



BUS5000W

FINAL ARTICLE

**SOCIAL MEDIA PERFORMANCE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP WITH CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION: THROUGH THE LENS
OF THE EXPECTATION CONFIRMATION THEORY**

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Submitted in fulfilment towards the completion of the BUS5000W course at the
University of Cape Town.

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Caitlin Ferreira

ABSTRACT

Early theories of conspicuous consumption proposed a framework in which individuals attempt to imitate the consumption patterns of others that maintain a higher social status. This results in individuals ostentatiously displaying their consumption patterns in order to reinforce their social status. The advent of social media has provided individuals with a new platform on which to display their conspicuous consumption. All consumption now has the possibility to become conspicuous consumption, displayed to a large network of friends and followers online. When individuals post content on social networking sites (SNSs), referred to as user-generated content, they hold some initial expectations regarding the response that their content will receive. This response (for example Likes and Comments on Facebook) is referred to as Social Media Performance in the current research. While research has been conducted, albeit minimal research, into measuring the performance of brand-generated content, no academic research has considered the perceived performance evaluation of individual user-generated content.

Previous research has identified a link between online performance, referred to as Social Media Performance in the current research, and conspicuous consumption. This link has however been suggested to be moderated by three variables, self-esteem, social media usage and emotion, tested separately as positive and negative affect. The current research sought to evaluate the moderating influences that self-esteem, social media usage and emotion exerted on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This was done through the lens of the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), as Social Media Performance is posited to follow an Expectation Confirmation Theory framework, in which SNS users are either satisfied or dissatisfied depending on their subjective evaluation of performance.

A conclusive, causal research design was implemented; making use of a non-probability sampling technique that achieved a sample size of 282 respondents. The target population consisted of young adults, between the ages of 18 and 29 years, due to the adoption of SNS usage amongst this age cohort. The results found a negative correlation to exist between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption and a positive correlation to exist between social media usage and conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, self-esteem, social media usage and negative affect were found to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. In particular, in the presence of negative Social Media Performance, higher levels of social media usage and lower levels of negative affect exerted a greater influence on this relationship. Whereas in the presence of positive Social Media Performance, lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of negative affect exert a greater influence on this relationship. This research has also confirmed the positive relationship between social media usage and conspicuous consumption.

The academic contribution of this research is four-fold: First, the concept of Social Media Performance is formalised. While other studies have referred to the importance of the performance of social media postings, few have conceptualised the construct directly. Second, the research has adopted an interdisciplinary approach, seeking to extend the implementation of the Expectation Confirmation Theory in a social media context. Third, the research addresses a gap in the literature concerning the effect of social media activity on its users as well as addressing a scarcity of literature surrounding user-generated content. Finally, the research provides clarity on several relationships that have garnered conflicting results in current literature.

The practical significance of this research is four-fold: First, this research stresses the importance of online consumer engagement on social media platforms. The research further provides practical guidelines regarding content and the nature of interactions and emphasizes the importance of developing Social CRM. Second, the influence of Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption is elucidated, and three moderating variables influencing this relationship are examined. The examination of this relationship indicates how user characteristics and perceived performance are able to affect consumption behaviour. Practical suggestions have been provided that would aid brands in seeking to alter the effect that the moderating variables exert. One such suggestion is the implementation of gamification principles in social media marketing strategies. This implication further stresses that marketing managers should be aware that social networking site users are particularly vulnerable to predatory marketing techniques. Third, the importance of controlling for an emotional response to social media content, self-esteem and social media usage is illustrated. Finally, a further implication relates to the assurance that all components of a digital marketing strategy are seamlessly integrated and offer consistent information.

Keywords:

Social Media Performance, User-generated Content, Conspicuous Consumption and Expectation Confirmation Theory.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of conspicuous consumption has been prevalent in Western society for several centuries (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; Page, 1992). Conspicuous consumption relates to the consumption of products that seek to display one's wealth in an attempt to reinforce one's social status (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). An individual engaging in ostentatious displays of wealth, allows other members of society to pass judgment on one's social status, and this seeks to reinforce the position (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001). Conspicuous consumption is defined as "the situation in which people spend a lot of money intentionally, so that other people notice and will admire them for their wealth" (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2015).

While the means through which members of society have chosen to display their wealth have changed over time, however the ultimate objective of obtaining status and prestige has remained unchanged (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; Page, 1992). The introduction of the Internet has provided individuals with a new platform to share their conspicuous consumption. It appears that the introduction of social media, in particular, has allowed for products that were once consumed in private to be publicly shared with a user's network of friends and followers (Yenicioğlu & Christodoulides, 2014).

Social media is defined as "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" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 59). Boyd and Ellison (2008) identify that since the inception of the first social media platforms, the concept of interacting with friends, acquaintances or complete strangers in cyberspace is one that has become integrated into the daily routines of millions of individuals worldwide. Social media platforms have experienced rapid growth worldwide. In 2014, Twitter, a micro-blogging social networking site, had 255 million registered and active users who jointly sent on average 500 million tweets on a daily basis (Bennett, 2014; Ohri, 2014). Facebook, however, had already surpassed Twitter, with 1,28 billion active monthly users (Bennett, 2014; Popper, 2014). Since 2014, the number of active monthly Twitter users has grown to 275 million (Giannetto, 2016), while Facebook has grown to 1.65 billion monthly users in 2016 (King, 2016). The abundance of social media usage around the world has become a driving force behind the creation and maintenance of a 'global village' (Oladokun, 2013). Young adults, aged between 18 and 29 years old, are among the most prominent users of social media (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Social media platforms also provide an easily accessible platform for consumers to interact with brands in an open forum (Van Belegem, Eenhuizen & Veris, 2011).

The subjective evaluation of the performance of online content posted on social media platforms is referred to as Social Media Performance in the current research. The Social Media Performance of an individual's content considers the degree of satisfaction regarding the performance of user-generated social media content shared on social media. For example, on Facebook, a post's popularity, or performance, could be measured in terms of the number of responses (likes and comments) that a particular post receives (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2010). In marketing literature, content created by users themselves is referred to as user-generated content. User-generated content refers to any content that is published online in any form, should exhibit some degree of creative effort on behalf of the user and is generally created outside of the user's professional routine or practice (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This understanding of the Social Media Performance of a post then relates to the subsequent popularity of the post (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Studies concerning the popularity of posts have been largely descriptive, with little formal theoretical substance underpinning the drivers of this popularity (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

As the evaluation of performance is subjective, no theoretical model exists that is able to classify whether the Social Media Performance, or popularity, of user-generated content could be classified as positive or negative (Connelly, 2014; Odden, 2012). It is therefore posited that Social Media Performance could follow an Expectation Confirmation Theory framework. As such, the current research will adopt the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) as a means through which to understand Social Media Performance. ECT posits that people have an expectation about their (or others) performance, if that expectation is exceeded, then they are satisfied. If they do not perform as expected, then they are bound to be unsatisfied (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). When applied to the social media context, and in particular the evaluation of user-generated content, the ECT suggests that an individual holds some initial expectation regarding the performance of the content posted. The actual performance, when compared with the initial expected performance, results in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). Research has indicated that a consumer's level of satisfaction, as measured by expectation confirmation or disconfirmation, influence conspicuous consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014).

The ability for online performance on social media to influence a user's conspicuous consumption has been documented in the literature, although it should be noted that this measure of performance was not directly operationalised (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Research proposes that positive or negative online performance is able to enhance or reduce an individual's self-esteem (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Research further proposes that positive online performance on social media could result in a loss of self-control, ultimately resulting in spontaneous and excessive behaviour (Thoumrunroje, 2014). While a link between online performance and conspicuous consumption has been identified in the literature, it has not been directly measured and was assumed to exist as a by-product created through the feedback mechanism

of social networking sites. Furthermore, it is proposed that several variables may exert a moderating influence on this relationship such that Social Media Performance would not affect all social media users in the same way. Three variables have been suggested to exert a moderating influence on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The variables, self-esteem (Thoumrunroje, 2014) and social media usage (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010) have been suggested to indirectly affect this relationship, although this has not been empirically tested in the literature. The third variable, emotion, has been shown to affect conspicuous consumption behaviour (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Baker, Moschis, Ong & Pattanapanyasat, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008) as well as the online behaviours of consumers (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Concerning the social media usage variable, Ahn (2011) explains that empirical research concerning the effects of social media usage on its users remains relatively exploratory in nature and lacks the solid foundation of longitudinal research. Concerning the second moderating variable, self-esteem, a definitive relationship has been identified in the literature between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Khannnn & Dhar, 2006). This relationship has, however, garnered contradictory results. Social media usage is suggested have a positive correlation with conspicuous consumption through the exposure to a feedback mechanism providing users with positive or negative feedback on their online content (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). The final moderating variable, emotion, has also garnered contradictory results with regards to its influence on conspicuous consumption (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Baker *et al.*, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008). Furthermore, emotion has been found to be a driving motivation behind many different consumer behaviours, including the sharing of online content (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Furthermore, while the expanse of research dedicated to social media continues to develop, several research studies are examining the measurement of performance of social media strategies (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Murdough, 2013; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This literature, however, tends to focus solely on the measurement of the performance of an overall social media strategy from a brand's perspective (Parveen, Jaafar & Ainin, 2015). A gap exists in the literature with regards to measuring Social Media Performance from an individual users perspective, by examining user-generated content. As such, the current research seeks to examine how an individual's Social Media Performance would influence their conspicuous consumption.

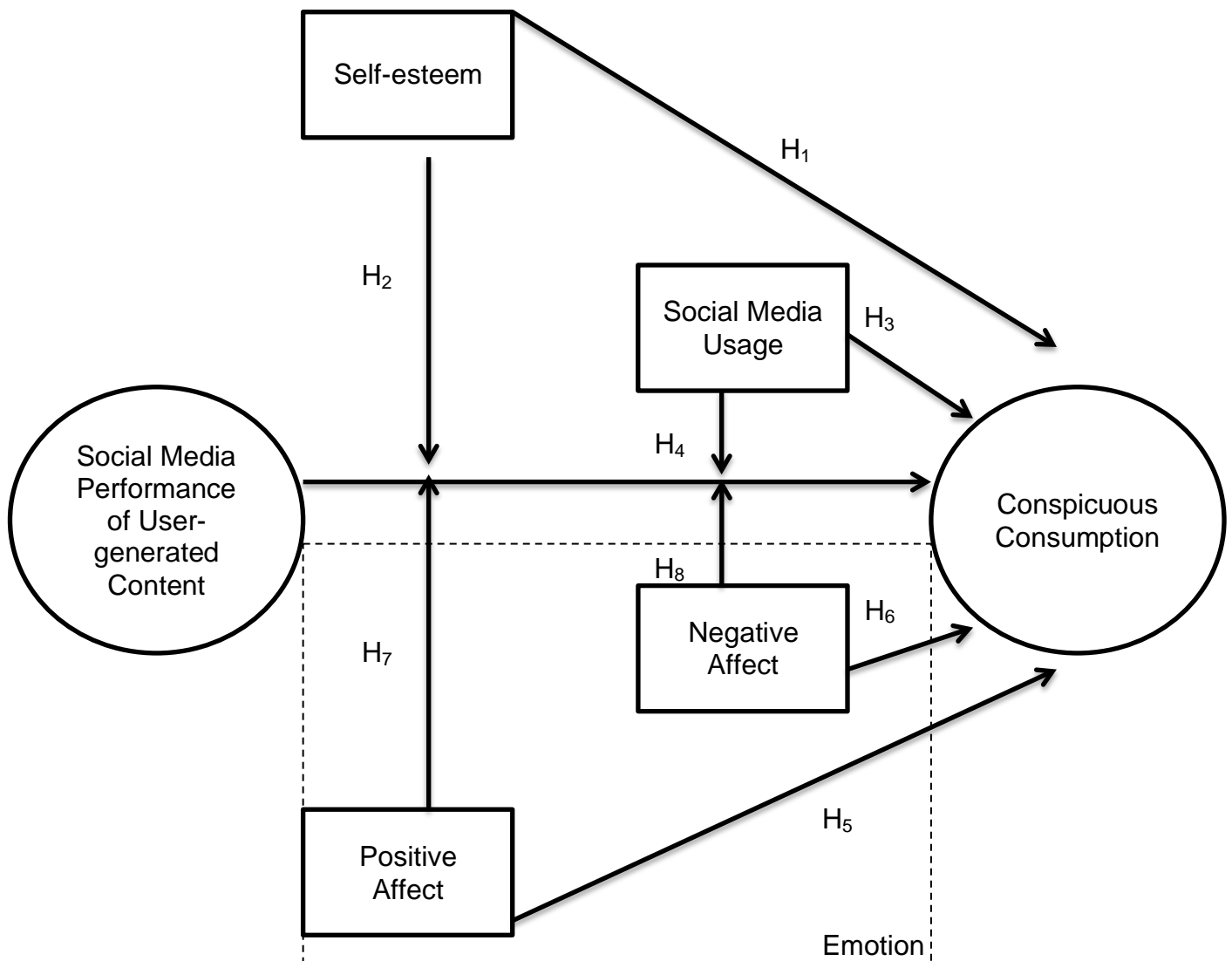
The current research, thus sought to examine the direct effects that self-esteem, social media usage and emotion exert on conspicuous consumption. Furthermore the research sought to examine the moderating effect that these three variables exert on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The research was thus be guided by the following research question:

How do self-esteem, social media usage and emotion influence the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption?

The conceptual model below, Figure 1, provides a graphical representation of the relationship between the Social Media Performance of user-generated content and conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, Figure 1 highlights the variables that are predicted to have a moderating effect on this relationship. It should be noted that the moderating variable emotion is measured as two distinct constructs, namely positive and negative affect. The rationale for this decision is discussed at length at a later stage. Figure 1 further highlights each hypothesis that will be independently tested in the current research. These hypotheses are defined further in Chapter 3.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model for the Current Research



The following objectives have been developed to test the direct and indirect effects that the moderating variables exert both on conspicuous consumption and the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. These objectives are directly based on the hypothesised relationships represented in Figure 1.

1. To determine whether a correlation exists between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour.
2. To determine whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.
3. To determine whether a positive relationship exists between social media usage and conspicuous consumption.
4. To determine whether social media usage moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.
5. To determine whether a correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.
6. To determine whether a correlation exists between negative affect and conspicuous consumption.
7. To determine whether positive affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.
8. To determine whether negative affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

The following section provides a summary of the literature reviewed in support of the current research. The methodology outlines the research design and method used, followed by an examination of the target population and sample design. The contribution of the study follows, in which the significance of the current research is outlined. Thereafter the demarcation of the study is postulated, followed by concluding remarks.

1.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section outlines the existing literature that has provided the theoretical foundations upon which the need for the current research was identified and

developed. This section is introduced with a brief operationalisation of conspicuous consumption and its apparent links to social media, thus allowing for the introduction of the concept of Social Media Performance. The Expectation Confirmation Theory is then explained and its relevance to the current research justified. The moderating roles of self-esteem, social media usage and emotion are then introduced.

1.2.1. Conspicuous Consumption

The theory of conspicuous consumption originated in Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, produced in 1899, which introduced status considerations into traditional economic theory (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1994; Page, 1992). This theory proposed a framework in which individuals attempt to imitate the consumption patterns of other individuals that maintain a higher social status (Trigg, 2001). The rationale for this behaviour is that it allows individuals to give the impression that they belong to a higher social class (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). Ostentatious consumption patterns resulting in outward displays of wealth allow other members of society to pass judgment on one's social status (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001). These judgments further reinforce an individual's social status, whether obtained or aspirational (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001). Conspicuous consumption is therefore defined as "the situation in which people spend a lot of money intentionally, so that other people notice and will admire them for their wealth" (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2015).

Despite the fact that conspicuous consumption has existed in Western society for several centuries (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; Page, 1992), the means through which individuals choose to display their wealth has changed, however the ultimate objective of obtaining status and prestige has remained unchanged (Page, 1992). Conspicuous products tend to exist in product categories that are highly visible, typically including cars, fashion, and jewellery items (Han, Nunes & Drèze, 2010). These conspicuous products commonly referred to as luxury goods, have created a one trillion Dollar industry worldwide as of 2014 (McCarthy, 2015). The strongholds for luxury, conspicuous products have typically been in mature, developed markets; however notable growth of luxury product categories has been noted in emerging economies (Bellaiche, Mei-Pochtler & Hanisch, 2010). During the recent, global economic decline, luxury purchases have remained steady across developing markets where luxury brands are associated with social status reinforcements (Bellaiche *et al.*, 2010). It is suggested that these purchases helped to alleviate the economic pressures placed on these developing economies throughout the global recession.

The introduction of social media has seemingly altered the landscape of traditional conspicuous consumption theory, as all consumption now has the possibility to become conspicuous consumption based on how individuals make use of social media (Yenicioglu & Christodoulides, 2014). Lehdonvirta (2010) acknowledges that in the social media environment, consumers engage in typical conspicuous

consumption behaviours, openly displaying their material possessions and consumption styles.

1.2.2. Social Media

Social media is defined as “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” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:59). Social media platforms make use of both mobile and web-based technologies in order to create interactive platforms that allow users to share, co-create, discuss and alter user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). With the advent of the Internet Age and subsequent proliferation of social media platforms, the conceptualisation of user-generated content remains somewhat in its infancy (Poch & Martin, 2015; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This being said, a generally acknowledged definition of user-generated content relates to content that is created by a user of a social media platform and is published online (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This definition is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

The current social media sphere consists of numerous social networking sites (hereinafter referred to as SNSs) that differ both in terms of their scope and functionality (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009:92) identify a typical SNS as one that allows users to ‘build and maintain a network of friends for social or professional interaction’. Users can create networks with acquaintances by submitting a friend request, subject to approval, or choosing to follow the activities of an individual, with or without their consent dependent on the site itself (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). SNSs allow users to create personalised profiles, filled with a variety of personal information, including photographs and links to affiliated profiles (Trusov *et al.*, 2009; Roebuck, 2012). Despite the differences in scope and functionality of SNSs, their fundamental technological features remain fairly consistent (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Boyd and Ellison (2008) identify that since the inception of the first SNSs, the concept of interacting with friends, acquaintances or complete strangers in cyberspace is one that has become integrated into the daily routines of millions of individuals worldwide. In 2014, Twitter, a micro-blogging SNS, had 255 million registered and active users who jointly sent on average 500 million tweets on a daily basis (Bennett, 2014; Ohri, 2014). In 2014, Facebook, surpassed Twitter, with 1,28 billion active monthly users (Bennett, 2014; Popper, 2014). In the past two years alone, Facebook has shown incredible growth and currently boasts 1,65 billion active monthly users (King, 2016). The number of active Twitter users has also witnessed growth as the site now boasts 275 million (Giannetto, 2016). The abundance of social media usage around the world has become a driving force behind the creation and maintenance of a ‘global village’ (Oladokun, 2013). Users of social media vary in terms of their age, education and income indicating that social media platforms are inclusive of many differing global market segments (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart & Madden, 2014).

