

Selfie-marketing: exploring narcissism and self-concept in visual user-generated content on social media

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Abstract

Purpose – The present research aims to examine selfie-marketing from a consumer behavior perspective. Creating and sharing selfies are gaining popularity among millennials. The authors seek to understand how this popularity relates to classic research on narcissism and self-concept and to determine the effectiveness of selfie-marketing in visual user-generated content.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed methods approach is used across two studies. Study 1's qualitative exploration uses the grounded theory method by analyzing semi-structured interviews with millennials. The findings produce three research propositions. These propositions are further developed into testable hypotheses in Study 2's quantitative investigation, featuring analysis of the variance of online survey data collected from millennials.

Findings – The findings suggest that narcissism positively relates to millennials' attitudes toward and intent to participate in selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps. Results also demonstrate that millennials seek to use selfies to present their self-concepts differently in various visual content-sharing environments.

Originality/value – The present research is among the first to focus on the importance of self-presentation and narcissism in regard to consumers' attitudes and behavioral responses toward selfie-marketing. For marketers, this underscores the importance of understanding the unique nature of user-generated visual content on social media.

Keywords Self-concept, Grounded theory, Narcissism, Selfie-marketing, User-generated content, Visual content-sharing apps

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The concept of a “selfie” is simple: a consumer takes a photo or video of himself or herself, shares it via social media and, then, waits for feedback. Approximately 93 million selfies are taken across the world each day (Cohen, 2016), with nearly 40 per cent of millennials taking at least one selfie per day (eMarketer, 2015). Indeed, selfies are an integral part of many consumers' lives, especially for millennials. Due to this growing trend, some companies are increasingly devoting resources to selfie-focused marketing activities (AdWeek, 2016), which encourage consumers to take and share selfies in relation to a brand. The authors hereafter refer to this concept as “selfie-marketing”, defined as user-generated selfies that are used by a

company for marketing purposes. For example, Buffalo Wild Wings launched an Instagram campaign asking consumers to share selfies with the hashtag #fannerism while watching the World Cup at its restaurants (Gibson, 2014).

While the marketing academic literature is studying brand–consumer interactions on mobile devices and social media in general (Bacile *et al.*, 2014; Hamilton *et al.*, 2016), it is important to examine the increasing trend of social networks featuring visual communication. Scholars outside of marketing, such as psychologists studying human interaction with computers, have made progress in this area. Bayer *et al.* (2016) examined visual-content sharing apps such as Instagram and Snapchat and how they differ from other social networking platforms in content formality and permanency, as well as unique social and emotional experiences. Moreover, Pittman and Reich (2016) suggested that people who share selfies on Instagram versus Snapchat may be attempting to express

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themselves differently, as social interactions on each platform may differ considerably. As such, consumers use self-presentation of selfies shared on visual content sharing apps as an impression management strategy (Qiu *et al.*, 2015). However, this phenomenon is far less researched in a marketing context (Lim and Lim, 2016), specifically as brands start to devote more resources to selfie-marketing campaigns.

The present research begins to fill this void by exploring the interplay of selfies, self-presentation, narcissism and self-concept on two popular visual content-sharing apps: Instagram and Snapchat. The authors examine how millennials use selfies to present their self-concepts on visual content-sharing apps, in an effort to understand their attitudes and intention to participate in selfie-marketing. This research adds to the literature's understanding of selfie-marketing and offers insights for marketers to plan and implement selfie-marketing initiatives.

Self-presentation and visual content-sharing apps

Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory posits that an individual develops a sense of self by creating an impression to showcase to others in face-to-face environments. In such social interactions, an individual controls which information to make available and how it should be made available, thereby forming one's impression management strategy (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). The prominence of self-presentation theory to marketers is immense and relates to several other consumer behavior theories. For example, the presentation of one's self through the lens self-concept theory (Sirgy, 1982) highlights the importance of consumers expressing an image or impression to others, such as through brand choice (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). Despite the offline origin of self-presentation and related theories, researchers are expanding these purviews to online contexts.

For instance, self-presentation is enhanced via computer-mediated-communication due to users exploiting technological aspects in certain online channels to manage their impressions (Walther, 1996). This enables people to use features of computer-mediated-communication channels to control the exchange of social information and manage their self-presentations (O'Sullivan, 2000). This idea of using channel attributes for "information control" (Feaster, 2010, p. 116) is paramount for users managing their self-presentations via different social media channels (Krämer and Winter, 2008).

The evolution of social media and front-facing camera technology now enables consumers to easily present themselves via a newer type of online environment: visual content-sharing apps. The photo- and video-editing features on visual content-sharing apps (e.g. Instagram and Snapchat) allow users to perform impression management by modifying their appearance to friends (Qiu *et al.*, 2015). In addition, similar to how products have utilitarian and hedonic functions, different social media may be used for utilitarian versus hedonic purposes.

