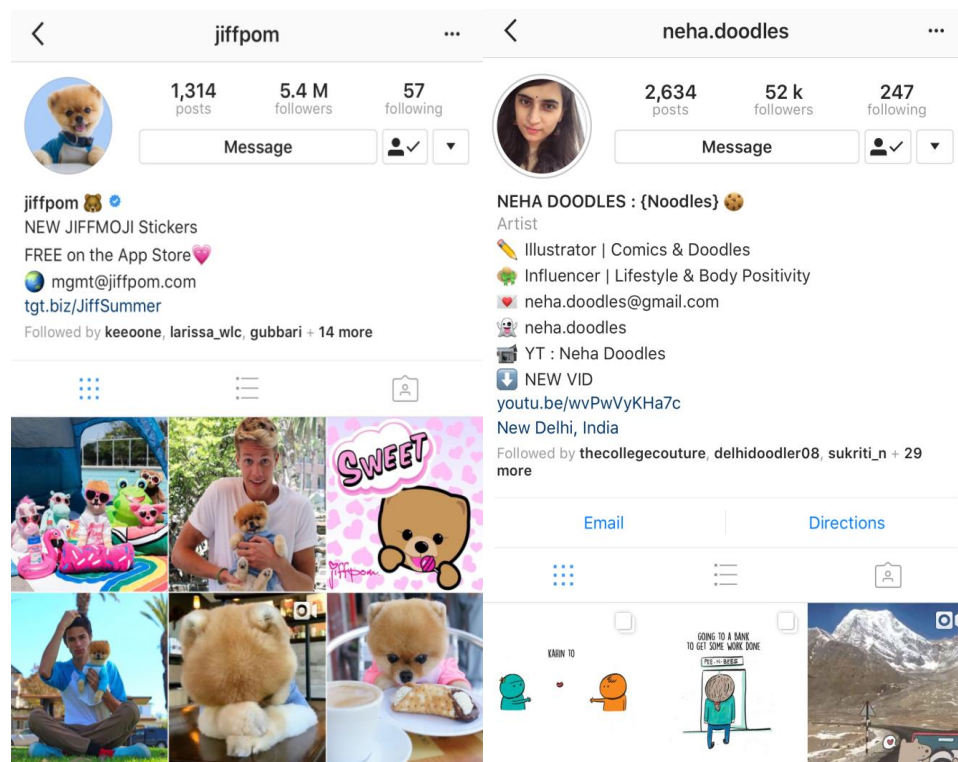


Figure 4: Micro celebrities exercising the concept of postmodernism

A central idea of postmodernism is the view of consumption as not only a way of benefitting from the actual 16 qualities of the product or service but also to convey something of the consumer of it (Featherstone, 2007). Instagram and other social media today are focused on the lives, or potential lives, of the users, lives that to a large extent is based on consumption. This means that identity and in part also social interactionism is very much related to the postmodernist view of the world, and without it, social media and especially Instagram would most likely not have looked the way it does and people would not use it in the same way that it is used today. Indeed, the result is that social life has changed.

Identity Capital

As social life in the western world is changing, the identity capital model by Cote (1997) takes its base from the idea that social life in the western world is becoming increasingly problematic for the individual (Gergen, 1991), especially in terms of creating a stable and viable identity (Cote, 1996). The problem with creating an identity is seen by some as a rather modern problem due to our increased focus on the individual instead of focusing on the group. It could though be argued that the issue of creating an identity has always existed but the possibilities to do this, through for example social media, have dramatically increased during the last century as we have gained access to multiple different ways of communication that did not previously exist. If people today are expected to individualize their life projects by “embarking on self-styled career/lifestyle trajectories based on their own personal preferences and choices” (Cote, 1997).

Today the importance of standing out among the crowd that is the globalized world is more emphasized than ever. The search to develop an identity and a “self” has existed in humans for a long time but the need for it has increased dramatically during the last century due to the competition we face regarding most of our life choices. Wallace (1995) describes the evolution of societal transitions as increasingly prolonged, in terms of transitions from education to work, dating to mating and childhood to adulthood. The problem of identity creation can therefore be seen in a postmodern perspective, how the issues behind identity creation stems from a more chaotic environment is described, a prerequisite clearly related to a postmodern view of the world. It is to find out how all individuals are in possession of their unique identity capital. This capital can be both tangible, as in financial assets and memberships, and intangible as in attitudes, knowledge or taste. More tangible assets tend to be manifested in the behaviours of individuals while more intangible assets tend to be a part of the personality of a person. This

model can be applied when looking at how, especially young people, create an image of themselves and how well they build up a status or negotiate for social memberships (Cote, 1997). This model can in this way be used when looking at how people create their identity online, through images, (Refer Figure 5), and how people use their identity capital to alter the projected image of them.