The proliferation of social media around the world has resulted in a significant number of brands using these platforms in order to supplement their communication strategies (Bushelow, 2012). The immense reach, low cost and instantaneous feedback mechanism associated with social media strategies have made the social media sphere an attractive opportunity for brands (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Pöyry, Parvinen & Malmivaara, 2013). A further incentive for brands to develop a social media presence relies on the fact that profiles are generally public-facing, thus appearing in search engines, granting the brand a reach greater than the platform itself (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013). The opportunity has been seized by a multitude of both local and multinational brands resulting in social media strategies being identified as a key component of a brand's promotional mix (Parveen *et al.*, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Lin & Lu, 2011). Consumers have embraced the presence of brands on social media with research indicating that in 2011 more than 50% of social media users followed and interacted with brands on various social media platforms (Van Belegem *et al.*, 2011).

The rapid acceptance of social media usage across age groups has prompted researchers to examine the social and psychological effects that social media usage may have on its users. Ahn (2011) explains that empirical research concerning the effects of social media usage on its users remains relatively exploratory in nature and lacks the solid foundation of longitudinal research. Curtis (2014) suggests that users of SNSs often feel inadequate about their own life or achievements. It is suggested that given these feelings of social inadequacy, SNS users evaluate themselves in relation to their online community. Odden (2012) acknowledges that individuals often evaluate the performance of their online content based on the presence or lack thereof of an immediate reaction from their online community. De Vries *et al.* (2012) also found that the performance of a post by users of SNSs has an effect on these users. Odden (2012) further acknowledges that individuals often tend to evaluate the performance of each and every individual post. This study attempts to formalise this as "Social Media Performance", discussed in more depth in the following section.

1.2.3. Social Media Performance

The measurement of the performance of user-generated content on a social media platform would typically depend on the nature of the platform itself. On the Facebook platform, for example, a post's performance could be measured in terms of the number of likes and comments that the post receives (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). While there is reference to the effects that the performance of social media posts have on those who post, there is very little empirical research on this effect. And the studies that have looked at this effect have been largely descriptive in nature (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). This understanding of the performance of a post would relate to the subsequent popularity of the post (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

Research has brought to light the fact that the performance of an online post on an SNS has an effect on the user (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). It is suggested that the effect that Social Media Performance has on a user could influence their feelings or attitudes towards the content posted. It is further suggested that when an SNS user posts brand-related content, they seek to create an association between themselves and the brand, in an attempt to develop and maintain their self-identity in a social context (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). It is thus proposed, that the performance and acceptance of this content, in which the user is emotionally invested, would be of great concern to the user.

This study argues that the performance of posts on SNSs, hereinafter referred to as Social Media Performance, may follow an ECT framework. The rationale behind this argument is that one user may be satisfied with 10 responses (e.g. likes and comments) to their post, while another user may be dissatisfied with 50 responses from their online community. The following section briefly describes the Expectation Confirmation Theory.

1.2.3.1. Expectation Confirmation Theory

Kotler and Keller (2009) state that satisfaction relates to feelings of pleasure or disappointment that arise from the comparison of perceived performance to initial expectations. Disconfirmation is defined as the disparity between a consumer's initial expectation and the observed performance of a product or service (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Research has identified three distinct categories of disconfirmation, namely positive disconfirmation, negative disconfirmation and lastly, simple disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). These three categories of disconfirmation are the result of the interplay between a consumer's expectations, perceived performance and resultant satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012).

This interplay proposed by the ECT suggests that a consumer's initial expectations of a product, service or technology artifact, creates a frame of reference, or an initial reference point, that then allows them to make a comparative judgment following the purchase or adoption (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The theory purports that when the performance of a product, service or technology artifact is lower than expected, the comparative judgment falls below the initial frame of reference and results in negative disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). This negative disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983).

The opposite also holds true when the performance of a product, service or technology artifact positively exceeds a consumer's expectations, the comparative judgment falls above the frame of reference resulting in positive disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The positive disconfirmation results in satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). While previous researchers have reported

conflicting definitions for the concept of simple confirmation, Elkhani and Bakri (2012) propose that simple confirmation occurs when a consumer's expectations are equal to the perceived performance.

The ECT has been extensively applied in consumer behaviour and information systems research (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Chen, Huang, Hsu, Tseng, and Lee (2010) applied the ECT in an online context as they examined the role of Internet self-efficacy in e-commerce. Chen *et al.* (2010) were able to adapt the ECT to an online context based on the foundational research conducted by Bhattacharjee (2001). Bhattacharjee (2001) identified the information systems (IS) continuance decision-making process as being similar to that of a consumer's repurchase intentions in the marketing field. This proposes that the robustness of the ECT allows the theory to be modified and implemented in an online context (Chen *et al.*, 2010). The current research thus proposes a further continuation of the ECT in an online context, specifically social media. Social media platforms are increasingly attracting the attention of both academic and marketing practitioners given their reach, ease of accessibility and growth (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

The reach, ease of accessibility and growth of social media has particularly captured the attention of brands seeking to engage with consumers (Pöyry *et al.*, 2013; Laroche *et al.*, 2012). However, these social media strategies are not without cost and as such marketing managers are required to evaluate the performance of their online strategies. There are a variety of measures that enable brands to evaluate the performance of their content on social media platforms; these measures typically measure the overall impact of a social media strategy (Ryan & Zabin, 2010). Little research however has considered how individual SNS users evaluate their content. Odden (2012) suggests that users evaluate the performance of each and every post on social media in terms of the number of responses that the content receives.

1.2.3.2. Social Media Performance of Brand and User-Generated Content

While research has been conducted, albeit minimal research, into measuring the performance of brand-generated content (De Vries *et al.*, 2012), little academic research has considered the perceived performance evaluation of individual user-generated content. The following section highlights the difference between the two.

- **1.2.3.2.1. Social Media Performance of Brand-generated Content**

Research conducted by De Vries *et al.* (2012) attempted to identify the drivers of brand-generated post performance on a brand's fan page. Brand-generated content on a fan page refers solely to the content generated by the brand itself (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Brand-generated social media content is fully controlled by the company and guided by the agenda of a previously specified marketing strategy (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014).

Examining the Social Media Performance of brand-generated content could be considered through three distinct channels, namely brand awareness, brand engagement and word-of-mouth (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Brand awareness would simply be measured as the number of users following the brand, the number of impressions made or the number of times a brand's application was downloaded (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Brand engagement would consider the number of likes or comments on brand-generated posts, the number of active users engaging with the brand or the number of user-generated items that incorporate the brand (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). The final channel through which a brand measures Social Media Performance considers word-of-mouth (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Word-of-mouth would relate to the number of times that a brand-generated post has been shared, the number of user-generated posts on a brand's page as well as the frequency of brand appearances in the newsfeeds of their followers (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

De Vries *et al.* (2012) developed a model to examine the drivers of brand post popularity, which they adapted from conceptual models used in advertising and word-of-mouth research studies. It should be noted that this measurement of brand-post popularity is a measure of brand engagement as outlined above. The model selected 6 characteristics that could influence the brand post popularity (i.e. the number of likes and comments that a specific post received) and tested the effects of each (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

The results indicated that certain factors of brand post popularity were able to increase the number of likes that a post received, while other factors were able to increase the number of comments that a post received. In particular, a brand should use a highly vivid or a medium-level interactive post in order to increase the number of likes that a post would obtain (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). An example of such a post could be a video or information regarding a competition (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). A brand wanting to increase the number of comments on a particular post, should post a highly interactive post, such as a question (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

Limited research exists as to whether the same drivers would contribute to similar outcomes on an individual user-generated post, as opposed to a brand-generated post.

- **1.2.3.2.2. Social Media Performance of User-Generated Content**

The conceptualisation of user-generated content does not remain static as new technologies come to light that allow consumers to disseminate information in different ways. The current research has adopted the conceptualisation of user-generated content provided by Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007). This conceptualisation requires that user-generated content bear three characteristics. Firstly, the content needs to be published online in some context, which could include a personal profile on an SNS or on a publically accessible brand page (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). The second characteristic is that the content needs to exhibit some kind of creative effort on behalf of the user (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery,

2007). This creative effort ensures that the user adds value to the existing work (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). Examples of such creative work would relate to posting one's photographs or sharing one's thoughts via a status update (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). The final characteristic of user-generated content relates to the fact that the content should be created outside the scope of one's professional routine (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This content is usually generated without the promise of remuneration and does not bear commercial intent (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).

A user posting content onto an SNS holds an expectation regarding how that particular post will perform. The expectations of performance that a user-generated post could achieve, would be in terms of the potential popularity that is expected, according to the number of likes and comments, similar to the brand engagement aspect outlined above. In line with the ECT, the user would experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction dependent on whether or not the post met the initial expectations of performance (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009). The interplay proposed by the ECT suggests that if the performance of an individual's post on an SNS exceeds their initial expectations, the comparative judgment falls above the frame of reference, resulting in positive disconfirmation and thus satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The opposite would hold true for an individual's post that underperformed initial expectations, as the comparative judgment would fall below the frame of reference, resulting in negative disconfirmation and thus dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980).

Research conducted by Millward Brown (2011) highlighted the emotional meaning behind why social media users choose to post user-generated content. Each post represents a need to be acknowledged by peers in the online social community (Millward Brown, 2011). Research suggests that each time a user opts to comment on the post of others, or likewise chooses to share the post of another; the user is seeking validation from their cyber community (Millward Brown, 2011). These underlying emotions, the need for recognition, validation and a sense of belonging, tend to shape the way in which social media users respond to brands in the social media environment (Millward Brown, 2011).

Research conducted by Mensel and Petersen (2011) highlighted that SNS users use brand interactions on social media as a means of expressing their identity in a social context. Creating associations with particular brands on SNSs, where a user's online community is able to view this interaction, aids a user's expression of self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). Engagement with a brand on an SNS could identify a willingness to be associated with that particular brand from an aspirational perspective, which again, aids the development of self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). It is suggested that when SNS users post brand-related user-generated content, in which they are emotionally invested due to the ability to develop their self-identity, they express a particular concern regarding the performance and acceptance of such content amongst their online network. A relationship between this

performance and conspicuous consumption has been found to exist in the literature. There are, however, several variables that have been identified as influencers of this relationship. In particular, three distinct variables have been posited to moderate this relationship. These variables are discussed below.

1.2.4. Moderating Variables

The combined effect of two or more predictor variables on an independent variable is referred to as moderation (Field, 2013). The moderator variable itself is able to influence the relationship between two other variables. In the current research, this relates to the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The three variables that have been suggested to moderate this relationship include self-esteem, social media usage and emotion. These moderating variables are discussed individually below.

1.2.4.1. Self Esteem

Self-esteem refers to global feelings of self-liking, self-worth, self-respect and self-acceptance (Truong & McColl, 2011; Kernis, 2003). Self-esteem is typically a stable characteristics that develops over time, however it is possible to be influenced in the short-term by daily events (Vogel, Rose, Roberts & Eckles, 2014). Self-esteem has a direct influence on human behaviour, as noted from a comparison of individuals with either high or low self-esteem (Singh, 2015). Individuals with a high self-esteem are generally happy and physically healthy (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003) with a greater self-confidence (Singh, 2015). Individuals with low self-esteem however are typically emotionally distressed (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003) and exhibit common symptoms of anxiety (Singh, 2015). These differences result in the behaviour of individuals with either high or low self-esteem being greatly different (Singh, 2015).

A definitive relationship has been identified in the literature between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Khann & Dhar, 2006). This relationship has, however, garnered contradictory results. Research proposes that a positive relationship exists between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, indicating that higher levels of self-esteem result in increased conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Khann & Dhar, 2006). The rationale for this school of thought relies on the assumption that when individuals experience a high self-esteem, they tend to exhibit a reduced level of self-control, often resulting in indulgent behaviour, such as excessive expenditure (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Khann & Dhar, 2006). The research conducted by Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) however found that a negative, compensatory relationship exists between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. Their research discovered that when respondents exhibited low levels of self-esteem they tended to increase their expenditures on conspicuous products in order to counter the effects of a low self-esteem.

Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) highlighted the mechanism through which social media exposure was able to influence self-esteem. When individuals received positive feedback from their online community, their self-esteem was increased, and when they received negative feedback, their self-esteem was reduced (Connelly, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006). Further research identified a relationship between this feedback, referred to in the current study as Social Media Performance, and an individual's conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014).

The current research therefore proposes that an individual's self-esteem fluctuations due to Social Media Performance, coupled with an individual's inherent predisposition to either high or low self-esteem could moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The second moderating variable relates to the intensity with which an individual actively uses social media platforms.

1.2.4.2. Social Media Usage

Correa, Hinsley & Gil de Zúñiga, (2010:247) define social media usage as the following:

“The particular consumption of digital media or Internet that has little to do with traditional information media use, but rather it provides a mechanism for the audience to connect, communicate, and interact with each other and their mutual friends”.

The number of social media users continues to rise exponentially each year, with up to 72% of online young adults using social networking sites (Wu, 2015; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010; Correa *et al.*, 2010). It has become difficult to argue with the pervasive nature of social media in the lives of consumers (Brooks, 2015). SNS usage is not defined to a particular location or time of the day, as SNS sites are used during both personal and professional time (Brooks, 2015).

Research has discovered a relationship between social media usage and conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Kamal, Chu & Pedram, 2013). It is proposed that the more time, both length and frequency, an individual engages on SNSs, the more opportunities arise for them to engage with the positive and negative feedback mechanism, referred to in the current study as Social Media Performance (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). The performance of user-generated content on SNSs is able to influence a user's self-esteem. Thoumrungroje (2014) then further explains that the effect on one's self-esteem is able to influence the user's conspicuous consumption, by affecting their ability to make rational purchase decisions. This indicates that a positive relationship exists between a user's social media usage and their conspicuous consumption behaviour (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Kamal *et al.*, 2013).

When individuals engage on an SNS, much of the time spent on the platform is dedicated to focusing on others in their online network, as opposed to themselves (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). This process has been found to reduce an SNS user's self-control, resulting in spontaneous and excessive behaviours (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). The current study therefore proposes that the amount of time that a user spends engaged on an SNS is able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, such that the higher an individual's social media usage, the lower their self-control, thus the greater their conspicuous consumption. The third moderating variable relates to an individual's emotion.

1.2.4.3. Emotion

An individual's subjective emotional well-being has been found to consist of two distinct factors, positive and negative affect (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener, Larsen, Levine & Emmons, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984). Both positive and negative affect can be considered as long-term character traits, alternatively they can be considered as states of mind, subject to short-term fluctuations (Watson, Clark & Carey, 1988:B). Two distinct schools of thought exist with regards to the relationship between positive and negative affect. The first relates to the notion of independence between the two, proposing that the two are not related and vary independently of one another (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985). The second proposes that a negative correlation exists between positive and negative affect (Diener & Emmons, 1984). This negative relationship indicates that it is relatively unlikely for an individual to experience both positive and negative affect at the same time (Diener & Emmons, 1984). The inconsistency in the literature with regards to the relationship between positive and negative affect, has resulted in the dimensions of emotion being treated as separate constructs in the current research.

The link between emotion and conspicuous consumption is well documented in literature. The apparent irrationality in consumer purchase behaviour is evidenced in the literature discussing that much purchase behaviour is guided by emotion, as opposed to reason (Murray, 2013; Bergman, 2010; Kamarck, 2005). Early research had proposed that a negative relationship existed between materialistic acts of conspicuous consumption and an individual's happiness, however this belief was not empirically tested (Baker *et al.*, 2013). Research examining the link between positive and negative affect and conspicuous consumption has resulted in contradictory findings, possibly due to the uncertain relationship between positive and negative affect (Baker *et al.*, 2013). It is proposed that conspicuous consumption behaviours that seek to reinforce one's social standing are able to affect an individual's self-esteem (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008). This is largely due to a belief that conspicuous products will elicit positive emotion thus increasing an individual's happiness (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Belk, 2001). This would propose a relationship between both positive and negative affect and conspicuous consumption. Note that this implies that when there isn't an emotional reaction to the Social Media Performance of user-generated content, the Social

Media Performance of the user's post will not likely affect their conspicuous consumption.

The literature has highlighted the ability for Social Media Performance to influence conspicuous consumption (Connelly, 2014; Thourmrungrroje, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006) and it has further provided a justification for emotion influencing how an individual perceives the Social Media Performance of user-generated content (Buechel & Berger, 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012). It is therefore proposed that the level of positive and negative affect that an individual experiences is able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

This study seeks to investigate how the perceived performance of brand-related user-generated content, resulting in satisfaction or dissatisfaction, is able to influence the user's conspicuous consumption. Based on the theory above, the research question that guided the focus of this study can be reiterated as follows:

How do self-esteem, social media usage and emotion influence the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption?

The methodology used to test this research question, and its associated objectives, in the current research is outlined in the following section.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the research design and method used in order to examine this relationship. The target population and sample design for the current research is then outlined.

1.3.1. Research Design and Method

The current research has employed a conclusive research design. Conclusive research designs are characterised by their ability to test specific hypotheses and examine predetermined relationships (Malhotra, 2010). The exact hypotheses to be examined in the current research are introduced in Chapter 3. These hypotheses are derived from the set of numbered objectives presented on pages four and five of Chapter 1. The current research employed causal research and made use of an experimental design, in particular, using a preexperimental design. A defining characteristic of the preexperimental design is that it does not employ randomisation (Malhotra, 2010). A static group design, with the inclusion of two experimental groups, was employed in the current research. In this particular design, a control group is included, which is not exposed to any treatments and two experimental groups that are exposed to different treatments (Malhotra, 2010). This design can be symbolised as follows:

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------|
| Control Group: | | O ₁ |
| Experimental Group 1: | X | O ₂ |
| Experimental Group 2: | X | O ₃ |

All three observations seek to measure all of the constructs being examined in the current study. In the current research, the treatment comprises a scenario depicting either positive or negative Social Media Performance. The treatment outlines a scenario in which the participant's user-generated post about a brand either failed to meet their initial expectations of performance (negative Social Media Performance) or exceeded their initial expectations of performance (positive Social Media Performance). The treatment effect in such a design is calculated as $O_2 - O_1$ for the first experimental group. Likewise, the treatment effect for the second experimental group is calculated as $O_3 - O_1$ (Malhotra, 2010).

This rationale for the selection of the pre-experimental design, particularly an adaptation of the static group design, is four-fold. Firstly, true experimental designs could not be used due to the requirement of randomisation (Malhotra, 2010). The inability to make use of randomisation required that a pre-experimental design be used. Secondly, pre-experimental designs, much the same as true experimental designs, allow for the introduction of a manipulation, the treatment variable, enabling the researchers to examine whether this manipulation influences the variables of interest. Thirdly, the static group design allows for the researcher to control for the influence of certain extraneous variables, where other pre-experimental designs cannot (Malhotra, 2010). Finally, several studies that seek to implement the ECT in various contexts have implemented similar experimental designs (McKinney, Yoon & Zahedi, 2002; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Olson & Dover, 1979).

1.3.2. Target Population and Sample Design

Malhotra (2010:372) defines the target population as "the collection of elements or objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made". The target population for the current research comprises young adults, both males and females, aged between 18 and 29 who are users of SNSs and who have previously posted user-generated content related to a brand.

The rationale behind conducting the research on young adults is rooted in their dominance of SNSs. Research conducted by Lenhart *et al.* (2010) identified that 72% of active online young adults (categorised as being aged between 18 and 29 years of age) made use of SNSs. The adoption of SNSs amongst the young adult category significantly superseded that of their elder counterparts (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). This research further revealed that young adults were the most likely age group to make use of online platforms, despite an increase in the overall population of Internet users (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Research conducted by Collin, Rahilly, Richardson and Third (2010) further reinforces the fact that young adults are avid users of SNSs, rating the use of social media platforms a priority activity predominantly used on a daily basis.