While utilitarian value is task-related, hedonic value reflects entertainment and emotional worth (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Similarly, millennials may use a platform such as Twitter for utilitarian purposes of staying up-to-date on news while using visual content-sharing apps such as Instagram and Snapchat to

interact with their connections' photos and videos for hedonic purposes (Pittman and Reich, 2016). Because visual content-sharing apps are well-suited for media sharing, firms are increasingly exploring the use of selfie-marketing campaigns on such apps (AdWeek, 2016).

An examination of different visual content-sharing apps suggests that they should not be viewed as the same. Table I highlights the features of two of the most popular visual content-sharing platforms among millennials, Instagram and Snapchat (Jackson, 2016), to explain how millennials use different apps for self-presentation. As shown in Table I, Instagram and Snapchat both allow consumers to take and share selfies with ease, but they offer very different features, levels of privacy and levels of permanency. Given that selfies are a visual form of user-generated content, the present research focuses on the visual platforms of Instagram and Snapchat. Therefore, Study 1 explores millennials' use of selfies to express themselves on these visual content-sharing apps, as well as their attitudes and intention to participate in selfie-marketing on such apps.

Study 1

Methodology

A qualitative exploration is appropriate when examining under-researched areas (Creswell, 2014), such as the emergent phenomenon of sharing selfies via visual content-sharing apps. Therefore, Study 1 consisted of an exploratory, qualitative investigation following the Strauss and Corbin (1990) grounded theory methodology. Compared to the Glaser and Strauss (1967) method, the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory approach uses a more structured and linear coding process, with an emphasis on conditions, context and consequences (Evans, 2013; Goulding, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which relied on an interview protocol to provide consistency. This enabled each informant to elaborate beyond the original questions and allowed the interviewer to inject with follow-up questions based on unexpected responses. Semi-structured interviews are useful because they allow the interviewer, "to build a conversation within a particular subject [...] and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions served as the data source used for the interpretation of meaning. Appendix 1 includes the interview protocol.

Data analysis and interpretation

Raw data in the form of informants' own words were coded with an inductive, constant comparative approach for category development (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). First-order codes for related statements were grouped into a manageable number of categories (Weber, 1990). Related categories helped to form more abstract metacategories. This process of assigning first-order codes to spoken words, aligning related first-order codes to categories and then grouping categories to form abstract metacategories is an accepted data analysis procedure commonly used in marketing research (Wunderlich *et al.*, 2013).

Table I A summary of snapchat versus Instagram

Feature	Instagram	Snapchat
Photos	Once posted, photos appear permanently, unless the photo sharer deletes it The user can share an unlimited number of photos Public by default, which means they are visible to all Instagram users. If a user chooses to make his or her account private, then only the users who follow him or her will be able to see his or her photos	Once posted, story appears for a 24-h period The user can share an unlimited number of 1-10 s photos Only available to a user's followers During the 24-h period a story is available, the user can delete a piece of content anytime
Video	Maximum length of 3-15 s per video All videos appear permanently unless the user deletes it All videos are public by default, which means they are visible to all Instagram users. If a user chooses to make his or her account private, then only the users who follow him or her will be able to see his or her videos	Maximum length of 1-10 s per video All videos that are a part of a user's story are only available to the user's followers All videos will be available for 24 h from the time it was posted
Real-time sharing	Shared photos and videos on Instagram can be either be taken in real-time and shared on Instagram right away or shared on Instagram from the user's library of saved media on the user's mobile device	All of the shared photos and videos that appear in a story must be taken in Snapchat and edited and shared in real-time
Self-editing	<i>Ability to crop a photo:</i> Yes <i>Photo/video geolocation information:</i> The user can search for a location that best matches where the photo was taken <i>Filter themes:</i> approximately 20 options <i>Embedded photo/video caption:</i> No. But, the sharer can easily add a caption that will appear underneath the content once it is posted <i>Embedded photo/video pictorial content:</i> No. But, the sharer can include emoticons (i.e. digital icons used to express ideas or emotions in electronic communication) to the caption Hashtags are searchable User can tag other users	<i>Ability to crop a photo:</i> No <i>Photo/video geolocation information:</i> Real-time location and temperature are automatically available <i>Filter themes:</i> Three basic options (white, saturated, sepia) <i>Embedded photo/video caption:</i> Yes. The sharer can choose to either type a caption and can choose from different font sizes and colors or to write a caption with one's finger <i>Embedded photo/video pictorial contents:</i> Yes. The sharer can easily add emoticons, which can be placed anywhere on the content. Uses can also use their finger to add a freehanded drawing to the content Hashtags are not searchable User cannot tag other users
Ability to share content on other social media platforms	Easy to share on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Tumblr	Unable to share directly on other social media platforms, but can be saved to the user's photo/video gallery on his/her mobile device to be accessed later
Viewer engagement	A viewer can click "like" and write comments on any shared photos and videos Likes and comments are available to all of the user's followers	A viewer cannot click "like" or make comments on any shared content Number of views for a piece of content is only available to the user