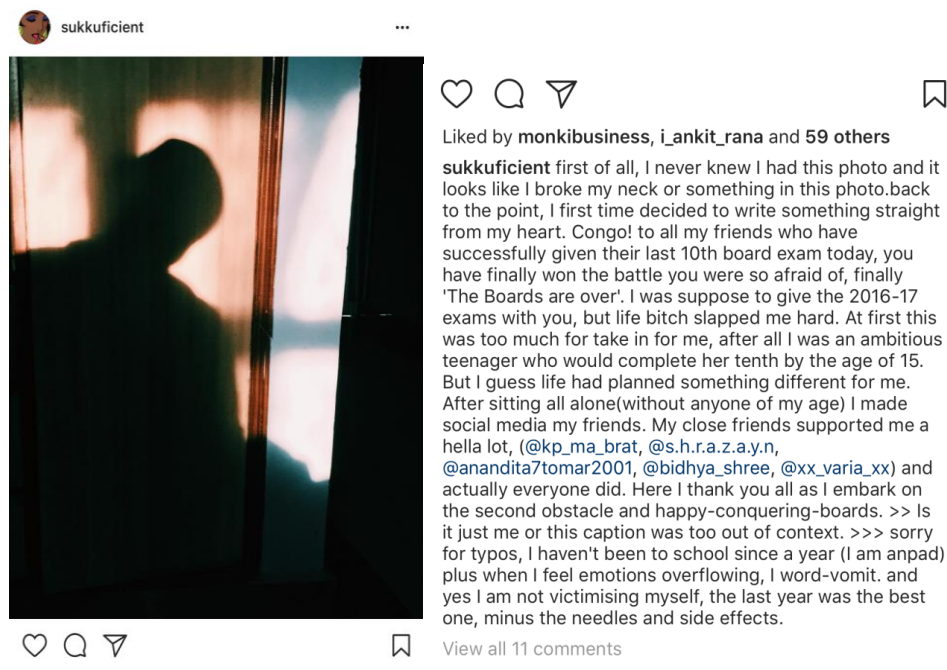


Figure 5: Societal transitions: Creation of Identity Capital

Qualitative Approach

This study explains how individuals create and convey their personal identity through images in social media. The core of this study is thus to research a behaviour and a process in which this is done. In a qualitative research strategy the main focus during the collection of data and the analysis is on words rather than quantification (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Epistemology refers to what is regarded as accepted scientific knowledge (ibid). Since the purpose of this paper is to understand how people create and alter their identity through images, an interpretive approach is most appropriate. Ontology concerns the nature of what entities exist, or can be said to exist and whether these entities should be regarded as objective or constructed. Furthermore, this study emphasizes a constructionist ontological approach since dealing with the complex identity creation and authenticity. In general, a qualitative

study is inductive, interpreting and constructionist. Finally, the constructionist view that is a central part of a qualitative research method 21 describes how social characteristics are the result of interaction between individuals and not by something “out there”.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The following conclusion is then based on the four themes that resulted from the coding process. The first theme, showing a nuanced image of themselves, were common for most of the participants in this study, meaning that they show only a selected part of their identity on Instagram. Many of them focused on certain areas of their identity and their life when it came to what they would post, ranging from their professional career oriented self to their artistic identity to their outgoing, social self. In comparison to “real life”, by which we mean the physical interaction in everyday life, social media and Instagram gives a greater freedom to express what people want to express as their identity and their self. If someone would in real life be limited by for example social status, money or time, social media contains a higher level of freedom when it comes to what can be posted. As one of the respondents as an example wanted to highlight his identity as a caring, politically and socially responsible citizen, this would most likely be much more costly and time consuming if he would actually have to participate in demonstrations, conferences and fundraisers. Through Instagram he instead posts photos of Amnesty International campaigns and citations regarding gender equality. Instagram, and personal branding through photos, can in this way be seen as an efficient way of promoting one’s identity, and in certain aspects more so than if this would have been done in real life. Partly creating and marketing one’s identity through images can thus be more efficient than doing it in “real life”. But during the research process a contradiction appeared which was manifested in the second theme; Images as a means of conveying identity for recognition. Several respondents claimed that they focused on certain aspects of their identity in terms of what they conveyed on Instagram, aspects which most often would be described as positive. But several respondents also showed a frustration and irritation since they felt that others mostly posted positive content about themselves. There was an irritation over people being too “good” or only posting images of themselves when they performed well. This according to some was easily identifiable and it could thus have a negative effect instead of the desired positive one considering what they wanted to highlight with their identity. Additionally, images can be technically altered which in turn can affect the level of credibility of them. The conclusion of this is thus that there has to be an understanding that this

awareness exists among many viewers and that consideration has to be taken to this, otherwise, the desired positive impact on the personal brand can end up being negative. The idea of images also plays an important role when this is compared to text, seen primarily in the third theme; Magnification as personal branding tool. Many of the respondents noted that images were more effective than text when it came to conveying a message mainly because this is more expressive and eye catching than text. Several respondents claimed the old saying; “A picture says more than a thousand words”, illustrating this. Images were also felt to be more artistically expressive than words. Several respondents described how their interest in photography or the arts were a major reason for why they had started using Instagram. It can thus be seen that whether the identity of the person is an artistic one or not, conveying one’s identity through images are most likely more expressively free than through words. The fourth and final theme, Reflexive social interaction, contributed to a more general conclusion that evolved throughout the research process. Conveying one’s identity through images can in the long run lead to a more expressive society. Several respondents mentioned how they saw Instagram as being very free, there are very few limits to what can be posted, and this could potentially lead to an impact on our culture as being more open and liberal regarding identity expression. It could although be argued that Instagram and other social media is a global forum, and that easier access to other cultures and the differences in identity and cultural expression could lead to a homogenization. Humans are generally considered as social beings who want to fit in with other humans and the increased awareness of others “selves” could lead to people imitating other people, and especially people outside of their own social sphere, to a greater extent than what has previously been done.

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