Rubin and Babbie (2010) acknowledge that social science research is often conducted in situations that do not allow for the implementation of a probability sampling technique. The current research has adopted a non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability sampling techniques largely rely on the judgment of the researcher as opposed to probability to select participants for inclusion in the research (Malhotra, 2010; Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The current research makes use of the non-probability techniques of quota sampling.

When implementing quota sampling, the researcher identifies specific control categories and then selects respondents from these identified categories (Malhotra, 2010). In order to qualify for participation in the current research, participants need to be between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age, they need to hold active personal accounts on SNS and they need to have posted user-generated content related to a brand previously. These factors comprise the control categories from which the participants were selected. The use of quota sampling is justified as it seeks to ensure that all participants are members of the target population (Stokes & Lomax, 2008). Furthermore, quota sampling is the most commonly used sampling technique for quantitative consumer research (Stokes & Lomax, 2008).

The use of a non-probability sampling technique provides both advantages and disadvantages for the current research. The non-probability sampling technique adopted in this research is known to be less expensive and more efficient than their probability-sampling counterparts (Malhotra, 2010; Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Yang and Banamah (2014) identify that the use of non-probability sampling techniques is commonplace in commercial research as the increased costs and low response rates associated with probability sampling often render these techniques impractical. Despite the ease associated with using non-probability techniques, the most relevant disadvantage is that the sample obtained may not be representative of the target population at large (Malhotra, 2010; Stokes & Lomax, 2008; Yang & Banamah, 2014; Rubin & Babbie, 2010). This is largely due to the potential presence of several selection biases (Malhotra, 2010). The presence of selection bias could negatively affect the generalisability of the results (Malhotra, 2010).

The current research seeks to counteract the disadvantages associated with the use of a non-probability sampling technique by obtaining a sufficiently large sample size. In line with the guidelines provided by Onwuegbuzie (2004; as cited in Collins *et al.*, 2007), the current research seeks to obtain a minimum sample of 64 respondents in each of the designated control and treatment groups, resulting in $64 \times 3 = 192$ respondents in total.

1.4. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The academic contribution of this paper is four-fold. Firstly, this research contributes to marketing literature, specifically digital marketing literature, by introducing the

concept of Social Media Performance. The current research has conceptualised a construct that has previously been alluded to in the literature, but has not been measured and examined independently. This research has stressed that Social Media Performance is an important factor to consider for future research in the social media sphere, and suggests avenues for such research.

Secondly the research has extended the use of an already existing theory, the ECT. This extension of the ECT into the social media context has not only demonstrated the robust nature of the theory, but it has provided an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how SNS users evaluate their performance on social media platforms. This has been done by combining key theories from the fields of social psychology and marketing and examining their combined effect in the context of social media. This extension of the ECT has also provided insight into how an individual's personal evaluation of performance is able to affect their consumption behaviour, specifically their conspicuous consumption behaviour.

The third academic contribution relates to addressing a gap in existing literature regarding the effects of social media activity on an SNS user. There exists a scarcity of literature concerning the effects that user-generated content has on individual SNS users (Poch & Martin, 2015). While the effects of user-generated content have been examined from a brands perspective, considering how brand equity is influenced for example, research does not consider these influences from a user's perspective. The proliferation of user-generated content across social media platforms has received great attention from marketers, as they have lost the ability to exert complete control over brand information shared online (Poch & Martin, 2015).

The fourth academic contribution relates to the testing of relationships that have garnered conflicting results in the existing literature, particularly, the relationship between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010, Khann & Dhar, 2006) and the relationship between positive and negative affect and conspicuous consumption (Baker *et al.*, 2013). The examination of these relationships seeks to provide clarity to results that have inconsistent findings in the literature.

The managerial implications of the current research are three-fold. Firstly, the formalisation of Social Media Performance seeks to explain how a personal evaluation of performance is able to influence real-life consumption behaviour. This bears great significance for marketing practitioners implementing digital marketing campaigns, particularly in the social media sphere. The research stresses the importance of active engagement with consumers on social media platforms, particularly when the consumer has initiated the engagement. Engagement with consumers in an online context has been shown to play a fundamental role in both developing and enhancing consumer brand relationships (Van Iwaarden, Van der Wiele, Ball & Millen, 2002).

Secondly, the research examines SNS user characteristics, namely self-esteem, social media usage and emotion that are able to exert an influence on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The current research provides guidelines as to how brands should adjust their social media marketing strategies in order to best take advantage of these moderating effects. Considering one of the direct relationships for example, it is posited in the current research that social media usage is positively correlated with conspicuous consumption. The support of this hypothesis would indicate that a key focus in a social media strategy would be to extend the social media usage of online consumers, through active online engagement. The current research has also provided marketing managers with guidance that can be implemented at a practical level.

The third managerial implication relates to the effect of emotion in marketing. The use of emotional appeals in marketing is not a novel concept and has been implemented by most successful marketing campaigns (Lewis, Fretwell & Ryan, 2012). Marketing campaigns tend to use content that triggers an emotional response in an attempt to influence a consumer's behaviour (Lewis *et al.*, 2012). The use of triggering emotional responses has been documented in the literature as it has been shown to influence a variety of behaviour, including the sharing of online content (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

1.5. DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The chapters to follow outline the theoretical foundations of the research, the methodology employed, the results obtained and concluding with a discussion of the results as well as recommendations for future research in this particular field of research. Table 1 outlines the layout of each chapter.

Table 1: Demarcation of the Current Research

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Chapter I | Introductory Chapter |
| Chapter II | Conspicuous Consumption and Social Media: The Relationship between User-generated Content and Conspicuous Consumption |
| Chapter III | Self-esteem, Social Media Usage and Emotion as Moderating Variables |
| Chapter IV | Methodology |
| Chapter V | Results |
| Chapter VI | Discussion and Recommendations |

The current chapter, Chapter I has outlined the introduction to the study by means of briefly outlining the literature that is central to the research. A brief outline of the methodology employed has been examined and the contribution of the research, to both literature and marketing practitioners, has been highlighted.

Chapter II, part I of the literature review centres its focus on the operationalisation of conspicuous consumption and the apparent links to social media. This chapter also introduces the concept of Social Media Performance. Chapter III, part II of the literature review, introduces the three identified moderating variables that are proposed to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This chapter discusses the theoretical relationships between each variable and conspicuous consumption, as well as the potential moderating influence of each variable.

Chapter IV provides an in depth examination of the methodology employed in the current research. This chapter seeks to explain and justify all methodological decisions made in the current research, the research method and design selected, the sampling techniques adopted and the measurement instrument used. This chapter also highlights all considerations that were made prior to the collection of the data, particularly with regard to sampling as well as the treatment used in the experiment.

Chapter V outlines the results obtained from the research as well as an in depth discussion regarding the interpretation of these findings. The results section analyses both the descriptive and inferential statistics allowing for the results from each hypothesis test to be obtained.

The final chapter, Chapter VI outlines the conclusions that may be drawn from the findings and provide a comparison of these conclusions to those currently found in the literature. Recommendations for further research in the field are also highlighted and any possible limitations of the research outlined.

1.6. CONCLUSION

The current research seeks to extend the implementation of the ECT into a new context, determining the subsequent effect of users Social Media Performance of their user-generated content on their conspicuous consumption behaviour. The research seeks to examine the possible moderating influence of three identified variables on this relationship. The variables, self-esteem, social media usage and emotion, have been shown to directly influence conspicuous consumption in the literature. The basis for the moderating influence has been supported by existing literature, although not theoretically examined.

The target population consists of young adults, given that they are one of the most prominent age groups actively engaging with social media platforms. The research makes use of an experimental design, in particular the pre-experimental design of a one-group pretest-posttest design. Participants were selected using quota sampling. This seeks to ensure that all participants exhibit the necessary characteristics

required for inclusion in the study as well as ensuring that all time and budget constraints are adhered to.

This research contributes to literature, particularly digital marketing literature as it provides marketing practitioners, implementing digital strategies, with an in depth examination of how the perceived performance of the content posted by users is able to influence their purchasing decisions. The research furthermore introduces the concept of Social Media Performance, a previously unacknowledged concept that has the possibility to alter decision-making.

The following chapter provides an in-depth examination of the existent literature concerning the relationship between the Social Media Performance of user-generated content and conspicuous consumption. This highlights the main relationship in the current research, examining the extent to which a perceived evaluation of performance is able to influence real-life consumption behaviour (see Figure 1).

CHAPTER II: CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a brief overview of the current research, incorporating a brief synopsis of the key literature relevant to the research. This chapter provides an in-depth examination of the dependent variable in the current research (see Figure 1), conspicuous consumption, as well as the independent variable, Social Media Performance, and the relationship between these constructs. The literature review begins with a theoretical overview of conspicuous consumption and defining the operationalisation and the importance of the construct. Following this, social media is then introduced and its relevance to the research examined. This section also examines the role of brands on social media, leading onto the link between conspicuous consumption and social media. Following this, Social Media Performance is introduced and operationalised in terms of the Expectation Confirmation Theory. Social Media Performance is examined from the perspective of both brand-generated content as well as user-generated content. Lastly, concluding remarks are made which seek to recapitulate the key points in the literature.

2.2. CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

The theory of conspicuous consumption originated in Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, produced in 1899, which introduced status considerations into traditional economic theory (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1994; Page, 1992). The introduction of this theory represented a powerful criticism of traditional theories of consumption and continues to be widely cited in literature (Trigg, 2001). Neoclassical theories of consumption, rooted largely in economic literature, focus on the maximisation of utility, whereas Veblen's theory proposed a framework in which individuals attempt to imitate the consumption patterns of other individuals that maintain a higher social status (Trigg, 2001). This would allow individuals to mimic levels of consumption, seemingly beyond their means, in order to give the impression of belonging to a higher social class (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). This introduced the assumption that individuals tend to compare themselves relative to others based on economic accomplishments (Kaus, 2013). In order to obtain self-respect, individuals seek to obtain at least equal economic success to that of members in their respective reference groups (Kaus, 2013).

Veblen's theory is rooted in the development of what he termed the *leisure class* (Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1994). The leisure class consists of members of society, who, in contrast to the working class, are not required to work but rather make use of the surplus produced by members of the working class (Trigg, 2001). The creation of this surplus allowed the relationship between asset ownership and social status to become increasingly apparent in society (Trigg, 2001). A social hierarchy soon

developed whereby some members of society owned particular assets whereas others did not and this ownership was displayed to others in an attempt to reinforce one's social status (Weatherford, 2013; Trigg, 2001). It is important to note however, that the conversion from wealth to social status relies on the social performance of members of the appropriately named leisure class (Han, Nunes & Drèze, 2010; Trigg, 2001). Thus, an individual's wealth and social status have been inextricably linked ever since the development of the social hierarchy (Han *et al.*, 2010). Judgments made by other members of society regarding one's status seeks to reinforce this status and in order for these judgments to be made, there must be an outward display of wealth (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001).

Veblen (1994) identifies two major ways in which individuals are able to demonstrate their wealth and thus reinforce their social standing in society. The first way relates to the engagement in conspicuous leisure, whereby individuals participate solely in leisurely activities as opposed to manual, productive work, in what is referred to as costly idleness (Trigg, 2016; Kaus, 2013; Arrow and Dasgupta, 2009; Trigg, 2001). The second way individuals are able to demonstrate their position in society is through the consumption of particular products, which, through a signalling effect, is able to aid the public demonstration of one's status (Kaus, 2013; Weatherford, 2013; Trigg, 2011). It should be noted that one common thread exists in both displays of wealth (Trigg, 2001). This refers to an element of wastage; this either refers to the wastage of one's time, or the wastage of goods and monetary resources (Trigg, 2001; Page, 1992). The ability to engage in such wasteful activities remains a key means through which members of the leisure class are able to actively display their wealth (Trigg, 2001).

Veblen (1994) further posits that an effective network is required in order for judgments, regarding an individual's leisure activities and wasteful purchases, to become common knowledge. In a mobile society, however, where individual networks may no longer be as integrated as they previously were, the display of wealth through consumption becomes a more vital display of wealth than the engagement of leisure activities (Trigg, 2001). Kaus (2013) further explains that the more anonymous and frequent interactions are, the greater the need for consumption, which is able to readily signal one's social status. This type of consumption, labelled as conspicuous consumption, occurs when individuals purchase products with the sole purpose of being able to express their wealth to other members of society (Trigg, 2001).

2.2.1. The Definition of Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption is defined as "the situation in which people spend a lot of money intentionally, so that other people notice and will admire them for their wealth" (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2015). The consumption of these products, made noticeable via ostentatious displays of wealth, seeks to satisfy an individual's need for prestige (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Page, 1992). It should be noted that the practice

of consuming products in order to display wealth has been present in the Western World for several centuries (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; Page, 1992). While the ways in which individuals have chosen to display their wealth has changed over the years, the ultimate objective of obtaining status and prestige has remained unchanged (Page, 1992). Given the ability of conspicuous products to bolster ones social standing, the consumption of these products represents a largely hedonic purpose as opposed to a functional purpose (Thoumrungraje, 2014). This is aligned with the research of Trigg (2001) that refers to these products as wasteful displays of wealth, given that the functionality of the product is not considered. Research has identified that not only are conspicuous products able to offer consumers an increased social standing, they too are able to provide individuals with a heightened level of happiness (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012).

Products purchased for the purpose of conspicuous consumption are classified as being distinctly different from shopping goods, as the primary need satisfied by conspicuous products is that of prestige (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Shukla, 2008). Conspicuous products tend to exist in product categories that are highly visible and in which greater expenditure is typically associated with higher income (Han *et al.*, 2010). These product categories typically include cars, fashion and jewellery (Han *et al.*, 2010). Branding products with ostentatious labels allows the products to be easily identified and tends to attract the viewing public (Weatherford, 2013). It should be noted that while an expensive price may be an indicator of status, the price itself is not the sole determinant of the desirability of the brand (Han *et al.*, 2010). The perceived uniqueness of the product often plays a defining role in the purchase decision process (Weatherford, 2013). Further to this, the sensuality of the product, which determines the ability of the product to appeal to the senses of both the consumer and the consumer's audience, remains the most important factor, as this would influence the feeling that the product gives the user as well as the feedback from others (Weatherford, 2013; Han *et al.*, 2010). A particular brand choice, however, is able to act as a signalling tool to other individuals, in order to infer particular characteristics to an individual using a specific brand (Han *et al.*, 2010).

Several economies around the globe have been affected by consumer spending in both a positive and a negative light, and given its economic importance, particularly in consumption-driven economies, research is beginning to examine the variables that are able to influence conspicuous consumption (Segal & Podoshen, 2012).

2.2.2. The Importance of Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption creates a distinct opportunity for brands to position their products as luxury goods (Weatherford, 2013). This status, as a luxury good, indicates that a consumer's perceived value of the product elicits feelings of exclusivity (Weatherford, 2013). The estimated size of the global market for luxury goods was approximately one trillion Dollars in 2014, with mature, developed markets making up a large share of these sales (McCarthy, 2015). Personal luxury

items, including perfume, jewellery and clothing, performed particularly well in 2014 with an estimated eighty-one billion Dollars spent in the United States alone (McCarthy, 2015).

While developed markets continue to perform well, notable growth in the luxury goods market in emerging economies is seemingly changing the landscape of luxury brands in these markets (Bellaiche, Mei-Pochtler & Hanisch, 2010). The Chinese market has seen the rise of conspicuous consumers who now frequently trade-up to fancier, higher-status brands, even when purchasing essential products (Mianyang & Shanghai, 2014). Despite the recent global economic decline, luxury purchases remained steady across developing markets where luxury brands are strongly associated with social status reinforcements (Bellaiche *et al.*, 2010). This helped to alleviate the economic pressures placed on these developing economies throughout the global recession.

The advent of social media has somehow altered the landscape of traditional conspicuous consumption theory, as all consumption now has the possibility to become conspicuous consumption based on how individuals make use of social media (Yenicioglu & Christodoulides, 2014). Lehdonvirta (2010) acknowledges that in the online environment, consumers engage in typical conspicuous consumption behaviours by openly flaunting their material possessions and consumption styles.

2.3. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is defined as “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” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:59). Social media use both mobile and web-based technologies in order to create interactive platforms that allow users to share, co-create, discuss and alter user-generated content (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). The conceptualisation of user-generated content does not remain static due to new technologies coming to light that allow consumers to disseminate information in alternate ways.

As previously discussed, the current research has adopted the conceptualisation of user-generated content provided by Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007). This conceptualisation requires that user-generated content bear three characteristics. Firstly, the content needs to be published online in some context, which could include a personal profile on any social media platform, or on a publically accessible brand page (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). The second characteristic is that the content needs to exhibit some kind of creative effort on behalf of the user (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This creative effort ensures that the user adds value to the existing work, as opposed to directly copying the work of others (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). The final characteristic of user-generated content relates to the fact that the content should be created outside the scope of one’s professional routine (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). This content is usually generated without the

promise of remuneration and does not bear any commercial intent (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).

The current social media sphere consists of numerous social networking sites (hereinafter referred to as SNSs) that differ both in terms of their scope and functionality (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). These different categories of social media are highlighted below.

2.3.1. Categories of Social Media

Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) identify four different categories of social media. Firstly, there exist platforms that cater to the general populace en masse, the most noteworthy of which being the most popular social network, Facebook. Secondly, social media sites such as LinkedIn, serve as more focused, professional networks allowing individuals to make professional connections with like-minded individuals. The third category of social media refers to media sharing sites, such as YouTube and Instagram, which tend to focus on the sharing of videos and photographs and other visual materials. The last category refers to blogs, which essentially allows any user to create and maintain their own website (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). Boyd and Ellison (2008) argue that a key distinction amongst the various SNSs is the subsequent cultures that emerge around them. This distinction is concerned with the fact that some SNSs support the continuation of pre-existing social networks, while others seek to create networks of strangers based on some shared interest (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Varying levels of privacy are imposed on different social media, dependent on the privacy policies of each SNS (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). Privacy policies specifically outline the level of information revealed to non-affiliated visitors and the extent to which non-affiliated individuals are able to navigate through an individual's network of connections (Trusov *et al.*, 2009).

Social media is no longer viewed as an additional communication and socialising tool amongst consumers; instead it has become an integral part of everyday life in the lives of consumers (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). Social media users are not defined to a particular age group or location, instead users from around the world are joining SNSs as a mass, worldwide community (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013).

2.3.2. Growth of Social Media

In 2014, Facebook boasted 1.28 billion monthly active users, with more than 1 billion accessing the site in its mobile format (Bennet, 2014; Popper, 2014). Statistics for the current year regarding Facebook's performance indicate that approximately 500 000 new users are added to the SNS daily, corresponding to six new profiles created every second (Regan, 2015). In South Africa in particular, one quarter of all South Africans, amounting to 13 million individuals, now make use of Facebook (Van Zyl, 2015). Facebook allows users to create individual, personal profiles, which can be updated to include a wide variety of personal information as well as information regarding ones favourite movies and musicians (Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lee, 2012).

On this profile, the user, as well as mutually accepted acquaintances, are able to post web links, comments, videos and photos of mutual interest (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Further to this, the capability to privately message other Facebook users allows users to engage in private, real-time instant messaging (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). This variety of features, combined with the seamless integration of gaming applications, groups and fan pages has resulted in Facebook becoming the most popular choice for online socialising (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). While Facebook may be the most popular and widely adopted SNS, a variety of others exist with altered offerings (Hughes *et al.*, 2012).