In addition to the aforementioned coding process, another analysis technique called dimensional profiling was adopted from [Strauss and Corbin \(1990\)](#). To create a dimensional profile, some of the underlying properties of metacategories were placed on different continua (e.g. low-high, few-many, short-lengthy) during open-coding. This helped to discover relationships in the data which then aided in category and metacategory development.

Sample characteristics

Interviews took place with 17 college students (10 women; 7 men; $M_{Age} = 21$) from a mid-size public university in the

Northeastern USA, thus representing millennials. As recommended in qualitative inquires ([Creswell, 2014](#)), purposeful sampling was used to ensure that all informants had experience taking and sharing selfies on visual content sharing apps. The number of informants in the sample is similar to other qualitative studies that have explored newer technologies in marketing ([Peters et al., 2007](#)). [Appendix 2](#) includes the informants' profiles.

Findings

The data analysis led to the emergence of three metacategories: self importance, ordinary conversation and extraordinary

amplification. **Table II** presents the coding structure used to arrive at these three metacategories. The process of using the raw data to create meaningful metacategories is discussed in the following paragraphs, supported with representative quotes from informants.

Self importance

The self importance metacategory was conceptualized by the authors and defined as an exaggerated focus on the importance of one's self within their social relationships. This metacategory was indicative of consumers who exhibit selfie behavior in general. Overall, 13 informants exhibited some degree of Self Importance. To develop this metacategory, the authors linked first-order codes to the underlying categories of *center of attention* and *desire for social adoration*. Regarding the center of attention category, the acts of taking and sending selfies via social media help to feed these millennials' need to capture the attention of others. Informants perceived themselves to be so important that their social connections constantly wanted to know their current status (e.g. Andy: "When I'm [sharing a selfie] people want to know what's going on in my life"). Informants used selfies on social networks to get noticed (e.g. Darla: "I want people to see me. I want people to notice me") and get responses from others (e.g. Eden: "To get Likes or any kind of reaction out of it or comments out of it. That's usually my intention"). In fact, the notion of a shared selfie not gaining others' attention (i.e. being ignored) was viewed negatively (e.g. Beth: "It's kind of saddening [...] if no one would respond to [my selfie] in any way, just ignore it [...] it's disappointing").

Selfies also helped to feed one's desire for social adoration. This category is described as informants' neediness for others to like them or respect them, such as attempts to suggest to or

convince their connections that they are interesting, funny or unique in some way. Moreover, informants posted selfies on social media as attempts to convince others that the poster should be admired or held in high regard. For example, Mike needed others to think he was interesting ("I have interests that lots of people don't have, so I figure if I take a picture of myself doing these things, I want someone to think I as a person am interesting") and Evan desired to have others think of him as humorous ("I want others to think I'm funny [...] to see and know about the extremely funny things that happen in my life").

Notably, informants who showed evidence of possessing some degree of self importance seemed open to the idea of selfie-marketing – as long as it centered on their own needs and preferences. For example, Eden noted she would look favorably upon and participate in a selfie-marketing campaign if, "it was for something that I would agree with". Informants' evaluations of the attractiveness of selfie-marketing campaigns were often tied to what was in it for them. For example, Tyler declared he would participate in a selfie-marketing campaign for, "monetary rewards or nonmonetary [...] something that I can actually use, benefit from, and enjoy".

The theoretical domain of narcissism aligns well with the authors' conceptualization of self importance. Narcissism is a personality trait characterized by a grandiose self-presentation motivated by the need to regulate self-esteem (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001). Visual content-sharing apps inherently involve self-presentation and feedback from others; as such, narcissism influences how millennials present themselves on visual content-sharing apps. Previous research suggests that narcissism is related to a desire to have a large social network of

Table II Overview of data coding structure

Illustrative data – first-order codes	Second-order categories	Metacategories
Get noticed	Center of attention	Self-importance
Get responses		
Hate being ignored		
Current status made available		
Bring focus to myself		
Need to feel liked	Desire for social adoration	
Need to feel funny/humorous		
Need to feel interesting		
Need to feel unique		
Need to feel important		
Unselective of selfie	Common place image	Ordinary conversation
Regular look		
Everyday activity		
Mundane situation	Low exposure	
Personal conversation		
Duration of visibility is limited		
Limited number of people will see it	Embellished image	Extraordinary amplification
Highly selective of selfie		
Look better than normal		
Special occasions		
A "take notice" situation or activity		
Megaphone broadcast	High exposure	
Lots of people will see it		
Duration of visibility is lengthy		

connections, a concern over getting attention of others, and presenting a positive self-image on social media (Bergman *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, social media users who score high on narcissism engage in a higher level of overall social media activities (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Based on the literature and findings from the present study, millennials possessing some degree of narcissism should have a favorable attitude toward and an interest in participating in selfie-marketing. Thus, the authors posit the following:

- P1. Narcissism is positively related to attitude toward selfie-marketing campaigns on visual content-sharing apps.
- P2. Narcissism is positively related to intent to participate in selfie-marketing campaigns on visual content-sharing apps.