Twitter, a micro-blogging SNS, focuses on the sharing of information and opinions as opposed to engagement in mutual social interactions (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Twitter allows users to post short statements, commonly referred to as 'tweets' limited to a total of 140 characters, allowing others to follow these updates should the content be of interest (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). The Twitter platform does not require users to input a great amount of personal information, thus anonymity remains much greater than Facebook (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). It has been proposed that the reasons for adopting Twitter may differ greatly to that of adopting Facebook. A possible rationale for this could be due to the reduced social pressure provided by anonymity (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Twitter has amassed 255 million monthly active users, who send a combined 500 million tweets each day (Bennet, 2014). Furthermore, Twitter has the highest penetration rate, (33%), amongst the millennial, young adult age cohort as opposed to any other age group (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

Research conducted by Lenhart *et al.* (2010) sought to highlight the social media usage amongst the so-called millennial generation in the United States of America. They defined the millennial generation as individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 years (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). The findings of their research clearly outline the centrality of the Internet in the lives of young adults (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Research suggests that over the past decade, the millennial cohort remain the age group most likely to go online, despite the increasing size of the overall Internet population (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). A staggering 93% of the millennial population was found to be active Internet users, greatly surpassing the adoption rates of their elder counterparts (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). It appears that the importance of the Internet is tightly linked to social media adoption amongst this age group, with 72% of millennials making use of social media platforms (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). This figure has increased rapidly over the past several years and remains significantly higher than the 30% penetration rate of social media amongst the age cohort of 30 years and older (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). As this adoption rate has grown, research has identified the increased probability of millennials holding active personal accounts on more than one SNS, fragmenting their social networking experience (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). However, Facebook remains the SNS of choice, with the highest penetration rate (77%) in the millennial market (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

While significant differences may exist between users of different SNSs as well as their motives for adopting specific social media platforms, several social media trends have been noted that appear to exist across social media platforms.

2.3.3. Social Media Trends

A trend that has been confirmed in the literature relates to the gender based differences of social media usage (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Research has identified that historically; women tend to use social media more than men (Anderson, 2015; Thoumrunroje, 2014). However, recent research conducted by the Pew Research Centre did not find the difference in overall social media use between men and women to be statistically different (Anderson, 2015; Vermeren, 2015; Clifford, 2014; Heine, 2013). These latest findings suggest that while women have been the dominant users of social media in the past, it appears that male users are slowly increasing their time spent on social media to become on par with their female counterparts (Anderson, 2015). While Anderson (2015) did not find significant differences toward men and women with regard to overall social media use; gender differences were noted on specific social media platforms. For example, a female bias was found to exist on Facebook and Instagram, a photo-sharing SNS, while other online discussion forums tended to attract more male users (Anderson, 2015).

Furthermore, trends concerning the online activities that SNS users tend to engage in have revealed how these activities are beginning to change. Research has noted a significant increase in the number of adult SNS users sharing user-generated content online, with 36% of young adults actively sharing their own, personal content on SNSs (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Sharing content on SNSs relates to the “extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content” (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011:245). Remixing, which relates to taking already existing online material and adding one’s own artistic creations, has become increasingly popular amongst adults on SNSs (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Another common online activity refers to posting comments, which may appear on a news group, a blog, or any SNS platform (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Adults have become more likely to post comments online, with approximately 26% of online adults engaging in this activity (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Within this adult cohort, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years old, are more likely (33%) to post comments online than their elder counterparts (24%) (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

Literature further suggests that the future of social media will consist of a seamless combination of brand-generated content and user-generated content, creating a more frank and balanced comprehensive source of information for a brand’s target consumers (Korenich, Lasca, Manrai & Manrai, 2014).

2.3.4. Brands on Social Media

The proliferation of social media around the globe has seen brands developing full-scale social media marketing strategies in order to supplement their communication strategies (Bushelow, 2012). The immense reach, low cost and instantaneous

feedback mechanism associated with social media strategies have made the social media sphere an attractive opportunity for brands (Pöyry *et al.*, 2013; Laroche *et al.*, 2012). Further to this, brands are able to readily determine consumer perceptions of new product and service offerings and rapidly disseminate brand-related information (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Laroche *et al.*, 2012). A further incentive for brands to develop a social media presence relies on the fact that profiles are generally public facing, thus appearing in search engines, granting the brand a reach greater than the platform itself (Turri *et al.*, 2013). This opportunity has been seized by a multitude of both local and multinational brands resulting in social media strategies being identified as a key component of a brand's promotional mix (Parveen *et al.*, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Lin & Lu, 2011).

Consumers have embraced the presence of brands on social media, with research indicating that in 2009 nearly 75% of SNS users below the age of 35 years old were happy with brand interaction in the online environment (McEleny, 2009). Further to this, more than 50% of social media users admitted to actively following and interacting with brands on various social media platforms (Van Bellegem, Eenhuizen, & Veris, 2011). Interactions with brands on social media allow marketers to regularly interact with consumers, allowing communication to be humanised to the extent that personal relationships can be fostered (Turri *et al.*, 2013; Bushelow, 2012; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Brands are able to use social media to create and maintain brand communities (Laroche *et al.*, 2012). A brand community is defined as “ a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These brand communities are facilitated by the creation of brand 'fan pages,' which act as an information hub of brand-related content (Turri *et al.*, 2013; Bushelow, 2012). These pages operate in a similar manner to individual profiles, however they are public facing by default to ensure maximum exposure (Turri *et al.*, 2013; Bushelow, 2012). Chaney (2012) suggests that these brand pages allow brands to amplify their marketing messages on social media. This amplification takes place when followers of a brand opt to share brand-generated content, thus stretching the reach of the marketing message (Chaney, 2012). However, one should not assume that users of SNSs are a passive audience; instead the platform encourages a two-way dialogue between brands and their consumers.

Consumers are increasingly assuming active roles in co-creating brand-related content in an online environment (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). Highly interactive social media platforms, with no barriers to entry, provide individuals with the ability to dictate the nature and context of their interactions with brands (Hanna *et al.*, 2011; Rajapat, 2009). The rise of social media has, to some degree, greatly reduced the control that brands hold over the content that is created and shared about their brand (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). This has resulted in brand-related content being created and shared across various social media platforms either with, or without, the consent of the brand (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). This volume of information available to brands on social media has quickly become a great source of competitive advantage in competitive global markets (Korenich *et al.*, 2014). The volume of user-generated content on

social media could also present a new segmentation tool for brands, allowing brands to build consumer profiles based on consumers' usage of social media platforms (Korenich *et al.*, 2014). An example of this segmentation could be the introduction of the Social Technographics Ladder created by Forrester Research (Bernoff, 2010). This tool profiles social media users based on the behaviours that individuals choose to engage in online (Bernoff, 2010). In addition, this tool profiles consumer groups ranging from the *inactives*, those that do not engage in any online activities, to the *creators*, those who create and publish their own content across social media platforms (Bernoff, 2010).

Research conducted by Millward Brown (2011) highlighted that a series of underlying motives tended to guide SNS users interactions with brands. In particular, users may associate themselves with certain brands on social media, where their associations are visible to their online network, in order to ascribe the brand characteristics to themselves. Mensel and Petersen (2011) reinforce this by highlighting that SNS users tend to use brand interactions on social media as a means of expressing their identity in a social context. This expression of one's social identity through the utilisation of social media platforms has resulted in displays of wealth in the online sphere that appear to mimic offline conspicuous consumption behaviours.

2.4. CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

It appears that the advent of social media has allowed for products that were once consumed in private to be publicly shared with a users network of friends and followers (Yenicioglu & Christodoulides, 2014). SNS users seek a response from their online communities regarding brands that they have purchased or are considering purchasing (Yenicioglu & Christodoulides, 2014). This response may be genuine, as it has been noted that consumers tend to seek advice and support from online communities regarding products and brands, and seek advice regarding purchases (Divol, Edelman & Sarrazin, 2012; Lehdonvirta, 2010). However, it is possible that creating an association with a particular brand on a public platform, such as an SNS, may be done in an attempt to display one's wealth in a conspicuous manner, thereby reinforcing one's social status.

Research conducted by Thourunroje (2014) attempted to draw parallels between conspicuous consumption and the usage of social media platforms. This research examined the relationship between social media usage and a heightened probability of individuals making irrational choices by increasing their expenditure on conspicuous products (Thourunroje, 2014). The results indicated strong support for this hypothesis, thus identifying a positive and significant relationship between social media usage and real-life conspicuous consumption behaviours (Thourunroje, 2014). Thourunroje (2014) posits that this relationship exists as a result of an individual's self-esteem being heightened due to positive interactions on the social media platform. Individuals with an increased self-esteem may experience a reduced self-control, resulting in purchasing decisions that could be classified as irrational and indulgent (Thourunroje, 2014).

Further research conducted on American and Arab university students sought to determine whether a relationship existed between materialism and the students' usage of social media platforms (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). Materialism relates to the importance that individuals place on possessions and consumption, with the belief that these possessions are a key determinant to social progress (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). Common understandings of materialism equate it, or at a bare minimum find a close link, to conspicuous consumption (Wong, 1997). The rationale for this assumption relates to behaviours that are commonly associated with materialistic behaviour, which appears to resemble those of conspicuous consumption (Wong, 1997). Further to this, materialism has been found to relate to the competitive display of wealth proposed in Veblen's early theories of conspicuous consumption (Wong, 1997). The relationship between conspicuous consumption behaviours of materialism and media consumption was again found to exist amongst the student populations (Kamal *et al.*, 2013; Richins, 1987). Past research has examined this media consumption in terms of television consumption; international magazine consumption and online gaming, all seemingly confirming the hypothesis that increased materialistic behaviours are associated with media consumption (Kamal, *et al.*, 2013).

The amount of time that consumers are spending with forms of electronic media continues to increase worldwide, with specific reference to social media usage (Lehdonvirta, 2010). Literature has confirmed the relationship between conspicuous consumption behaviours and media usage, one should consider this relationship in the social media context. However, there exists sparse literature in ascertaining whether this relationship would hold in a social media context (Kamal *et al.*, 2013).

As previously identified, aligned with Veblen's early theories on conspicuous consumption, judgments made by other members of society regarding one's status seek to reinforce this status and in order for these judgments to be made, there must be an outward display of wealth (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001). Lehdonvirta (2010) acknowledged that in the online environment, consumers openly flaunt their material possessions and consumption styles. It is suggested that these displays of wealth could be flaunted in order for an individual's online network to make judgments regarding their social status, thus ensuring that this status is reinforced, as proposed by the theory.

In order for SNS users to be able to pass judgment on the social status of other SNS users, there needs to be a social comparison that is conducted. Research has identified that SNS users compare themselves to other users (Lee, 2014). SNSs have in fact made the process of social comparison much easier for consumers (Lee, 2014). These comparisons allow users to evaluate themselves, in terms of their social standing, opinions and abilities, and subsequently develop feelings of happiness or unhappiness depending on whether they are satisfied with themselves following this comparison (Lee, 2014). This has prompted researchers to examine the social and psychological effects that social media usage may have on its users. Curtis (2014) suggests that users of SNSs often feel inadequate about their own life

or achievements. While it is known that users are evaluating themselves against members of their online community, the basis for this comparison remains somewhat undetermined.

Research conducted by Odden (2012) suggests one basis for this comparison: Individuals often evaluate the performance of their online content based on the presence, or lack thereof, of an immediate reaction from their online community. He further acknowledges that individuals often tend to evaluate their performance of individual posts as opposed to examining the effect their online presence bears as a whole (Odden, 2012).

2.5. SOCIAL MEDIA PERFORMANCE

Previous research (De Vries *et al.*, 2012) has found that the performance of a post by users of SNSs has an effect on these users. As Odden (2012) identified, users evaluate their performance based on an immediate response from their online community. A sizeable response, although subjective, would indicate positive performance, whereas a lack of response would indicate negative performance (Odden, 2012). This response, upon which performance is measured, would relate to the popularity of the post. (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). There is however little to no research on this effect.

De Vries *et al.* (2012) acknowledge that little is known about the factors that influence brand post popularity, while studies that have been conducted remain largely descriptive in nature and lack strong, theoretical foundations. Further to this, research conducted in this field has not formally tested the activities believed to influence the popularity of a post (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). When considering the Facebook SNS platform, a post's popularity or performance could be measured in terms of the number of likes and comments a particular post receives, or the number of times that friends and followers share the original post (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). On the Twitter platform, these responses would be measured in terms of 'retweets,' replying to the original tweet or mentioning the original tweet, thereby making reference to it (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). Followers can also publically mark the tweet by 'favouriting' the original post (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). All of these actions are visible to both parties' networks and may possibly induce other members within either network to respond to the original post (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). De Vries *et al.* (2012) acknowledge that current insights into factors that influence post popularity lack rigor and are relatively sparse.

The current research argues that the performance of posts on SNSs, hereinafter referred to as Social Media Performance, may follow an Expectation Confirmation Theory (hereinafter referred to as ECT) framework. The rationale behind this argument is that one user may be satisfied with 10 responses to their post, while another user may be dissatisfied with 50 responses from their online community. The nature of satisfaction is subjective and thus needs to be treated as such. The ECT has been applied to various marketing contexts with great success, most notably

service evaluation. The following section briefly describes the Expectation Confirmation Theory and its application to this study.

2.5.1. Expectation Confirmation Theory

The development of the ECT, pioneered by Richard Oliver in the late 1970s, resulted in the development of a consumer behaviour model designed to predict post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction (Chou, Min, Chang & Lin, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2010; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1977). This model was developed on the foundation of previous research that suggested that two constructs, namely performance-specific expectations and expectancy disconfirmation, play a vital role in a consumer's post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction (Day, 1984; Oliver, 1980; Day, 1977). Caruana (2000) further broke down these two constructs into four distinct constructs: expectations, perceived performance, disconfirmation and satisfaction.

Expectations refer to a consumer's anticipation regarding the performance of a product or service (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Consumer expectations can be shaped through experience, from the feedback and experience of others or learnt from informative marketing efforts (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009). Perceived performance relates to the consumer's experience of the performance of a product or service, the perceived performance can be in line with, or misaligned with the consumer's initial expectations (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012).

Disconfirmation is defined as the disparity between a consumer's initial expectation and the observed performance of a product or service (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Research has identified three distinct categories of disconfirmation, namely, positive disconfirmation, negative disconfirmation, and simple disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). These three categories of disconfirmation are the result of the interplay between a consumer's expectations, perceived performance and resultant satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Kotler and Keller (2009) state that satisfaction relates to feelings of pleasure or disappointment that arise from the comparison of perceived performance to initial expectations.

This interplay proposed by the ECT suggests that a consumer's initial expectations of a product, service or technology artifact, creates a frame of reference, or an initial reference point, that then allows them to make a comparative judgment following the purchase or adoption (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The theory purports that when the performance of a product, service or technology artifact is poorer than expected, the comparative judgment falls below the initial frame of reference resulting in a negative disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). This negative disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). The opposite also holds true when the performance of a product, service or technology artifact positively exceeds a consumer's expectations, the comparative judgment falls above the frame of reference resulting in positive

disconfirmation (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The positive disconfirmation results in satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). While previous researchers have reported conflicting definitions for the concept of simple confirmation, Elkhani and Bakri (2012) propose that simple confirmation occurs when a consumer's expectations are equal to the perceived performance.

The ECT has been extensively applied in consumer behaviour and information systems research and has long been used as the dominant theory for measuring consumer satisfaction in marketing research (Lankton & McKnight, 2012; Bhattacharjee, 2001). Chen *et al.*, (2010) applied the ECT in an online context as they examined the role of Internet self-efficacy in e-commerce. Chen *et al.* (2010) were able to adapt the ECT to an online context based on the foundational research conducted by Bhattacharjee (2001). Bhattacharjee (2001) identified the information systems (IS) continuance decision-making process as being similar to that of a consumer's repurchase intentions in the marketing field. This proposes that the robustness of the ECT allows the theory to be modified and implemented in an online context (Chen *et al.*, 2010). The current research thus proposes a further continuation of the ECT in an online context, specifically in the social media context, given that social media platforms are increasingly attracting the attention of both academic and marketing practitioners given their reach, ease of accessibility and exceptional growth (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

While the expanse of research dedicated to social media continues to develop, several research studies are examining the measurement of performance of social media strategies (Murdough, 2013; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This literature tends to focus solely on the measurement of the performance of an overall social media strategy from a brand's perspective (Parveen *et al.*, 2015). A gap exists in the literature with regards to measuring Social Media Performance from an individual user's perspective, in examining their personal, user-generated content. Therefore, the current research seeks to extend the ECT into a social media context. In particular, the current research seeks to examine how an individual's Social Media Performance would influence a consumer's conspicuous consumption of a particular brand.

The rationale for this decision relies on the fact that the performance of an online post on an SNS has an effect on the user (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). It is suggested that the effect that Social Media Performance has on a user could influence their feelings or attitudes towards the brand-related content posted and thus influence their conspicuous consumption, when related to a conspicuous product.

2.5.2. Social Media Performance of Brand-generated Content

Brand-generated content on a fan page refers solely to the content generated by the brand itself (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Brand-generated social media content is fully controlled by the company and guided by the agenda of a previously specified

marketing strategy (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). While a variety of studies have sought to measure the performance of brand-generated content, these studies tend to provide brands with tools that allow them to measure the overall impact that their strategy has on different social media platforms (Ryan & Zabin, 2010). An example of a typically used metric of brand performance on an SNS could be the frequency of brand mentions on a specific platform (Murdough, 2013). Similarly, previous research has looked at how content created by brands on SNSs fare. For example, De Vries *et al.* (2012) attempted to identify the drivers of brand-generated post performance on a brand's fan page. As all responses to brand-generated content are publicly accessible to all members in the networks of both parties, brands seek to drive the engagement of their posts in order to obtain the benefits associated with increased exposure (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). This increased exposure could possibly result in an increased fan base for the brand on a particular SNS (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014).

Examining the Social Media Performance of brand-generated content could be considered through three distinct channels; namely brand awareness, brand engagement and word-of-mouth (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). *Brand awareness* would simply be measured as the number of users following the brand, the number of impressions made, or the number of times a brands application was downloaded (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). *Brand engagement* would consider the number of likes or comments on brand-generated posts, the number of active users engaging with the brand, or the number of user-generated items that incorporate the brand (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). The final channel through which a brand could measure their Social Media Performance considers *online word-of-mouth*, or eWOM (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). eWOM, in the social media context, would relate to the number of times that a brand-generated post has been shared, the number of user-generated posts on a brand's page, as well as the frequency of brand appearances in the newsfeeds of their followers (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

De Vries *et al.* (2012) developed a model to examine the drivers of brand post popularity which they adapted from conceptual models used in advertising and word-of-mouth research studies. It should be noted that this measurement of brand-post popularity is a measure of brand engagement, as outlined above. The model selected six characteristics that could influence the brand post popularity and tested the effects of each (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). The study only considered the Facebook platform and thus measured popularity in terms of the number of likes and comments that a post received (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). The model was able to significantly predict the brand post popularity, in terms of the number of both likes and comments that a post received (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

The results indicated that certain factors of brand post popularity were able to increase the number of likes that a post received, while other factors were able to increase the number of comments that a post received. In particular, a brand should use a highly vivid or medium-level interactive post in order to increase the number of likes that a post would obtain (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). An example of such a post could be a video or information regarding a competition (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Highly

interactive posts, that required a response from followers, such as a question, tended to have a negative effect on the number of likes that a post received (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, entertaining posts, not related to the brand, had a negative effect on the number of likes that a post received (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Presumably this is due to the fact that followers expect brand-generated content on the brand's page to concern the brand (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Alternatively, if a brand wanted to increase the number of comments on a particular post, they should post a highly interactive post, such as a question (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). This seems intuitive, as the followers would have to comment on the post in order to answer the question (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, a brand post with a low level of interactivity, such as a web link, had a negative effect on the number of comments. It should be noted that the factors driving the number of likes and comments may be contradictory at times, with certain factors increasing one form of response, while decreasing the other.

Research conducted by Zadeh and Sharda (2014) criticised previous models of post popularity as being too simplistic, opting only to focus on one-dimension of popularity at a time. They suggest making use of a joint probability function that is able to incorporate both timing and the number of followers that a brand has amassed (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). The model was adapted for the Twitter platform and allows marketing managers to observe how and when members of their network respond to their posts, as well as to gauge the response that different types of content would achieve (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). The model further helps to predict when a brand should post new content onto an SNS, and the frequency thereof, in order to maximize the immediate reaction that they hope to achieve (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014).

Both of the above mentioned studies solely considered the drivers of brand-generated content and limited research exists as to whether the same drivers identified by De Vries *et al.* (2012), or the model created by Zadeh & Sharda (2014), would contribute to equivalent outcomes on an individual user-generated post, as opposed to a brand-generated post. This study therefore contributes to the existing body of literature by looking at the performance of social media posts made by the users themselves. In particular, when they are posting about particular brands.

2.5.3. Social Media Performance of User-generated Content

The past several years have witnessed a pronounced increase in the amount of user-generated content available on the Internet (Carmel, Roitman & Yom-Tov, 2012). As previously identified, the current research has adopted the conceptualisation of user-generated content proposed by Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007).

Leung (2013) conducted research that considered the motives behind SNS users generating content and distributing it on SNSs. One motive behind SNS users generating online content related to social and affection needs (Leung, 2013). This reflects that SNS users create user-generated content in order to share their interests, views, opinions and experiences with their online network (Leung, 2013). The second identified factor concerned the need to vent negative emotion of

discontent, anger or injustice to their online audience (Leung, 2013). The third motive, that of recognition needs, is consistent with research conducted by Millward Brown (2011). This motive describes that users post content onto SNSs in order to establish their personal identity and to gain respect and support from their online peers (Leung, 2013).

When a user posts content onto an SNS, they hold expectations regarding how that particular post will perform. The expectations of performance that a user-generated post could achieve, would be in terms of the potential popularity that is expected, according to the number of responses, similar to the brand engagement aspect in the model proposed by De Vries *et al.* (2012). The nature of these responses would be dependent on the SNS itself. In line with the ECT, the user would experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction dependent on whether or not the post met the initial expectations of performance (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009). As highlighted previously, the interplay proposed by the ECT suggests that if the performance of an individual's post on an SNS exceeds their initial expectations, the comparative judgment falls above the frame of reference, resulting in positive disconfirmation and thus satisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). The opposite would hold true for an individual's post that underperformed initial expectations, as the comparative judgment would fall below the frame of reference, resulting in negative disconfirmation and thus dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Caruana, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980).

Research conducted by Millward Brown (2011) highlighted the emotional meaning behind why social media users choose to post user-generated content. Each post represents a need to be acknowledged by peers in the online social community (Millward Brown, 2011). Research suggests that each time a user opts to comment on the posts of others, or likewise chooses to share the posts of another; the user is seeking validation from their cyber community (Millward Brown, 2011). These underlying emotion, the need for recognition, validation and a sense of belonging, tend to shape the way in which social media users respond to brands in the social media environment (Millward Brown, 2011). This suggests that users post content in order to seek validation from their online community, and they expect a response from their community; and as Odden (2012) indicates, users expect this response to be instantaneous. It should be noted that due to the vast quantity of data on SNSs, only small quantities of posts are expected to in fact gain great popularity (Carmel *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, while a small number of posts will receive a response from a user's network, it is postulated that a large number of posts will be ignored (Carmel *et al.*, 2012).

Further to this, research conducted by Mensel and Petersen (2011) highlighted that SNS users use brand interactions on social media as a means of expressing their identity in a social context. Creating associations with particular brands on SNSs, where a user's online community is able to view this interaction, aids a user's expression of self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). When a user posts brand-

related content, this can not only be seen as an explicit mention, but also some form of implicit endorsement of the consumed branded product (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). Furthermore, engagement with a brand on an SNS could identify a willingness to be associated with that particular brand from an aspirational perspective, which again aids the development of self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). This appears to coincide with the original theories of conspicuous consumption behaviours proposed by Veblen (1994), as interactions with aspirational brands, or posting user-generated content relating to conspicuous products, which openly seek to display one's wealth, could be posted in order to reinforce one's social status amongst their network (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). Given the finding that users interact with particular brands on SNSs as a means of self-expression and identity creation, coupled with the fact that the performance of user-generated content influences the user, it could be suggested that the performance of brand-related user-generated content could ultimately affect how the user feels toward the brand. As identified, this implication could further influence users' willingness to engage in further conspicuous consumption behaviour.

This research seeks to investigate how the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content influences a consumer's level of conspicuous consumption based on the resulting satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the performance of the post. This central relationship of the study is illustrated in the following figure, Figure 2. This relationship will consider how conspicuous consumption changes following exposure to different levels of Social Media Performance. In order to examine this relationship, the Social Media Performance of user-generated content will be examined as a treatment, with the subsequent effects on conspicuous consumption examined.

Figure 2: The Central Relationship between Social Media Performance of User-generated Content and Conspicuous Consumption



Chapter 3 explores this relationship between the Social Media Performance of user-generated content and conspicuous consumption in greater detail. In particular, the following chapter explicates the factors that may influence this relationship.

2.6. CONCLUSION

The consumption of conspicuous products has the ability to bolster an individual's social standing (Thoumrungrroje, 2014). This is rooted in Veblen's (1994) theory of conspicuous consumption that relates to the outward display of wealth. For decades, an individual's wealth and social status have been inextricably linked (Han *et al.*, 2010). Judgments made by other members of society regarding one's status seeks to reinforce this status and in order for these judgments to be made, there must be an outward display of wealth (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001).

Social media has provided an easy medium for users to display their wealth, resulting in consumption that was once private, being shared with a user's network of friends and followers (Yenicioglu & Christodoulides, 2014). Research has further indicated that users tend to interact with, or post user-generated content, related to certain brands in an attempt to express their identity in a social context (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). It is further acknowledged that users engage with aspirational brands in order to create an association between themselves and the particular brands (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). It is therefore posited that these interactions could act as conspicuous displays of wealth within the social media context.

When SNS users post content online, research has shown that they seek validation from their online community (Millward Brown, 2011). This validation comes in the form of an immediate response from their online community (Odden, 2012). The exact details of this response would depend on the specific SNS. When user-generated content is posted to an SNS, the user holds some initial expectations regarding the performance of their post, as proposed by the ECT (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Research has shown that the performance of user-generated posts on social media is able to influence the user, however the extent to which this affects the user has not been documented (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Further to this, it is suggested that Social Media Performance is able to influence an SNS user's conspicuous consumption. The rationale for this assumption is rooted in the satisfaction, or lack thereof, derived from the interplay between expectations of performance and perceived performance, as proposed by the ECT (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Oliver, 1980). When an individual experiences a heightened level of satisfaction, resulting in them feeling good about themselves, they are more likely to act on impulse and engage in indulgent behaviour (Thoumrungrroje, 2014). This indulgent behaviour would subsequently manifest itself as conspicuous consumption behaviour. Therefore, the current research seeks to determine whether the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content is able to influence a user's conspicuous consumption of the specified brand.

The following chapter examines three variables that could possibly influence the relationship indicated in Figure 2. These three variables are self-esteem, social media usage and emotion. Each variable is operationalised and its significance to the

current research is highlighted. Furthermore, the expected moderating effects are discussed.

CHAPTER III: SELF ESTEEM, SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND EMOTION AS MODERATING VARIABLES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an in-depth examination of conspicuous consumption and its apparent presence across social media platforms. Conspicuous products, products that are ostentatiously consumed in order to display one's wealth (Page, 1992) were evidenced to be able to reinforce an individual's social status (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Trigg, 2001). These conspicuous displays of wealth are used in order to strengthen one's social standing, through the judgments made by other members of society (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001).

The advent of social media has provided individuals with a readily available platform to display their conspicuous consumption (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014; Yeniciglu & Christodoulides, 2014). SNS users post user-generated content related to specific brands in order to create an association between themselves and the brand in an attempt to express their identity in a social context (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014; Mensel & Petersen, 2011). When SNS users post user-generated content, they seek some kind of validation from their online community and this validation comes in the form of an immediate reaction to their content (Connelly, 2014; Odden, 2012; Millward Brown, 2011). When user-generated content is shared online, users hold some initial expectations as to how the content will be received by their online community. This measure of reception, referred to as Social Media Performance, is theorised to follow the ECT framework (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012).

Research has shown that the performance of user-generated content is able to have an effect on an individual, however the extent of this effect has not been documented (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). The previous chapter further provided a strong justification for the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, highlighting that Social Media Performance is able to affect the individual through various different channels, which is then able to influence their consumption behaviour.

This chapter further expands on the variables that may influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and an individual's conspicuous consumption behaviour. The chapter begins with an in-depth examination of the construct of self-esteem and how this is able to influence this relationship. Following this, the intensity with which an SNS user uses social media is examined. Parallels are drawn regarding an individual's usage of social media and their level of conspicuous consumption, as well as the moderating effect that social media intensity bears on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The role of emotion in affecting the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption behaviour is examined. Finally, the research is contextualised in accordance with the selected SNS, Facebook as well as the

specific type of user-generated content that was examined. First, however, the discussion of the first moderating variable: Self-esteem.

3.2. SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem refers to global feelings of self-liking, self-worth, self-respect and self-acceptance (Truong & McColl, 2011; Kernis, 2003). Self-esteem is seen as an attitude held about oneself that is related to personal beliefs, regarding one's "skills, abilities, social relationships, and future outcomes" (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003:220). It should be noted that self-esteem, although simply defined, refers to a series of complex emotional responses and forms part of one's broader self-concept (Vogel, Rose, Roberts & Eckles, 2014; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003; Bailey, 2003). While self-esteem is a relatively stable characteristic that develops over time, it is possible to be influenced in the short-term by daily events (Vogel *et al.*, 2014).

Self-esteem has a direct influence on human behaviour, as can be noted from a comparison of individuals with either high or low self-esteem (Singh, 2015). Individuals with high self-esteem behave in a different manner to individuals with low self-esteem (Singh, 2015). It is generally believed that there are many benefits associated with having a high self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Individuals exhibiting high self-esteem are generally happy and physically healthy (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003), and are usually more social and popular amongst their friend group (Singh, 2015). Further to this, individuals with high self-esteem have been found to be academically more successful and ambitious, with a greater confidence in their opinions (Singh, 2015). Whereas individuals exhibiting low levels of self-esteem are typically emotionally distressed (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003), express difficulty in social situations and exhibit symptoms of anxiety (Singh, 2015). Individuals with low self-esteem are easily offended by the critique of others and exhibit a low self-efficacy (Singh, 2015). This contrast indicates that the behavioural patterns of individuals with high self-esteem and low self-esteem can greatly differ (Singh, 2015). Gender differences are commonly cited in self-esteem literature, with men reportedly having a higher self-esteem than women in general (Singh, 2015; Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1999)

It is widely believed that self-esteem plays an important role in maintaining one's ego, thus individuals are naturally driven to develop and maintain their self-esteem (Truong & McColl, 2011; Rosenberg & Owens, 2001). This drive to develop one's self-esteem plays a vital role in consumption purchases (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011).

3.2.1 Self Esteem and Conspicuous Consumption

Individuals engage in conspicuous consumption behaviours in an attempt to display wealth and prestige (Kaus, 2013; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Trigg, 2001). These displays seek to obtain some extrinsic benefit from an individual's social

network; however, these displays have been noted to positively influence an individual's self-esteem, an inherently intrinsic benefit (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008). This increase in self-esteem is largely due to a belief that conspicuous products will increase an individual's happiness, thus making them feel increasingly fulfilled (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Belk, 2001). Truong and McColl (2011) acknowledge that purchasing goods that will supposedly enhance one's self-esteem specifically improves one's self-worth.

A definitive link has been identified between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption within the literature; the exact nature of this relationship has however garnered conflicting results. Thourunroje (2014) and Khann and Dhar (2006) suggest that a positive relationship exists between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, indicating that higher levels of self-esteem result in increased conspicuous consumption. The rationale for this school of thought relies on the fact that when individuals experience a high self-esteem, they tend to exhibit a reduced level of self-control, often resulting in indulgent and spontaneous behaviour, such as excessive expenditure (Thourunroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Khann & Dhar, 2006).

Research conducted by Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) found that a negative association exists between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. This research discovered that when respondents exhibited low levels of self-esteem they tended to increase their expenditures on conspicuous products (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). They explain this relationship as a compensatory relationship, in which individuals tend to purchase conspicuous products when they feel that their self-integrity may be under threat (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). In Sivanathan and Pettit's (2010) research, they provided respondents with positive and negative feedback that could possibly pose as an enhancement or a threat to one's self-worth, examining this relationship in terms of a high status product as well as a low status product. Their results revealed that participants were willing to pay significantly more for a high status product following negative feedback as opposed to positive feedback (Sivanathan and Pettit, 2010). This confirmed that the valuation of high-status products significantly increased when one's self-worth was seemingly threatened (Sivanathan and Pettit, 2010). The current research thus seeks to determine the nature of this relationship, in order to support the research of Thourunroje (2014) and Khann and Dhar (2006) or to support the findings of Sivanathan and Pettit (2010). The following hypothesis is thus examined:

H₁: There is a correlation between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour.

Individuals are driven to protect their self-esteem, whether it is high or low (Singh, 2015). One possible technique used by individuals to protect their self-esteem relates to making selective social comparisons (Singh, 2015). Individuals tend to compare themselves to others that have similar demographic characteristics, but that they deem inferior in order to create a favourable comparison for themselves (Singh,

2015). Individuals tend to avoid upwards comparisons, where they would be comparing themselves to individuals that they deem to be superior (Singh, 2015). The advent of social media has provided a new platform for users to readily make social comparisons (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian & Halliwell, 2015). The current research seeks to adapt this mechanism of positive and negative feedback proposed in the research of Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) and test whether the subsequent influences on self-esteem and conspicuous consumption would hold in the social media context.

3.2.2. Self Esteem and Social Media

Gonzales and Hancock (2011) conducted research on the effects of exposure to social media on a user's self-esteem. Previous research was somewhat divided on the subject as to how social media exposure influences a user's self-esteem as much research tended to focus on specific categories of self-esteem as opposed to general self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Further to this, research that sought to examine the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem has itself garnered contradictory results. Studies conducted by Kross, Verduyn, Demiralp, Park, Lee, Lin, Shablack, Jonides and Ybarra (2013), Vogel *et al.* (2013) and Kalpidou, Costin and Morris (2011) found that higher social media usage was associated with a reduced general well-being and overall self-esteem. Research conducted by Valkenburg, *et al.* (2006) found that social media usage was positively associated with self-esteem, through the mechanism of positive feedback from online connections. It was thus proposed that SNSs, are able to influence temporary states of self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006). It is suggested that the ability for SNSs to affect a user's self-esteem, whether positively or negatively, is based on the self-presentation bias (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) coupled with incessant online social comparisons (Vogel *et al.*, 2014).

The self-presentation bias allows SNS users to have control over the information they choose to share, which could make users increasingly aware of their own limitations or inadequacies due to social comparisons, thus lowering their self-esteem (Vogel *et al.*, 2014; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Alternatively users can choose to display only select information to their online networks, thus positively enhancing certain aspects of themselves, boosting their self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). The research by Gonzales and Hancock (2011) found the latter to be true, whereby the self-presentation bias available to users on SNSs increased their self-esteem. This finding was in contrast to their expectations as traditional theory supports the notion that stimuli that prompt self-awareness create inconsistencies between oneself and socially accepted standards, thus lowering self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

The findings of Gonzales and Hancock (2011) were significant as they highlighted how the process of selective self-presentation is able to positively influence an SNS user. They further purport that the care that individuals take in ensuring they only report positive information on digital platforms, positively influences an SNS user's self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). It remains plausible that a non-edited view

of oneself, such as a mirror image, may lower self-esteem as it highlights inconsistencies between oneself and socially accepted standards (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

It is suggested that a positive relationship exists between an SNS user's self-esteem and the number of responses their user-generated content receives, based on the satisfaction achieved, as proposed by the ECT (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). This assumption was confirmed by the Ford 2014 Trend Report (Connelly, 2014), which found that 62% of online adults experienced increased self-esteem following a positive reaction to their user-generated content. It was also found that 72% of individuals above the age of 34 years, admitted to only posting user-generated content that they knew would be positively received by their online community (Connelly, 2014). Recent years have seen a dramatic rise in the amount of brand-related user-generated content on SNSs. When user-generated content is related to the consumption of a brand, the user seeks to create some association between themselves and the brand, thus solidifying their self-identity in a social context (Mensel & Petersen, 2011).

While the phenomenon of consumer's sharing consumption experiences is not novel, the introduction of social media has allowed for this consumption to now be shared on a different platform, to a greater audience (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). Social media amplifies a user's ability to share their consumption behaviours and further provides a platform for users to share consumption behaviours that were previously private, resulting in a proliferation of brand-related user-generated content (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). As acknowledged by Mensel and Petersen (2011), creating an association with particular brands on SNSs, where a user's online community is able to view this interaction, aids a user's expression of self-identity. This is reinforced in the research of Kunst and Vatrapu (2014) that supports the notion that posting brand-related user-generated content indicates an implicit endorsement of the brand to one's online network. It is thus posited that the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content plays a vital role in developing and maintaining the self-esteem of the user. Thus, the user would bear a great interest in the performance and acceptance of this content amongst their online community.