Ordinary conversation and extraordinary amplification

The next two conceptualized metacategories were labeled as ordinary conversation and extraordinary amplification. These two metacategories were somewhat polar opposites of one another and, therefore, were aided by using dimensional profiling. Ordinary conversation is defined as communicating via visual content-sharing apps in a way similar to an everyday, personal conversation with one other person or a small group of others. In this manner, these ordinary conversations are not sensationalized and unfold similar to a real-time exchange in which the user-generated content cannot be saved in perpetuity or easily shared with the masses. Extraordinary amplification is defined as communicating through visual content sharing apps to sensationalize one's self to a larger, broader group than a one-on-one conversation. These exchanges can expose hyped or glorified user-generated content for a lengthier duration of time and to a larger audience. Interestingly, these two metacategories had a direct link to selfie-sharing behaviors via Snapchat and Instagram, respectively.

Regarding the ordinary conversation metacategory, first-order codes were linked to the underlying categories *commonplace image* and *low exposure* as informants discussed their selfie activities on Snapchat. For instance, coded informant data regarding selfies on Snapchat were linked to the commonplace image category by mentions of not being selective of a selfie image to share (e.g. Andy: "One or two times I take [a selfie]"), not looking at one's best (e.g. Sue: "I send snapchats when not looking as nice") and during normal, mundane situations (e.g. Evan: "If I am bored [...] [selfies] just describe my personality in the moment"). Representative examples of first-order codes linked to the low exposure category regarding selfies on Snapchat included mentions of visibility to only a few people (e.g. Zayne: "More personally based, like if I am going to send it to a specific person [...] a conversation with someone") and limited duration (e.g. Janice: "It is not something that people can look at over and over again, it's there then it's gone").

Regarding the extraordinary amplification metacategory, a number of codes were linked to the underlying categories *embellished image* and *high exposure*, as informants discussed their selfie activities on Instagram. For instance, coded informant data related to the embellished image category included being highly selective or overly picky of a selfie image

to share (e.g. Cathy: "At least 30 pre-selfies and then settle on the one"), a desire to look at their best, (e.g. Eden: "Feel like I am looking good. Only once every few weeks when I do my hair and makeup [...] Yes [uses filters] to make myself look better") and during special occasions or events (e.g. Zoe: "Usually if it is a big event or if I was on a vacation or something. Nothing on a regular basis") when referencing selfies on Instagram. Examples of first-order codes linked to the high exposure category referred to a large number of people may see the selfie and the duration of a selfie may be over an extended or unlimited time frame for selfies shared on Instagram (e.g. Janice: "On Instagram [...] it is not a one and done deal you see it for a second and then it is gone [...] you see it on their newsfeed for as long as they keep it up there").

The authors posit that the ordinary conversation and extraordinary amplification metacategories share some consistencies with self-concept theory. "Self-concept" refers to the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself or herself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). Self-concept is a multidimensional construct, within which two of its dimensions align with these two metacategories: the actual-self and the ideal-self. According to Sirgy (1985), the actual self-concept represents how an individual sees him or herself in actuality (i.e. in everyday life), whereas the ideal-self represents how an individual would like to be seen by others (i.e. at their very best). This psychological concept plays an important role in consumer decision-making (Sirgy, 1982), and the authors posit that the two self-concepts relate to consumers' choice of which visual content-sharing app to use when sharing selfies. To apply a metaphor to the interpretation of our findings (Spiggle, 1994), informants sometimes arrived at a *fork in the road* concerning what social network to use when sharing a selfie.