3.2.3. The Moderating Effect of Self-esteem on Social Media Performance and Conspicuous Consumption

Valkenburg *et al.* (2006) highlighted the mechanism through which social media exposure was able to influence self-esteem. When individuals received positive feedback from their online community, their self-esteem was increased, and when they received negative feedback, their self-esteem was reduced (Connelly, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006). This feedback relates to the responses received to user-generated content on their online profile (Valkenburg *et al.* 2006). It should be noted that these fluctuations in self-esteem are dependent on the stable self-esteem traits that an individual bears, as an individual's predisposition to high or low self-esteem could amplify this fluctuation. The current research seeks to quantify this feedback as

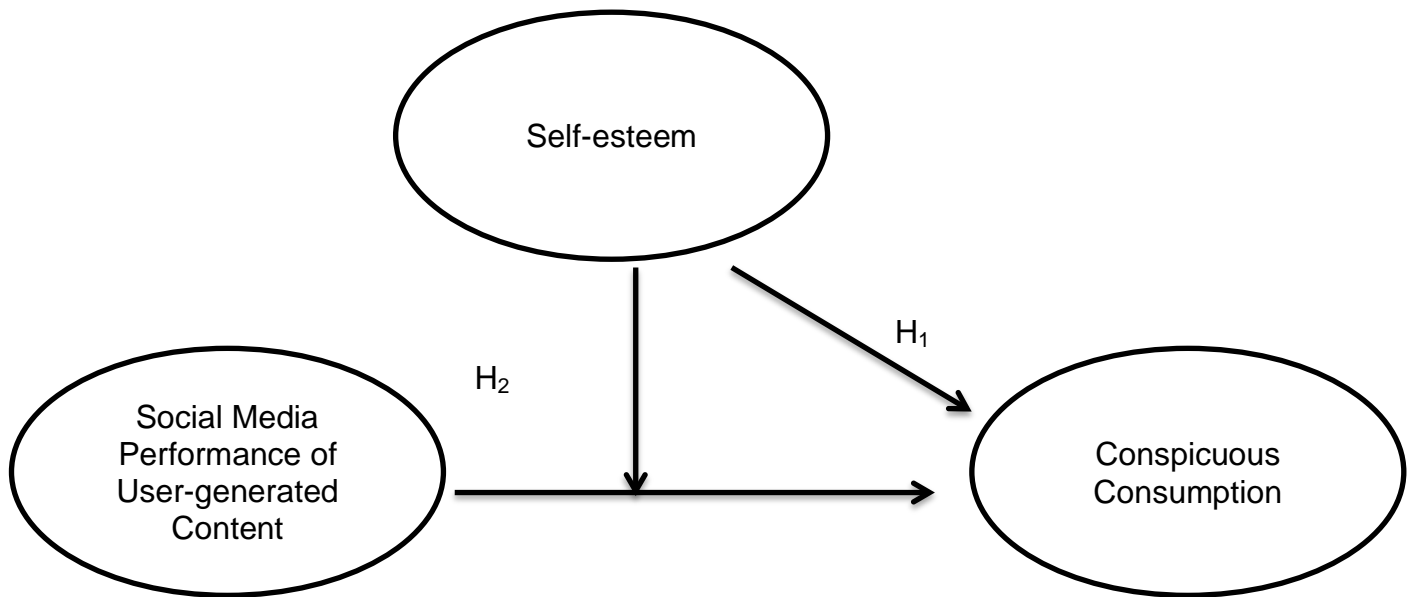
the number of responses that an individual receives on each post of user-generated content on a particular SNS. As Odden (2012) identified, SNS users evaluate their performance based on an immediate response from their online community. A sizeable response, although subjective, would indicate positive performance, whereas a lack of response would indicate negative performance (Connelly, 2014; Odden, 2012).

Research has shown that positive and negative Social Media Performance is able to influence an individual's conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014). Thoumrungroje (2014) suggests that the relationship between Social Media Performance of user-generated content and conspicuous consumption can be influenced by a user's self-esteem. Individuals with an increased self-esteem may experience reduced self-control, resulting in purchasing decisions that could be classified as irrational and indulgent, referred to as conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014). Thus an individual's self-esteem has a direct influence, whether positive or negative, on their conspicuous consumption behaviour (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Sivanathan and Pettit, 2010; Delaney, 2008, Khann and Dhar 2006). It is therefore posited, in line with the findings of Thoumrungroje (2014) that an individual's self-esteem would be able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. In particular, the current research seeks to examine this relationship when considering brand-related user-generated content. It is proposed that this relationship holds when considering brand-related content, as users make use of this *consumer exhibitionism* as a means of expressing their self-identity and as such are heavily invested in the performance of such content (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). The following hypothesis is thus used in order to test this moderation.

H₂: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Figure 3 below provides a graphical representation of the above-mentioned hypotheses, H₁ and H₂ that seek to examine the direct and moderating influence of self-esteem.

Figure 3: Conceptual Map Presenting H₁ and H₂



Thoumrunroje (2014) further argues that self-esteem is able to influence a user's conspicuous consumption through a different variable. This variable, the intensity with which one users social media, is also able to influence an SNS user's conspicuous consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014). The rationale for this assumption is that social media intensity can lead users to make irrational consumption decisions based on this indirectly influencing their self-esteem (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

3.3. SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

The number of social media users continues to rise exponentially each year, with up to 72% of online young adults using social networking sites (Wu, 2015; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Correa, Hinsley & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). It has become difficult to argue with the ubiquitous nature of social media in the lives of consumers (Brooks, 2015). Social media usage can be operationalised in many ways, given the significant differences across social media platforms (Davenport, Bergman, Bergman & Fearington, 2014). Correa *et al.* (2010:247) define social media usage as the following:

“The particular consumption of digital media or Internet that has little to do with traditional information media use, but rather it provides a mechanism for the audience to connect, communicate, and interact with each other and their mutual friends”.

It should be noted that there are different practical measurements of SNS usage (Davenport *et al.*, 2014). Davenport *et al.* (2010) suggests that one should distinguish between active and passive social media usage. Active usage refers to engaging with SNSs as a creator and distributor of user-generated content, while passive

usage refers to engaging with SNSs with the sole purpose of consuming content (Davenport *et al.*, 2014). Broad measures of usage, such as the time spent on a particular SNS, tend to incorporate aspects from both categories of usage (Davenport *et al.*, 2014).

SNS usage is not confined to a particular location, or a specific time during the day as the sites are accessed frequently both from home and places of work (Brooks, 2015). It is proposed that the hedonic appeal of social media, coupled with the ease of connectivity to ones online network, creates a strong attraction to use social media both in personal and professional time (Brooks, 2015). Social media users are usually distracted between six and eight times in a typical working day, consuming approximately 28% of an average work day (Brooks, 2015; Spira & Feintuch, 2006). Social media usage in the workplace has therefore been associated with much inefficiency (Brooks, 2015). Research has indicated that individuals will jump to a disturbance approximately 40% of the time, as opposed to focusing on a task (Brooks, 2015). When they return to the task, following the interruption, it could take up to 25 minutes for the individual to return to their cognitive state with the original task (Brooks, 2015). For students, the classroom environment is comparable to the work environment, where students are expected to perform specific tasks meticulously and efficiently (Brooks, 2015). Reporting on research conducted by Cengage Learning, Strang (2014) identified that 59% of students made use of social media when in a classroom environment.

Research conducted by Chang and Hsiao (2014) divided SNS users into groups on the basis of the amount of time that they spent on SNSs in an attempt to gain a better understanding of their behaviour. They further acknowledge that the amount of time a user spends on SNSs may be indicative of their psychological status (Chang & Hsiao, 2014). Classifying users based on their SNS usage allowed Chang and Hsiao (2014) to profile users in terms of their SNS activities, providing marketers with tailored marketing activities to attract different segments. Zhang and Pennacchiotti (2013) presented a model for predicting purchase behaviours from an SNS user's personal profile and usage. They found that a correlation existed between particular social media activities and online purchase and consumption patterns (Zhang & Pennacchiotti, 2013). Further research conducted by Amaro and Duarte (2015) anticipates that individuals who exhibited higher levels of social media usage were more likely to engage in particular purchase and consumption behaviours.

3.3.1. Social Media Usage and Conspicuous Consumption

The current research has emphasised the increase in social media usage around the world, with individuals seemingly spending an extensive amount of time on SNSs daily (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). It is proposed that higher social media use provides SNS users with an increased opportunity to receive feedback, on their user-generated content, from their online community. This feedback refers to the positive and negative feedback mechanism proposed and tested by Sivanathan and Pettit (2010). This feedback has been shown to indirectly influence a user's conspicuous

consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Thoumrunroje (2014) explained this relationship as one that influenced an SNS user's self-esteem, subsequently affecting their conspicuous consumption. When users receive positive or negative feedback to their user-generated content, this influences their self-esteem, either positively or negatively (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Thoumrunroje (2014) then further explains that this affect on one's self-esteem is able to influence the user's conspicuous consumption, by affecting their ability to make rational purchase decisions.

This is aligned with the research of Kamal *et al.* (2013), which found a significant relationship existed between an individual's usage of social media and their display of materialistic behaviours. Kamal *et al.* (2013) examined this relationship amongst both American and Arab university students. The relationship proved to be significant across cultures, with higher levels of social media usage influencing materialistic consumption behaviours (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). A justification offered for this relationship relates to the use of interactive advertising media on social media platforms (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). This research further discovered the notion that consumption leads to happiness was apparent across both cultures, with Arab students indicating that materialistic purchases were used to reinforce their social success in comparison to others (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). In light of the finding of Thoumrunroje (2014) and Kamal *et al.*, (2013) it is proposed that social media usage would be positively related to conspicuous consumption behaviours in the current research. This has resulted in the development of the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption.

The more time SNS users spend engaging in online activities on social media platforms, the more opportunities are presented to evaluate one's Social Media Performance. This performance could be evaluated relative to previous performance, or to the performance of others (Fardouly *et al.*, 2015). It is suggested that the identified relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption may be influenced by the intensity with which an SNS user uses social media platforms.

3.3.2. The Moderating Effect of Social Media Usage on Social Media Performance and Conspicuous Consumption

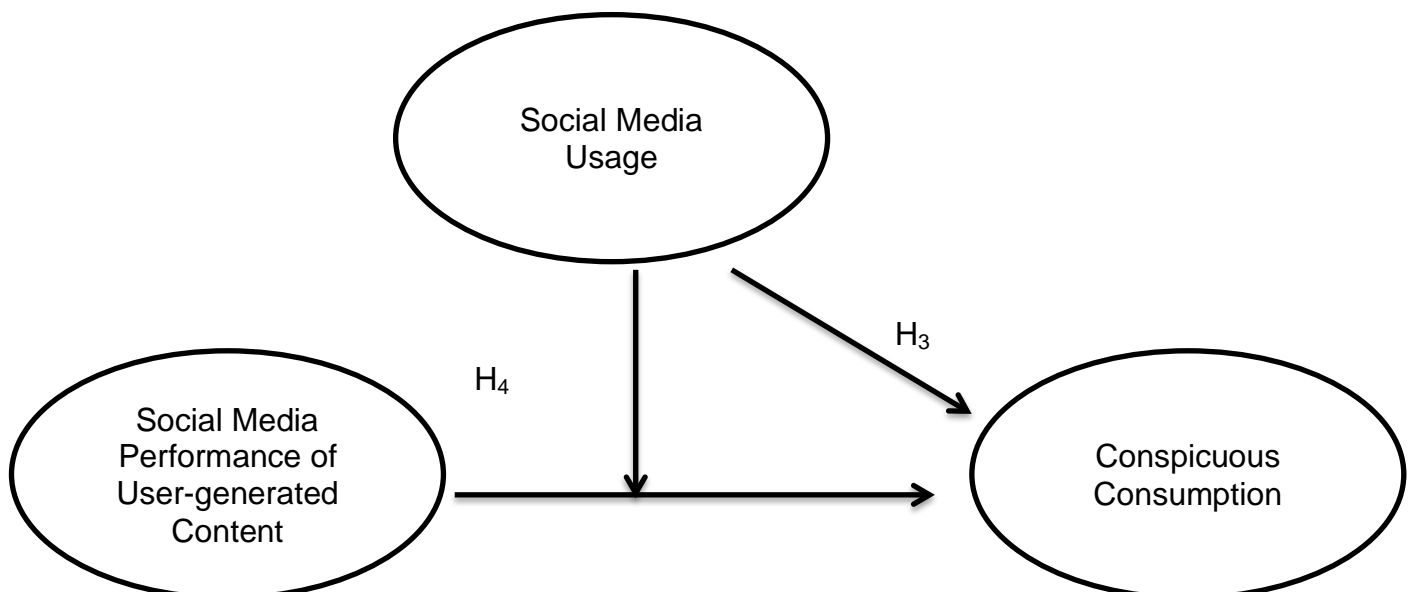
The positive and negative feedback mechanism available to SNS users, in the form of responses created by their online network, is able to affect users well-being (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Buechel & Berger, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit; 2010). This feedback has been shown to indirectly influence a user's conspicuous consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014). The higher an individual's social media intensity, the more opportunities to engage with this feedback mechanism materialise.

It is thus proposed that the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption is moderated by the degree of social media intensity of the user. Research conducted by Wilcox and Stephen (2012) indicated that when individuals spend time on an SNS, much of that time is dedicated to reading the content of others in their online network. This focus on others, as opposed to oneself, is also able to reduce self-control (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). These findings are somewhat aligned with those of Thoumrungroje (2014) that also found social media usage to be associated with a loss of self-control. This loss of self-control is associated with irrational decision-making, and in the case of the current research, conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). In light of these findings, the current research seeks to determine if social media usage is able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This relationship primarily relates to a reduced self-control associated with increased social media usage (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). Again, this relationship is examined in the context of brand-related user-generated content, due to the heavy investment in the performance of this particular type of content (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). In order to test this proposition, the following hypothesis, H₄, has been developed.

H₄: Social media usage moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Figure 4 below provides a graphical representation of the above-mentioned hypotheses, H₃ and H₄ that seek to examine the direct and moderating influence of social media usage.

Figure 4: Conceptual Map Presenting H₃ and H₄



Social media platforms embody a wide range of often-subconscious decision-making activities that tend to be shaped by individual, social and environmental factors

(Widén, Lindström, Bräanback, Huvila & Nyström, 2015). Frequent SNS users may be largely unaware of these factors affecting their online behaviour, particularly for younger individuals for whom social media usage has become a daily activity (Widén *et al.*, 2015). It has been extensively argued in the literature that emotion is able to significantly influence an individual's decision-making capabilities (Widén *et al.*, 2015; Bergman, 2010; Dean & Croft, 2009; Gutnik, Hakimzada, Yoskowitz & Patel, 2006). As such, SNS users are constantly faced with decision-making activities that result in both rational and irrational outcomes being achieved (Widén *et al.*, 2015; Dean & Croft, 2009). Hardin (2009 as cited in Widén *et al.*, 2015) identified what he referred to as *colloquial rationality*, as a basis for understanding how SNS users make decisions in the social media context. This theory claims that there is a degree of rationality at the moment a decision is made on social media, however that exact decision may, at a later stage, invoke regret in the user (Hardin, 2009 as cited in Widén *et al.*, 2015). It is suggested that the use of social media is thus able to invoke both positive and negative emotion in users. Positive emotion could be derived from the satisfaction achieved through social media use; however, SNS usage could also invoke negative emotion resulting in conflicting emotion (Widén *et al.*, 2015; Lin & Utz, 2015).

3.4. EMOTION

An individual's subjective emotional well-being has been found to consist of two distinct factors, positive and negative affect (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984). Both positive and negative affect can be considered as a trait, indicating its relative stability, alternatively they can be considered as a state, indicating that there can be transient fluctuations in mood (Watson *et al.*, 1988:B). Negative affect refers to subjective distress, which consists of a wide range of negative mood states, including, but not limited to, fear, anxiety, hostility, scorn and disgust (Watson *et al.*, 1988:B). Negative affect as a trait, concerns a predisposition to experience negative emotion that could further influence ones "cognition, self-concept and world view" (Watson *et al.*, 1988:347:B). Alternatively, positive affect refers to an individual's pleasant engagement with their environment (Watson *et al.*, 1988:347:B). Individuals exhibiting high levels of positive affect would present high levels of mental alertness, enthusiasm, energy, interest and joy (Watson *et al.*, 2, 1988:347). Considering positive affect as a trait concerns a predisposition to positive emotional experiences, reflecting a general sense of competence and well-being (Watson *et al.*, 1988:B).

Two schools of thought appear to exist in the literature with regards to the relationship between positive and negative affect. The first, relates to the notion of independence between the two (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985). In this view, positive and negative affect appear to vary independently, thus the amount of positive affect that an individual experiences does not significantly correlate with the amount of negative affect that they experience (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985). While much research agrees with this notion, the second school of thought

identifies positive and negative affect as being strongly negatively correlated (Diener *et al.*, 1985). Diener and Emmons (1984) explained that it is highly unlikely for both positive and negative affect to occur in the same individual at the same time, given their bipolar nature thus supporting the notion of a strong negative relationship. This intuitive reasoning indicates that the more an individual experiences positive emotion, the less time is available for them to experience negative emotion (Diener *et al.*, 1985).

Emotion, both positive and negative, is able to affect consumption purchases and the associated decision-making processes (Murray, 2013; Bergman, 2010; Kamarck, 2005). The pursuit to reinforce one's social status through the purchase of conspicuous products can thus be influenced by emotion (Ivanic & Nunes, 2009). The rationale for this proposition is that emotion associated with positive affect can be achieved through conspicuous consumption behaviours that seek to reinforce one's social status (Ivanic & Nunes, 2009).

3.4.1 Emotion and Conspicuous Consumption

The apparent irrationality in consumer purchase behaviour is evidenced in the literature discussing that much purchase behaviour is guided by emotion, as opposed to reason (Murray, 2013; Bergman, 2010; Kamarck, 2005). Research, particularly in the field of psychology, has highlighted that emotion can have a significant influence on an individuals' processes of logical reasoning (Jung, Wranke, Hamburger & Knauff, 2014; Murray, 2013). This influence can be exceptionally powerful, with research finding that the role of emotion in purchase decisions has been found to be twice as likely than that of cognition (Knight & Kim, 2007). Bergman (2010) suggests that consumers are highly responsive to cues that communicate with them on an emotional level and as such this is often a strategy employed by advertisers. A nationally advertised and well-known brand is thus able to create an emotional connection with consumers; with research indicating that the richer the emotional content of a brand's representation in the mind of a consumer, the more likely the consumer is to purchase the brand (Murray, 2013).

Early research proposed that a negative relationship existed between materialistic acts of conspicuous consumption and an individual's level of happiness (Baker, Moschis, Ong & Pattanapanyasat, 2013). This would indicate that a correlation would exist between negative affect and conspicuous consumption, as the more an individual engaged in conspicuous consumption behaviours, the higher their level of negative affect would be. While this belief is widely held, Baker *et al.* (2013) acknowledged that no research conclusively tested this hypothesis. Further to this, research that had been conducted established contradictory findings with some proposing a positive association, while others proposed a negative association (Baker *et al.*, 2013).

Conspicuous consumption behaviours that seek to reinforce one's social standing have been found to positively influence an individual's self-esteem (Wang &

Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008). This increase in self-esteem is largely due to a belief that conspicuous products will elicit positive emotion thus increasing an individual's happiness (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Belk, 2001). This would propose that a correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption, as increased conspicuous consumption behaviour would elicit positive affect, thus increasing overall well-being.

In light of the above contradictory findings in the literature regarding the influence of emotion on conspicuous consumption, the current research seeks to separately examine the influence of positive affect and negative affect as distinct constructs. This approach is further required by the lack of a general consensus regarding the relationship between positive and negative affect (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984). Thus, the current research examines the effects of positive and negative affect as distinct constructs. The current research seeks to determine whether the relationship between emotion and conspicuous consumption, as proposed by the literature, exists in the current context. Researchers have developed arguments for the correlation to exist between positive affect and conspicuous consumption (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Belk, 2001) as well as negative affect and conspicuous consumption (Baker *et al.*, 2013). The current research seeks to test both of these propositions. Thus the following two hypotheses have been formulated, each relating to a distinct component of emotion, namely positive affect and negative affect.

H₅: A correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.

H₆: A correlation exists between negative affect and conspicuous consumption.

The use of social media has been associated with a number of positive social benefits, particularly for emotionally unstable individuals (Buechel & Berger, 2012; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). The response generated from a user's online community is purported to aid their well-being and as such seeks to regulate unstable emotion (Buechel & Berger, 2012).

3.4.2. Emotion and Social Media

Buechel and Berger (2012) propose that particular social media platforms act as an emotion regulation tool. SNSs offer users the opportunity to share user-generated content and anticipate a response from their online network (Buechel & Berger, 2012). Should this response be favourable, it could boost the user's emotional well-being through perceived social support. Individuals who experience unstable emotion express difficulty in regulating their emotion and tend to experience intense emotion more so than emotionally stable individuals (Buechel & Berger, 2012). It is suggested that certain SNS activities enable users to regulate their emotion (Buechel & Berger, 2012). Buechel and Berger (2012) discovered that emotionally unstable individuals tend to create and share content more frequently and tend to share their emotion more when doing so.

Literature has shown that emotion plays a determining role in activities related to information and social sharing behaviour in the social media environment (Widén *et al.*, 2015; Buechel & Berger, 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012). However, the role that an individual's emotion plays in their online decision-making remains relatively underdeveloped (Widén *et al.*, 2015). Research conducted by Buechel and Berger (2012) sought to examine how the responses that an SNS user receives, referred to in this research as Social Media Performance, is able to affect their emotional well-being.

3.4.3. The Moderating Effect of Emotion on Social Media Performance and Conspicuous Consumption

Buechel and Berger (2012) induced negative affect in individuals in order to determine the possible influence that this would bear on their SNS activities. They manipulated the ability for the user to receive responses on their content in order to determine if the possibility of receiving a response is required for the perceived benefits of emotional sharing to occur. They suggest that the social sharing of emotion on SNSs can provide users with immediate benefits, in the form of social support. The results indicated that following an incident that increased negative affect, users experienced positive benefits from sharing user-generated content with others provided that the possibility existed for the user's network to respond. It should be noted that the benefits were not obtained from sharing content online; they were obtained through the knowledge that others would be able to respond to the content (Buechel & Berger, 2012).

The literature has highlighted the ability for Social Media Performance to influence conspicuous consumption (Connelly, 2014; Thourunrojroje, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006) and it has further provided a justification for emotion influencing how an individual perceives the Social Media Performance of user-generated content (Buechel & Berger, 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012). The current research thus seeks to combine these propositions and determine whether an SNS user's emotion is able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The rationale for this proposition is that individuals may be heavily emotionally invested in the Social Media Performance of their user-generated content that they post on SNSs in an attempt to boost their emotional well-being. Research has shown that these behaviours differ amongst individuals exhibiting varying levels of positive and negative affect (Buechel & Berger, 2012). Further to this, the performance of this user-generated content has been shown to influence the emotional well-being of the user (Buechel & Berger, 2012). Thourunrojroje (2014) proposes that when individuals feel good about themselves, they are inclined to make irrational decisions, such as excessive expenditure on conspicuous products. This relationship considers brand-related user-generated content in testing the below hypotheses, due to the increased emotional investment that an individual places on the Social Media Performance of this content (Kunst & Vatrappu, 2014). In order to test this moderation affect, the following two hypotheses have been formulated in order to determine this effect separately for both positive affect and negative affect.

H₇: Positive affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₈: Negative affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

The following two conceptual maps, Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively, graphically represent the hypotheses testing the direct and moderating influences of emotion. Figure 5 presents H₅ and H₇, examining the direct and indirect influences of positive affect, while Figure 6 presents H₆ and H₈, examining the direct and indirect influences of negative affect. These two figures are presented below.

Figure 5: Conceptual Map Presenting H₅ and H₇

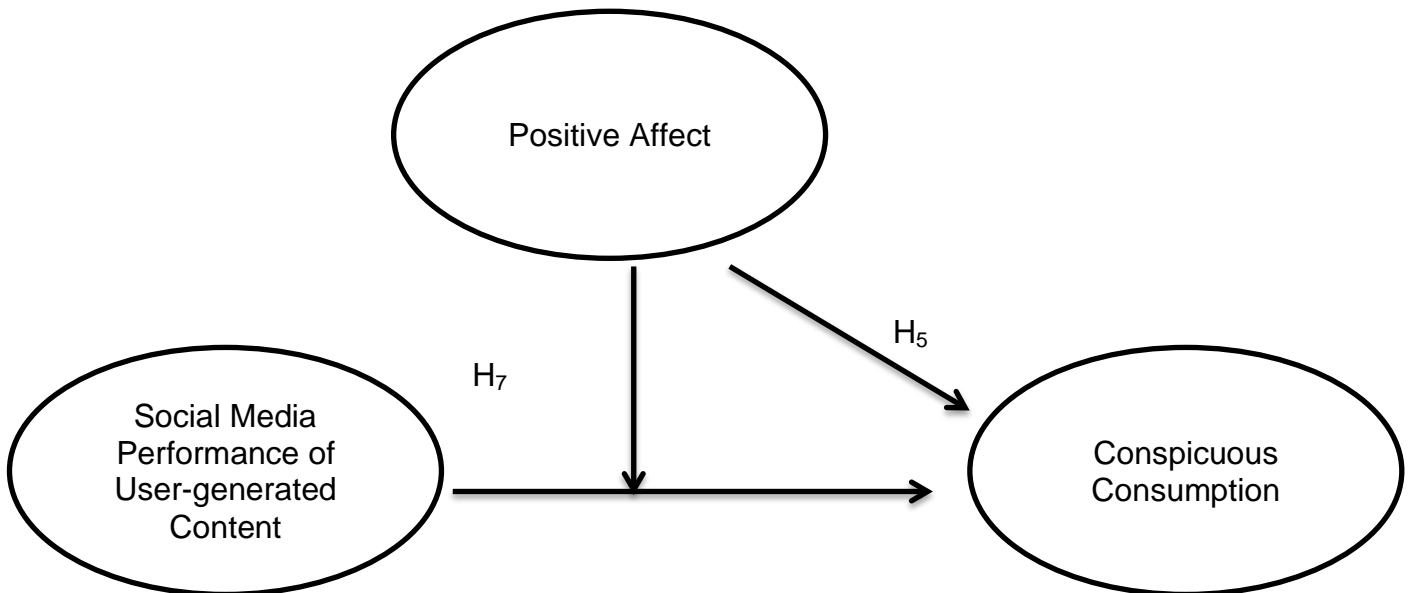
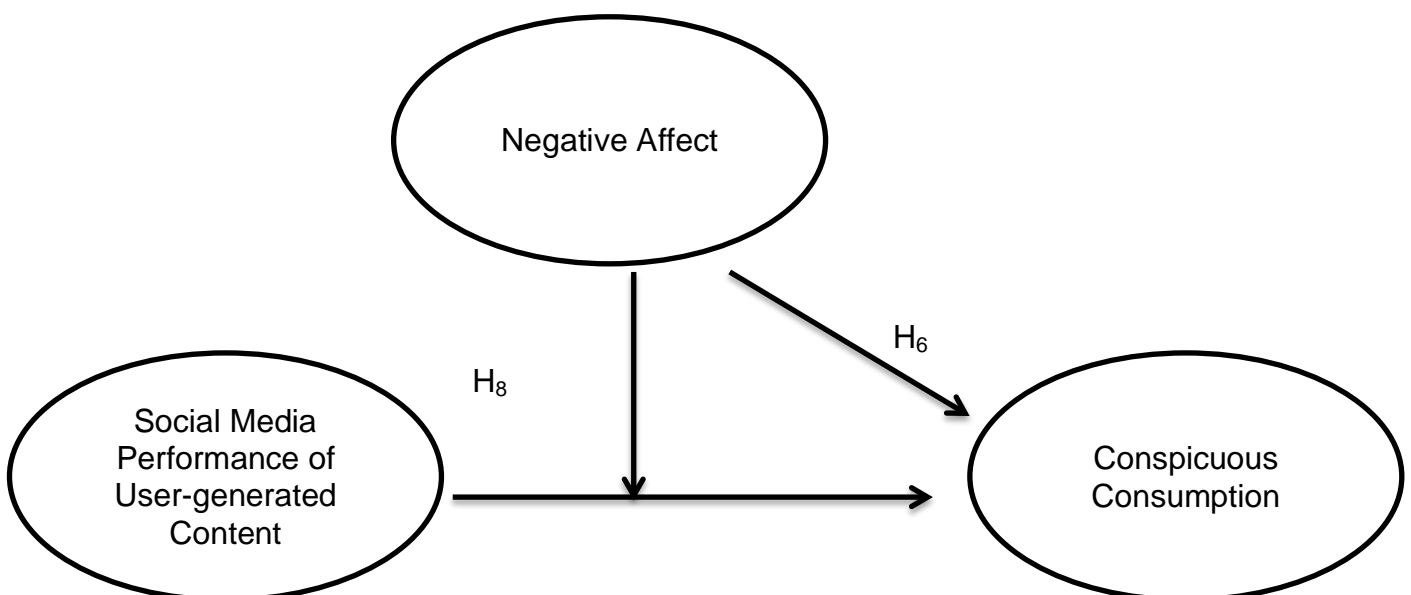


Figure 6: Conceptual Map Presenting H₆ and H₈



In order to test the hypotheses proposed, a specific SNS was selected in order to ensure the consistency of the results as well as the consistency of the user-generated content. The current research examines users of Facebook generating user-generated content on the Facebook platform.

3.5. THE FACEBOOK PLATFORM

Given the populace of users registered on Facebook, it is not surprising that this was one of the most visited websites on the Internet as of August 2014 (Brooks, 2015). In the past two years alone, Facebook has shown incredible growth and currently boasts 1,65 billion active monthly users, remaining the most popular SNS worldwide (King, 2016). The popularity of Facebook remains highest amongst the target population for the current research, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Collin *et al.*, 2010), with a penetration rate of 77% in this millennial market (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

In 2015, it was reported that approximately 500 000 new users joined the Facebook platform daily (Regan, 2015). Facebook allows users to create individual, personal profiles, which can be updated to include a wide variety of personal information as well as information regarding ones favourite movies and musicians (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). On this profile, the user, as well as mutually accepted acquaintances, are able to post web links, comments, videos and photos of mutual interest (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). User-generated content on Facebook includes text written by users, photographs and other images uploaded to the site, music and other audio content recorded or edited by users as well as video and film recorded or edited by users (Arnhold, 2010). The amount of personal information that users are required to share on Facebook aids the self-presentation bias. The self-presentation bias allows individuals to selectively present the information that they would like to share (Vogel *et al.*, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). This bias has been shown to be important in influencing a user's self-esteem and emotional well-being (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Facebook allows individuals to hide certain content from their online network, should they not wish to share it, a mechanism not shared by all other SNSs (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

The penetration rate of Facebook amongst the target population together with the ability to create and distribute many kinds of unrestricted user-generated content and the ability to enhance oneself using the self-presentation bias, has resulted in Facebook being selected as the SNS platform for consideration in the current research. The current study has adopted the conceptualisation of user-generated content from Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007), who acknowledge the difficulty of categorizing user-generated content. The current research seeks to examine user-generated content related to a brand, while maintaining all aspects of the definition proposed by Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2007).

3.5.1. Brand-related User-generated Content on Facebook

Research has shown that when SNS users post content related to a brand, they seek to create an association between themselves and a brand as a means through which to develop their self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). Individuals typically use brands and other symbols to develop and maintain their self-image in both online and offline contexts (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012). Smith *et al.* (2012) identified that brand-related user-generated content played a vital role in the self-presentation of users, more so than initially predicted.

When a user posts brand-related content, this can not only be seen as an explicit mention, but also some form of implicit endorsement of the consumed branded product (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014). Furthermore, engagement with a brand on an SNS could identify a willingness to be associated with that brand from an aspirational perspective, which again, supports the development of self-identity (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). This appears to coincide with the original theories of conspicuous consumption behaviours proposed by Veblen (1994). Interactions with aspirational brands, or posting user-generated content relating to conspicuous products, which openly seek to display one's wealth, could be posted in order to reinforce one's social status amongst their network (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). As brand-related user-generated content seeks to develop and maintain the user's self-identity, it is proposed that users are heavily invested in the performance of such posts. It is further proposed that users carefully monitor the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content, in order to determine the response received from their online community.

3.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has identified three distinct variables that are able to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The first construct, self-esteem, has been strongly correlated with displays of wealth in the form of conspicuous consumption (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Truong & McColl, 2011; Delaney, 2008; Belk, 2001). The exact nature of this relationship has however garnered contradictory results in the literature (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Khann & Dhar, 2006). This research thus seeks to determine the nature of this relationship. The Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content is proposed to influence an individual's self-esteem (Kunst & Vatrapu, 2014; Thoumrunroje, 2014). In turn, this influences an individual's ability to make rational decisions, thus increasing the likelihood of excessive and ostentatious consumption.

The second construct, social media usage, relates to the intensity with which an individual is an active user of a specific SNS (Brooks, 2015; Davenport *et al.*, 2014). A correlation between social media usage and conspicuous consumption has been established in the literature, with heightened levels of social media usage being associated with increased conspicuous consumption (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Kamal

et al., 2013). It is further proposed that the intensity with which one users SNSs is able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This moderation primarily relates to a reduced level of self-control associated with increased social media usage (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). It is proposed that individuals who use social media excessively experience a greater loss in self-control, resulting in increased conspicuous consumption, whereas users who do not visit SNSs frequently do not experience such a drastic reduction in self-control, thus reducing their conspicuous consumption.

The third construct, emotion, consists of both positive and negative affect (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Diener *et al.*, 1985). The relationship between these sub-constructs has not reached a consensus in the literature, and as such, positive and negative affect are treated as distinct constructs in the current research (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984). The link between emotion and conspicuous consumption is due to the confounding effect that emotion plays in consumer purchase behaviour (Jung *et al.*, 2014; Murray, 2013; Bergman, 2010; Kamarck, 2005). This relationship between the underlying dimensions of emotion and conspicuous consumption has garnered contradictory results (Baker *et al.*, 2013; Wang & Griskevicius, 2013; Belk, 2001). The current research thus seeks to test this relationship while examining positive and negative affect distinctly. Buechel and Berger (2015) examined how the response that an individual received to their user-generated content was able to affect their emotional well-being. The current research has taken cognizance of the research conducted by Buechel and Berger (2015) and thus has included emotion as a potential moderating variable.

The following chapter outlines the methodology employed in the current research. This includes a description of the research design and method employed, all sampling decisions made, the measured instrument that has been used and well as the data collection procedures.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a theoretical justification for the introduction of self-esteem, social media usage and emotion as moderating variables in the current research. The hypotheses were then introduced and justified in accordance with existing literature, whilst identifying inconsistencies in the literature.

This chapter focuses on the methodology employed in the current research. The subsequent section briefly reiterates the approach and contextualises the research. This includes a review of the research question and hypotheses that were examined. Following this, an in-depth discussion of the research design and methods employed is conducted, highlighting the rationale behind these specific decisions. Various aspects related to the sampling technique and respondent profiles are then discussed. This is followed by a full description of the measurement instrument that was utilised throughout the data collection procedure. This section includes a breakdown of the scales that were adopted for each construct measured. Data collection procedures are examined, highlighting practical processes that were followed to ensure the collection of valid data. Data analysis techniques that were employed to test the hypotheses are identified and finally, concluding remarks are then made.

4.2. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

The current research has introduced the concept of Social Media Performance; a phenomenon already alluded to in the literature, yet lacking proper conceptualisation, measurement and validation of its existence. The relationship between the Social Media Performance of user-generated content and conspicuous consumption has been identified in the literature (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Conspicuous consumption appears to have become synonymous with social media, given the ease of sharing consumption behaviour within online networks (Yenicioğlu & Christodoulides, 2014). Three distinct factors have been suggested by the literature to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, namely self-esteem (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.*, 2006), social media usage (Thoumrunroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012) and emotion (Buechel & Berger, 2012). The current study seeks to examine the direct influence that these three variables exert on an individual's conspicuous consumption, as proposed by the literature as well as examine possible moderating effects on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

This research was conducted in South Africa, an emerging economy, which proves to be of great importance to the constructs being measured. Kamal *et al.* (2013) acknowledge that the conspicuous consumption and the prevalence of materialism appear to differ across countries. Greater levels of materialism could be found in

societies that were undergoing socioeconomic and cultural change (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). Kamal *et al.* (2013) proposes that in Hong Kong, where consumers experienced a rapid increase in socioeconomic status several years ago, consumers were much more likely to embrace lifestyle changes and enhancements to their self-image. In emerging markets, which are becoming increasingly exposed to Western ideologies and consumption-related messages, it is proposed that this exposure could alter social and cultural values to reflect that of a consumption-oriented lifestyle bringing with it inherently materialistic values (Kamal *et al.*, 2013). Kamal *et al.* (2013) were able to prove the hypothesis that Arab university students exhibited greater levels of materialism than their American counterparts, thus reinforcing this theory. It is thus proposed that in South Africa, a comparable emerging market, university students would exhibit behaviours symbolic of conspicuous consumption as has been identified in university students in comparable developing markets. Research conducted by Souiden, M'Saad & Pons (2011) found that consumers were inclined to engage in the conspicuous consumption of branded fashion items in an attempt to reinforce their social status. This finding is significant as it was found to hold in a developing economy comparable to that of South Africa (Souiden *et al.*, 2011). Mansveldt & Robbins (2011) identify that in developing economies, it is likely that individuals are often attracted to and indulge in conspicuous products ahead of necessities. The current research sought to examine the Social Media Performance of user-generated content related to a conspicuous fashion brand that existed in South Africa.

Fashion items are generally considered to be a socially consumed product, furthermore these products are related to an individual's appearance and thus form part of an important category of conspicuous consumption (Kamal *et al.*, 2013; Souiden *et al.*, 2011). This finding has been reinforced by Kamal *et al.* (2013) who found a positive link between the materialistic nature of individuals and their purchase intentions of luxury fashion items. Clothing in particular, given its outward appearance, is used as a visible prop to enhance one's self-identity and thus is rife with conspicuous purchases (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). The current research has chosen to utilize the Social Media Performance of user-generated content relating to the Nike brand.

Nike is a multinational company specializing in the design, development and international marketing of high quality footwear, apparel and associated accessories (Goldman & Papson, 2004). Since 2007, the Nike brand has increased in value from approximately \$7,5 billion to \$26 billion in 2015, with the share price performing exceptionally over the past year (Ozanian, 2015). In 2014, Nike was noted as being the world's most valuable sports brand (Sengupta, 2014). Nike's advertising efforts build on the globalisation of a sports culture; with a commitment to ensuring their products remain locally relevant in each market (Goldman & Papson, 2004). The Nike *swoosh* serves as an easily identifiable symbol of the brand assisting the signalling process associated with conspicuous consumption, allowing others to readily make inferences about the wearer (Berger & Ward, 2010). The Nike *swoosh* has become one of the most recognizable brand icons standing for "*athletic*

excellence, a spirit of determination, hip authenticity, and playful self-awareness” (Goldman & Papson, 2004:1). This symbol has become so prominent and well known that Nike barely uses the brand name in marketing communications (Goldman & Papson, 2004).

Nike spends excessive amounts promoting the reputation of their products more so than the product itself (Mansveldt & Robbins, 2011). This expenditure is greater than most other companies worldwide (Mansveldt & Robbins, 2011). Nike tends to engage in celebrity endorsements with the intention of conferring a degree of status onto their products (Mansveldt & Robbins, 2011). These endorsements seek to increase the value of conspicuous consumption, resulting in an increased selling price, far in excess of production costs (Mansveldt & Robbins, 2011). This has resulted in the brand being viewed as a premium brand. The Chief Financial Officer of Nike acknowledged this movement towards a premium brand when commenting on the brand’s pricing strategy (O’Reilly, 2014).