In the analysis, the authors linked 16 of the 17 informants' selfie-sharing characteristics on Snapchat to an actual self-concept. Example words and phrases linked to the actual self for Snapchat selfies included statements of taking a selfie when looking normal, always looking the same no matter what, during everyday situations and caring less about an optimal appearance. The authors also linked the actual self-concept to actions of choosing to take a single selfie instead of taking several to choose from for Snapchat (e.g. Beth, who takes a single selfie for Snapchat, because "they are going to take what they are going to get") and no use of image filters and enhancements for Snapchat (e.g. Ida: "No filters!"). In contrast to an actual self, the authors identified an association between the ideal self and Instagram. We linked 12 of 15 informants' [1] selfie-sharing characteristics on Instagram to an ideal self-concept. Representative examples of words and phrases linked to the ideal self-concept included statements such as trying to look better or more attractive than normal, doing something special or attending special events and being with important people. The authors also linked the ideal self-concept to actions of repeatedly taking selfies to choose the perfect one for Instagram (e.g. Joe: "I pick my favorite selfie of the week [...] I take 15-to-20 a day [...] like 100 a week. So I will pick my favorite") and heavy use of image filters and enhancements on Instagram (e.g. Darla: "Filters are very important. It just looks better"). In sum, depending on an informant's appearance, the situation, the desired length and breadth of exposure, an

informant may have chosen a social media pathway that aligned with either the actual or ideal self.

Importantly, the same person communicating an actual-self on one visual content-sharing app and an ideal-self on another is supported within self-concept theory, which suggests that self-concepts are dynamic structures that vary by situations, social perceptions and communication partners (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). In addition, on social media, it is quite common to represent one's self in either an enhanced socially desirable image or an actual image depending on the situation and audience (Qiu et al., 2015). As shown in Table I, by enabling private versus more public discussions, content visible to friends versus content visible to anyone, sharing briefly or in perpetuity and offering a limited to wide selection of image filter tools can make one app more attractive over the other depending on how millennials want to present their self-concept via a selfie in a given situation. Thus, the authors posit the following:

P3a. An actual self-concept aligns with characteristics of Snapchat when sharing a selfie.

P3b. An ideal self-concept aligns with characteristics of Instagram when sharing a selfie.

Study 1 discussion

The exploratory findings from Study 1 offer insights into a consumer's personality that can benefit marketers wishing to implement selfie-marketing initiatives. Millennials have underlying desires to feel self-important, which can be met via ordinary conversations or via extraordinary amplification. Depending on which self-concept is active at a particular moment, millennials can satisfy their needs for self-importance through Snapchat or Instagram.

Understanding such consumer behaviors can aid marketers who want consumers to participate in selfie-marketing. For example, marketers of products designed to improve consumers in some way (e.g. fashion apparel, cosmetics) may benefit by using Instagram as the medium for a selfie-marketing campaign. In contrast, marketers of products designed with everyday life in mind (e.g. fast food, coffee) may find more success using Snapchat for a selfie-marketing campaign. While Study 1 posits the relationships of narcissism and self-concept, respectively, to selfie-marketing campaigns, Study 2 formally hypothesizes and assesses these relationships quantitatively.

Hypotheses development

Narcissism and selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps

Highly narcissistic individuals are characterized as egocentric, having a sense of grandiosity, dominance and entitlement and perceiving themselves as more attractive and better than others (Raskin and Howard, 1988). Research suggests that highly narcissistic individuals post a greater number of selfies (Sorokowski et al., 2015) and photos with others (Bergman et al., 2011) on social media than individuals who exhibit low narcissism. Moreover, narcissists believe they are entitled to the admiration and respect of others (Baumeister and Bushman, 2002). To extend this literature and to formally hypothesize the qualitative findings from Study 1, the authors contend that

narcissism has the same effect on millennials' attitudes and behavioral responses toward selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps and posit the hypotheses shown in Figure 1:

H1. Narcissism is positively related to attitudes toward participating in selfie-marketing on (a) Snapchat and (b) Instagram.

H2. Narcissism is positively related to intention to participate in selfie-marketing on (a) Snapchat and (b) Instagram.

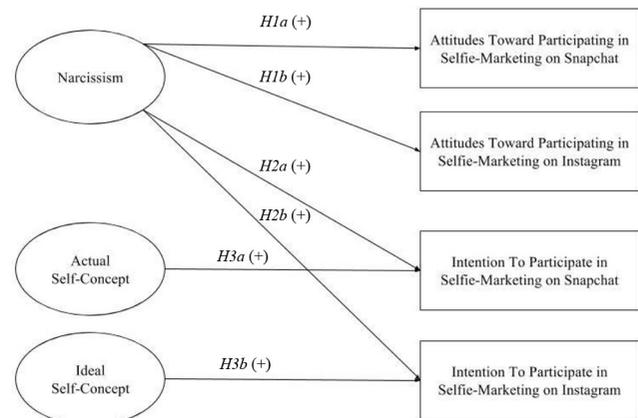
Self-concept and selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps

Consumers use self-presentation as an impression management strategy, in that they develop a sense of self by creating an impression they wish to give others (Goffman, 1959). This self-presentation is continuously being shaped by one's self-concept, including one's actual self-concept or one's perceived reality of oneself, as well as one's ideal self-concept or one's ideals and goals of what one would like to become (Wylie, 1979). Due to the ephemeral nature of certain visual content-sharing sites such as Snapchat, which consumers use to express themselves more freely (Bayer et al., 2016), compared to Instagram, where the content that is posted is more formal and permanent in nature (Pittman and Reich, 2016), the authors posit that consumers who have strong actual self-concepts will engage with selfie-marketing campaigns on various sites differently than those who have strong ideal self-concepts. This hypothesis is further supported by findings from Study 1, which suggest that the visual content-sharing site a millennial uses may depend on which self-concept is active at a given moment. Thus, the authors hypothesize the following:

H3a. Consumers with stronger actual self-concepts will have greater intention to participate in selfie-marketing campaigns via Snapchat compared to consumers who exhibit weaker actual self-concepts.

H3b. Consumers with stronger ideal self-concepts will have greater intention to participate in selfie-marketing campaigns via Instagram compared to consumers who exhibit weaker ideal self-concepts.

Figure 1 Study 2 hypotheses



Study 2

Methodology

Study 2 is a survey-based design that seeks to examine the effect of narcissism and self-concept in attitudes and behavior responses related to selfie-marketing among millennials. Undergraduate students at a university in the Midwest USA were recruited for course credit. The sample is familiar with the social media environment, with 92 and 95 per cent using Instagram and Snapchat, respectively. Furthermore, responses to a seven-point semantic differential question – anchored with very unfamiliar and very familiar – asking about their familiarity with Snapchat (Instagram) produced a mean score of 6.45 (6.35). To further illustrate the sample's familiarity, 90 per cent of the participants post visual content several times per month. A total of 168 students participated in the survey, 16 of which failed a quality check and were removed from the analysis. As a result, 152 usable responses were collected (68 per cent female, $M_{\text{Age}} = 20$ years).

Participants first responded to items about their Snapchat and Instagram usage and then responded to items about narcissism, actual self-concept and ideal self-concept. Based on their average composite score, the authors used median splits to dichotomize the participants into high and low groups on each of the three variables. Next, participants were asked to imagine a company they like a lot and to provide the name of the company. They were then given the definition of selfie-marketing and were asked about their attitudes toward and intentions to participate in a selfie-marketing campaign for said company as they responded to the remaining survey items (these items were automatically populated with the name of the company they provided).

Narcissism was measured using the 16-item, Likert-type narcissism personality inventory from Ames *et al.* (2006). To assess *actual self-concept*, participants responded to the question, "To what extent do the following personality attributes apply to you?" Following Kressman *et al.* (2006), participants used a seven-point Likert-type scale to answer this question for a list of 14 personality attributes. To assess *ideal self-concept*, participants responded to the question, "To what extent do the following personality attributes apply to how you would like to be?" which was followed by the same list of 14 personality attributes. *Attitude toward participating in selfie-marketing on Snapchat (Instagram)* was measured using a three-item, seven-point Likert-type scales adapted from Falk *et al.* (2010). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on the statement, "Participating in [company name]'s selfie-marketing on Snapchat (Instagram) would be exciting/interesting/enjoyable". *Intention to participate in selfie-marketing* was measured using a two-item, semantic differential scale (very unlikely/very likely; definitely will not/definitely will) for the question "How likely is it that you will participate in [company name]'s selfie-marketing on Snapchat (Instagram)?"

Results

An analysis of covariance was conducted to examine the hypotheses: the effect of narcissism on millennials' attitudes toward (*H1*) and intent to participate in (*H2*) selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps. Controlling for participants' use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest,

narcissism has a significant, positive effect on millennials' attitude toward participating in selfie-marketing on Snapchat ($F(6) = 3.32$, $M_{\text{Nar}} = 5.41$, $M_{\text{Non-Nar}} = 5.06$, $p = 0.05$), but not on Instagram ($F(6) = 38.58$, $M_{\text{Nar}} = 5.21$, $M_{\text{Non-Nar}} = 4.99$, $p > 0.05$); thus, *H1* is partially supported. Narcissism also has a significant, positive effect on millennials' intent to participate in selfie-marketing on Snapchat ($F(6) = 19.86$, $M_{\text{Nar}} = 4.84$, $M_{\text{Non-Nar}} = 4.18$, $p < 0.01$) and on Instagram ($F(6) = 29.93$, $M_{\text{Nar}} = 4.45$, $M_{\text{Non-Nar}} = 3.78$, $p < 0.01$), thereby supporting *H2*.

The authors next assessed the effect of actual and ideal self-concept on (a) Snapchat and (b) Instagram selfie-marketing participation (*H3*). Actual self-concept has a significant, positive effect on millennials' intent to participate in selfie-marketing on Snapchat ($F(6) = 21.74$, $M_{\text{HighActual}} = 4.88$, $M_{\text{LowActual}} = 4.13$, $p < 0.05$), in support of *H3a*. Results further indicate that ideal self-concept has a significant, positive effect on millennials' intent to participate in selfie-marketing on Instagram ($F(6) = 21.38$, $M_{\text{HighIdeal}} = 4.49$, $M_{\text{LowIdeal}} = 3.74$, $p < 0.05$), in support of *H3b*. Additionally, ideal self-concept does not have a significant effect on millennials' participation in selfie-marketing on Snapchat ($F(1) = 3.45$, $M_{\text{HighIdeal}} = 4.83$, $M_{\text{LowIdeal}} = 4.19$, $p > 0.05$) and actual self-concept does not have a significant effect on millennials' participation in selfie-marketing on Instagram ($F(1) = 3.45$, $M_{\text{HighActual}} = 4.42$, $M_{\text{LowActual}} = 3.79$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the alternative relationships to *H3a* and *H3b* are not significant.

Discussion and theoretical contributions

The growing popularity of mobile devices and social media is enabling consumers to participate in newer forms of marketing communication (Bacile *et al.*, 2014). Selfie-marketing is one emergent type of such communications, which aligns with millennials' selfie-sharing behavior and is thus capturing the interests of marketers. The present research is among the first to shed light on the roles of narcissism, self-presentation and self-concept on millennials' attitudes and behavioral responses toward selfie-marketing in visual content sharing apps. The first contribution of the present research corroborates the positive relationship between narcissism and selfie behaviors (Sorokowski *et al.*, 2015) and extends this relationship to selfie-marketing initiatives. The authors demonstrate that narcissistic millennials have positive attitudes toward and greater intentions to participate in self-marketing campaigns on visual content-sharing apps.

The present research also adds to the literature on self-concept. Shankar *et al.* (2009) suggest that identity should no longer be viewed as a stable or enduring construct but as one that is constantly negotiated, reassembled and reproduced across time. Results of the present study support and extend these conclusions, suggesting that as the visual content-sharing environment changes, so too do opportunities for consumers to express and alter their self-concepts. Thus, consumers' self-concepts can change over time, but they can change based on the nature of the media they use to express them. Furthermore, Belk (2014) contends that consumers often pay closer attention to managing their online presence than their presence in a traditional, face-to-face environment. The present research supports and adds to these recent findings by demonstrating that millennials use selfies to present their self-concepts

differently on visual content-sharing apps. In general, millennials put more effort into creating, selecting and improving the quality of their selfies before sharing on permanent, versus real-time, visual content-sharing apps. These findings also add to the classic psychological concept of the ideal self, in that millennials focus on this self when the content is more permanent in nature but are more willing to express their actual selves through real-time content. Moreover, the findings of the present study suggest that millennials often possess multiple self-concepts with their selfie-sharing behavior, that is, a given consumer may seek to express herself as professional and attractive in a more permanent environment such as Instagram, but as funny and casual in a real-time environment such as Snapchat.

Finally, this research contributes to the marketing literature on consumer behavior related to social media. While participants expressed some similarities across visual content-sharing apps, results of the present study reveal that consumers engage in selfie-related behaviors differently. When consumers seek to express their ideal self, they are more likely to use an app like Instagram as a visual diary, depicting selfies of traveling, celebrating special occasions and looking and feeling their best. Moreover, these selfies allow them to express their artistic tastes such as the immensely popular use of filters prior to posting the content. While perfecting one's ideal self is often not a real-time activity for these consumers, they must engage in real-time communication on other visual content-sharing apps such as Snapchat. Sending visual content in real-time allows consumers to express their actual selves without concern for permanency. Indeed, the present research highlights the importance of marketing scholars studying the distinct and intricate nature of creating and sharing of visual content on social media.

Managerial implications and future research directions

Marketers can use the findings of the present study to aid in the design and implementation of selfie-marketing for brands. The first two propositions of Study 1 suggest that a consumer who exhibits the personality trait of narcissism is more likely to have a favorable attitude toward and a stronger intent to participate in a selfie-marketing campaign. This bodes well for marketers who want to implement selfie-marketing campaigns pursuing millennials, as the millennial generation has a stronger predisposition toward narcissism versus other generations (Bergman *et al.*, 2011). Study 1's last two propositions posit that consumers may be more likely to share a particular self-concept via selfies on certain social networks. While *P1* and *P2* suggest that millennials generally look upon selfie-marketing favorably, *P3a* and *P3b* suggest that the type of selfie shared may vary by visual content-sharing app.

This is a particularly valuable finding for marketers of products that often align with an actual versus an ideal self-concept. For instance, a popular cosmetics firm which often conveys an ideal self-concept to millennials may have success with a selfie-marketing campaign via a visual content-sharing app such as Instagram, where these consumers prefer to communicate an ideal self-concept through their selfies. In contrast, a selfie-marketing campaign on Snapchat may seem more appealing to millennials when brands convey an actual self-concept such as Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign (Neff, 2014).

As demonstrated in Study 2, marketers should consider aligning millennials' behaviors on visual content-sharing apps with the focus of their promotions. That is to say, selfie-marketing efforts aimed at millennials' ideal selves are likely to lead to more positive attitudes and receptive behavioral intentions on permanent, versus real-time, visual content-sharing apps (e.g. Instagram). On the other hand, selfie-marketing aimed at millennials' actual selves are likely to resonate more with consumers in environments where they prefer real-time content. For example, while selfie-marketing efforts on Instagram may be more effective if millennials are encouraged to share one of their "very best" selfies, marketers may consider requesting that millennials share an informal, humorous selfie on Snapchat.

Next, marketers should note that some millennials are more narcissistic than others. While narcissistic millennials have more positive attitudes toward and greater intentions to participate in selfie-marketing, marketers may consider targeting the ideal and actual self-concepts of millennials who are low in narcissism to increase positive attitudes and participation. Future research should explore what comprises an effective selfie-marketing campaign targeted at narcissistic versus non-narcissistic millennials. Finally, because millennials are more likely to use a visual content-sharing app such as Instagram to share selfies that depict important moments, marketers should design such selfie-marketing campaigns to encourage consumers to share selfies that feature those moments, whereas on Snapchat, selfie-marketing campaigns should be more directed at everyday activities.

As with many exploratory studies, several limitations and opportunities for future research should be noted. First, future scholars should seek to increase external validity by increasing the diversity of the sample, including teenagers (ages 12–17) and older consumers (ages 31+). Second, future studies should examine the effect of gender in selfie-marketing on visual content-sharing apps. Third, while the present study focused on brand promotion through selfies from everyday consumers, celebrity brand promotion is a longstanding, popular concept in the marketing literature (Choi *et al.*, 2005), and future studies could add to the selfie-marketing literature by considering the effects of celebrity selfies. By comparing the effects of selfies created and shared by everyday consumers compared to those of celebrities, such studies would extend the body of literature on celebrity endorsement.

Other future research opportunities exist for marketing academics and practitioners to extend beyond selfie-marketing on Instagram and Snapchat to other social media platforms that use similar features. For example, Facebook and Pinterest share permanency elements, whereas Wickr and iDelete are more focused in real-time and on self-destruction. Furthermore, scholars should explore other features of visual content-sharing apps identified beyond permanency, such as how many brands use the app and how public/private users can make the content. In general, selfie-marketing is underexplored, and a variety of academic and practical strides can be made to shed light on this phenomenon and its implications for consumers' narcissism and self-concept.

Note

- 1 Two informants had never shared a selfie on Instagram.

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Appendix 1. Interview protocol

Interviewee number #: _____
 Interview Date: _____

Please complete this survey before we begin the interview:

- 1) Gender: _____Male _____Female
- 2) Age: _____
- 3) Cell phone type: _____

Interview begins here...

- (1) Why did you decide to become an Instagram user?
- (2) How would you describe your Instagram behaviors?
- (3) Why did you decide to become a Snapchat user?
- (4) How would you describe your Snapchat behaviors?
- (5) Do you take selfies?
- (6) Why do you take selfies?
- (7) How do you think your selfies describe yourself?
- (8) What do your selfies look like?
- (9) Please describe your selfie behaviors on Instagram.
- (10) Please describe your selfie behaviors on Snapchat.
- (11) What are your thoughts on companies that use Instagram for selfie-marketing campaigns? What are your thoughts on companies that use Snapchat for selfie-marketing campaigns? Do you have different opinions toward such campaigns on Instagram versus Snapchat? Why or why not?
- (12) What are your thoughts on companies that you follow that ask you to participate in selfie-marketing on Instagram? What are your thoughts on companies that you follow that ask you to participate in selfie-marketing on Snapchat?
- (13) Have you ever participated in a selfie-marketing campaign on Instagram and/or Snapchat?
- (14) Any final thoughts you want to share with me?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 2. Interviewee profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Age
Beth	Female	18
Sue	Female	23
Darla	Female	21
Mike	Male	24
Mary	Female	22
Joe	Male	19
Evan	Male	21
Zayne	Male	22
Zoe	Female	20
Eden	Female	20
Tyler	Male	26
Cathy	Female	20
Ida	Female	19
Andy	Male	21
Ken	Male	18
Steph	Female	21
Janice	Female	23

Note: All interviewees are both Snapchat and Instagram users except two, who only use Snapchat

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