The Nike brand was adopted for use in the current study based on the brand awareness and relevance of the brand amongst the target market as well as their familiarity with the product category. In 2015, Nike was voted as the ‘*Coollest Brand Overall, Coolest Clothing Brand, Coolest Footwear Brand*’ and ‘*Coollest Brand Slogan*’ in the Sunday Times Generation Next Survey Awards (Research News, 2015). These awards are voted for by South African youth and indicate the popularity of the brand within this market (Research News, 2015). Nike not only appeals to top-performing athletes, but rather to the everyday consumer, as evidenced by the survey awards (Doke, 2015; Research News, 2015). The Nike brand acts as a source of inspiration, encouraging all consumers to perform to their optimal capability (Doke, 2015). Nike incorporates both a male and a female line of clothing, footwear and accessories and would therefore be relevant to all members of the target population.

The current research has been contextualised to appeal to the South African target population as indicated above. A summary of the research question and hypotheses tested in the current research follow hereafter.

4.2.1. Research Question

The current research is guided by the following research question:

How do self-esteem, social media usage and emotion influence the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption?

In order to answer the above research question, eight hypotheses have been formulated that were used in statistical testing procedures. These are highlighted below.

4.2.2. Hypotheses

The first two hypotheses, H₁ and H₂ concern the direct and moderating influence that self-esteem bears on an SNS user's level of conspicuous consumption. H₃ and H₄ concerned the direct and moderating influence that social media usage bears on an SNS user's level of conspicuous consumption. H₅, and H₇ focus on the direct and moderating influence that positive affect have on an SNS user's conspicuous consumption behaviour. Finally, H₆ and H₈ focus on the direct and moderating influence that negative affect has on an SNS user's level of conspicuous consumption. It should be noted that these hypotheses have been derived from the objectives presented in Chapter 1. These hypotheses are summarised below.

H₁: There is a correlation between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour.

H₂: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption.

H₄: Social media usage moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₅: A correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.

H₆: A correlation exists between negative affect and conspicuous consumption.

H₇: Positive affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₈: Negative affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

The next section provides an in depth discussion of the research design and methods used for data collection purposes.

4.3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

A research design relates to a framework used for conducting research and is categorised into either an exploratory or conclusive research design (Malhotra, 2010). Exploratory research allows researchers to make use of a relatively unstructured and flexible approach in order to uncover insights into the phenomenon of interest (Malhotra, 2010; Parasuraman, Grewal & Krishnan, 2007). In conducting exploratory research, the variables are relatively loosely defined and the success of

the research depends, to a large extent, on the skills of the researcher (Malhotra, 2010; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007). The insights uncovered using exploratory research are often tested using conclusive research. Conclusive research allows researchers to verify pre-existing insights and to provide decision makers with a specific course of action (Malhotra, 2010; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007). Conclusive research seeks to test hypotheses and examine the relationships that exist between variables (Malhotra, 2010). The current study has adopted a conclusive research design as this has aided the researcher in decisively answering the identified research question (Singh, 2007). Hypotheses have been developed based on pre-existing literature that the current study seeks to statistically examine. Conclusive research can be characterised as either descriptive or causal research (Malhotra, 2010; Singh, 2007; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007).

Descriptive research focuses on describing a phenomenon of interest without seeking to establish any causal relationships (Malhotra, 2010; Singh, 2007). Descriptive research can incorporate both quantitative and qualitative aspects and often makes use of observational and survey methods to collect data (Knupfer & McLellan, 1996). Descriptive research does not permit researchers to isolate variables with the purpose of determining possible cause and effect relationships (Knupfer & McLellan, 1996). Despite the inability of descriptive research to determine causal relationships, this methodology is commonly used in published academic articles (Knupfer & McLellan, 1996).

Causal research seeks to determine a cause and effect relationship between variables, and if such a relationship exists, it further attempts to determine the nature of this causal relationship (Malhotra, 2010; Singh, 2007). In order to determine a causal relationship, the researcher is required to manipulate the independent variable, while monitoring any change in the dependent variable (Malhotra, 2010; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007). It is imperative that the researcher controls for any extraneous variables, in order to be able to determine causality (Malhotra, 2010; Singh, 2007; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007). Further to the need for manipulating an independent variable, several studies seeking to examine the effects of the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) in various contexts have implemented similar causal designs (McKinney, Yoon & Zahedi, 2002; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Olson & Dover, 1979). The current study has adopted a causal research design as the researcher seeks to manipulate the independent variable, Social Media Performance, in order to identify any effect on the dependent variable, conspicuous consumption.

The current study has adopted an experimental design, commonplace in causal research (Malhotra, 2010). The research has in particular made use of a pre-experimental design. A pre-experimental design enables the researcher to infer causal relationships in a practical context (Parasuraman *et al.*, 2007). It is important for one to note that the use of a pre-experimental design may both benefit and disadvantage the research. These possible effects are discussed below.

Pre-experimental designs are one of the simplest forms of experimental designs to implement (Wang & Morgan, 2010). Beyond the efficiency of these designs, they also serve as cost effective alternatives to true experimental designs (Wang & Morgan, 2010). Pre-experimental designs can often be conducted in a natural setting, without making respondents explicitly aware of the measured constructs. Pre-experimental designs are considered to be the prerequisite to true experimental designs, where it is possible to randomise both respondents and treatment categories (Wang & Morgan, 2010). Pre-experimental designs are often used when research does not allow for the implementation of a true experimental design (Wang & Morgan, 2010). This may be due to ethical issues, time constraints or any other resource constraints placed on the researcher (Wang & Morgan, 2010).

Pre-experimental designs are characterised by a distinct lack of randomisation in the research process (Malhotra, 2010). This lack of randomisation does not allow the researcher to control for certain extraneous variables (Malhotra, 2010). This randomisation relates to the random assignment of individuals as well as the random assignment of treatments to groups (Malhotra, 2010). It is suggested that the use of strict filter questions is able to eliminate selected extraneous variables by ensuring that respondents adhere to certain characteristics. The inclusion of several demographic questions in the current research seeks to ensure that the demography of different groups used in the research is similar. A further disadvantage related to the inherent lack of randomisation of the pre-experimental design is the potential for selection bias (Sharma, 2014). Selection bias refers to the improper assignment of respondents to treatment conditions (Malhotra, 2010). This occurs when respondents selected for one experimental group differ to those selected for other groups (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong & Hilton, 2014). This improper assignment creates a significant threat to internal validity resulting in meaningless comparisons between the groups (Monette *et al.*, 2014). The current research made use of an online software feature on the Qualtrics platform, which allowed for respondents to be placed in different treatment groups at random, ensuring that each treatment received an equal number of respondents. This characteristic has removed the threat of selection bias, as the researcher had no control in assigning respondents to treatment groups. The researcher was not able to randomly assign treatments to groups; thus the design remains that of a pre-experimental research design with the slight adaptation for the randomisation of respondents.

The pre-experimental design used in the current study is the static group design. A traditional static group design consists of two distinct groups and requires a comparison of these two groups (Monette *et al.*, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). One group is exposed to a treatment while the other is not and thus used as a control group (Monette *et al.*, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). The static group design used in the current study can be symbolised as shown in Figure 7. In Figure 7, 'O' represents the measurement of constructs included in the research, whereas 'X' represents the exposure to the treatment (Monette *et al.*, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). The symbols used in Figure 7 are presented in a particular time sequence, with those appearing on the left occurring before those appearing to the right (Monette *et al.*, 2014). The current

study used two distinct experimental groups. The rationale for this decision was to ensure that distinct groups were created to test both treatments, namely the positive and negative Social Media Performance.

Figure 7: Static Group Design

| | Pretest | Treatment | Post-test |
|------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Control Group: | | | O |
| Experimental Group 1: | | X | O |
| Experimental Group 2: | | X | O |

Experimental Group 1 refers to the group that was exposed to a scenario depicting positive Social Media Performance, whereas Experimental Group 2 refers to the group that was exposed to a scenario depicting negative Social Media Performance. Across all three groups, the same measurement instrument was utilised, with the only difference being the presence or absence of the treatment. The treatment consisted on a written scenario depicting either positive or negative Social Media Performance. Both positive and negative Social Media Performance were incorporated in the current research similar to the research of Sivanathan and Pettit (2010), which tested the influence of both positive and negative feedback on an individual’s conspicuous consumption. Their research found differing outcomes for positive and negative feedback, thus the current research seeks to establish whether the same relationships would hold in the social media context. Contradictory findings in the literature with regards to the relationship between Social Media Performance and the three identified moderating variables, further warrants the need to test both treatment conditions.

The scenario for Experimental Group 1 read as follows (see Appendix B):

You posted a photo of your new Nike shoes that you just purchased to your Facebook profile. You tag the Nike fan page in your update to ensure that they will see the post. A short while later, you notice that Nike have acknowledged your post and responded. Furthermore, your status has received many likes and comments and was widely acknowledged by your online community, this response has greatly exceeded your initial expectations.

The scenario for Experimental Group 2 read as follows (see Appendix C):

You posted a photo of your new Nike shoes that you just purchased to your Facebook profile. You tag the Nike fan page in your update to ensure that they will see the post. A short while later, you notice that Nike have not acknowledged your post and have not responded. Furthermore, your status

has received very few likes and comments and was not acknowledged by your online community, this response falls far below your initial expectations.

The scenarios for both treatment groups have used wording that is able to encapsulate the subjectivity of a measurement of performance. As such, no numerical value is attached to the responses received on the user-generated content. Both scenarios explicitly state that the respondent had been the instigator of engagement with a brand on social media, with both reporting on the success of this engagement. The scenario then highlights that the respondent should be evaluating this performance in terms of 'likes' and 'comments,' typical measures of performance on the Facebook platform (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Lastly, the scenario explicitly states that the response received on their user-generated content either fell above or below their initial expectations. This again seeks to reinforce the subjectivity of performance and satisfaction as proposed by the ECT (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012).

Figure 7 highlights that the static group design that has been implemented does not make use of pretests, but rather post-tests following a treatment. The lack of pretests seeks to eliminate testing effects associated with experimentation in research (Malhotra, 2010). These testing effects relate to the possibility that a prior observation and measurement of the dependent variable is able to affect a latter observation and subsequent measurement of the dependent variable (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). It is possible that respondents may alter their attitudes or perceptions, particularly if they become aware that these are being measured (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010).

In order to select and assign respondents to the treatment groups, various sampling techniques were employed. Procedures related to the sampling process in the current research are highlighted below.

4.4. SAMPLING

This section discusses all procedures related to defining the target population and the subsequent measures used to obtain a sample of the desired population. The following segment describes the target population together with the rationale for this selection. The respondent profile is then defined. The sampling design and techniques employed in the current research are then examined, followed by an assessment of the sample size used in the current research.

4.4.1. Target Population

The target population is defined as “the collection of elements of objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made” (Malhotra, 2010: 372). The target population refers to the individuals to which the researcher seeks to generalise their findings (Jha, 2014). It can be referred to as the 'parent group' from which the sample is drawn (Jha, 2014). The target population for

the current research consists of young adults, both male and female, aged between 18 and 29 years old who are active users of the Facebook platform and who have previously engaged with brand-related content on an SNS platform in any context.

The rationale for researching young adults relates to the penetration of Internet use amongst this market and their dominance of SNS usage. Research has indicated that 93% of young adults, aged 18 to 29 years old are avid Internet users, making Internet use a crucial aspect of everyday life (Halliday, 2016; Sin & Kim, 2014; Güzin & Koçak, 2011; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Research conducted by Lenhart *et al.* (2010) examined the social media use of young adults and found that 72% of online young adults made use of at least one SNS. This far exceeds the SNS penetration rate amongst their elder counterparts, those 30 years and older (Güzin & Koçak, 2011; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Research conducted in the United States of America has further indicated that males and females are equally likely to make use of SNSs, and that no significant differences existed in the overall penetration rates amongst racial groups (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). It should be noted that gender and racial differences were noted when considering the usage of specific SNSs (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

Looking at specific SNS platforms, research has shown that 71% of young adults maintain a personal profile on Facebook with one-third of young adults admitting to posting or reading status updates on the network (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Facebook remains the most popular SNS amongst this age group, despite their tendency to develop and maintain profiles across a number of SNSs (Güzin & Koçak, 2011; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

As the current study examines the Social Media Performance of user-generated content, it is important to note that young adults are increasingly sharing user-generated content (Halliday, 2016; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Research conducted by Lenhart *et al.* (2010) identified that in 2009, 37% of young adult SNS users admitted to sharing their personal, user-generated content online. Furthermore, 19% of young adult SNS users stated that they 'remixed' online content (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Remixing content relates to sourcing pre-existing online content (whether it be songs, text or images) and adapting this content in some way using the creative input of the user (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010). Posting personal comments online has become increasingly common amongst young adult SNS users, with 26% of this age cohort partaking in this activity (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

The respondent profile consisted of individuals, both male and female, as no gender parameters were set, who were between the ages of 18 and 29 years. A further filter question required that respondents held an active, personal Facebook profile ensuring that all respondents were users of the social network and thus familiar with the functions of the platform. As the current research sought to examine the influence on Social Media Performance in line with a specific brand, respondents had to be aware of the Nike brand. This filter question specified that respondents did not need to currently or previously own a Nike product, however they had to indicate that they were aware of the brand. Respondents must also have previously posted,

commented on, or interacted with any content related to a brand on the Facebook platform. This ensured that respondents were familiar with the activity described in the scenario that was proposed to the treatment groups. While no gender or racial parameters were set for inclusion in the research, these demographic variables were captured in order to gain a further understanding of the composition of the sample. This could provide additional insight into the composition of the control and treatment groups to determine if all groups were equivalent with regards to these demographic variables.

The sample consisted of students at the University of Cape Town. The use of students as respondents in academic research has become a somewhat contentious issue in the literature (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). The use of university-level students as respondents in Consumer Behaviour research has seen a dramatic increase (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). Research has revealed that 86% of research subjects in empirical research studies published in the 26th Volume of the *Journal of Consumer Research* were made up of university students (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). The contentious issue of using university students in academic research has garnered both proponents and opponents (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). One of the arguments for the use of students in research acknowledges that students serve as appropriate test subjects provided that the research considers either a basic psychological process or tests a theory that links to human behaviours that are autonomous of the sample characteristics (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). This ensures that the results can be generalised to non-students that form part of the target population (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). Liefeld (2003 as cited in Peterson & Merunka, 2013) challenges the notion of using students solely from one department or faculty within the university. The rationale for this concern lies in the possibility of homogeneity of samples when considering students from only a single academic major (Peterson & Merunka, 2013). In order to overcome the potential risks associated with a homogenous sample, the researcher made the research available to all students across all university faculties and departments.

4.4.2. Sampling Design: Quota Sampling

The sample of the research refers to a subgroup of respondents existing within the target population selected for participation in the research (Malhotra, 2010). Samples are drawn from a population when a census, surveying all members of the target population, is not possible (Burton, 2000). Conclusions are drawn based on the results from data collected from the sample and these conclusions are subsequently generalised to the target population at large (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). Decisions made regarding the sampling design are able to affect the quality of the inferences made by the researcher and in particular, could affect the ability to generalise these findings to the target population at large (Jha, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The validity of the results relies on the adequacy of the sample selection, which subsequently influences the ability to meet the research objectives (Uprichard, 2013). There are several advantages to making use of a sample when collecting data, with many of these benefits focusing on time and other resource efficiencies (Burton,

2000). Fewer respondents allow researchers to collect and analyse data in a timely manner, while collecting more in depth data on fewer respondents (Burton, 2000).

Sampling techniques can either be categorised as probability or non-probability techniques (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Burton, 2000; Kalton, 1983). The choice between probability and non-probability is principally focused on a realistic assessment of the alternatives, in line with the resources available to the researcher (Burton, 2000). This decision is also impacted by an evaluation of the concerns associated with the validity of each approach (Burton, 2000).

Probability sampling techniques ensure that each member of the target population has a known and equal probability of being selected for inclusion in the research (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Henry, 2004; De Vaus, 1996 as cited in Burton, 2000). This ensures that respondents are selected based on chance, ensuring a random sample is selected that is representative of the target population (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). Probability sampling requires that the researcher make use of a sampling frame (Malhotra, 2010; Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). A sampling frame refers to a list of all possible individuals that could be selected for inclusion in the research, based on some predetermined characteristics (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) acknowledge that sampling frames are very scarcely available for academic research, thus eliminating the possibility of making use of probability sampling techniques. Williams (2003) concurs that often it is neither possible, nor cost-effective to make use of probability sampling techniques. In order to counteract issues generally arising from the lack of a sampling frame, there exists a range of non-probability sampling techniques for researchers to utilize (Burton, 2000).

Non-probability sampling techniques largely rely on the discretion and personal judgment of the researcher in selecting the sample (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Phua, 2004). Concerns regarding the implementation of non-probability sampling techniques appear to concentrate on a bias related to the inclusion of respondents based on their accessibility to the researcher (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). This bias is largely due to the introduction of human judgment in the selection process and while this bias may be unintentional, it still exhibits the ability to influence results (Phua, 2004). It however remains possible to ensure that non-probability sampling techniques yield representative samples, provided that due care is taken in selecting respondents (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). Yang and Banamah (2014) identify that the use of non-probability sampling techniques is commonplace in commercial research as the increased costs and low response rates associated with probability sampling often render these techniques impractical. The current research thus implemented non-probability sampling techniques due to the lack of a sampling frame and the prevalence of these techniques in Social Science research. In particular, quota sampling was used.

Quota sampling can be viewed as a two-stage restricted judgmental sampling technique (Malhotra, 2010). The first stage requires the researcher to develop strict

quotas or characteristics, of population elements (Malhotra, 2010). These quotas are generally referred to as control categories and are implemented in order to exactly replicate the presence of certain characteristics in the target population (Malhotra, 2010; Henry, 2004). The second stage is to select respondents that adhere to the predetermined control categories (Malhotra, 2010). Quota sampling is a commonly used non-probability technique in the market research industry (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000; Burton, 2000). Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) acknowledge that quota sampling is more often feasible than any probability sampling techniques, when conducting social science research.

A distinct advantage of quota sampling is that it allows researchers to replicate exact proportions of certain characteristics that appear in the target population, without the aid of a sampling frame (Henry, 2004; Burton, 2000). Quota sampling is relatively inexpensive, with the cost per respondent being considerably less than random sampling techniques (Burton, 2000). Greater convenience associated with the ease of obtaining respondents, allows the researcher to achieve the desired sample size in an efficient manner (Malhotra, 2010; Burton, 2000). The procedures for identifying a sample are seemingly simple given the absence of a sampling frame (Burton, 2000).

When using quota sampling, it is possible that the sample selected may not be representative of the population at large with regards to certain demographic characteristics (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). This may result in additional unintentional variation between treatment groups than other techniques (Burton, 2000).

In the current research, a quota based on age was implemented. The rationale for the age quota, whereby respondents had to be between the ages of 18 and 29 years, sought to ensure that all respondents formed part of the target population at large. The population of young adults in South Africa aged 18 to 29 years old comprises the population that the researcher seeks to generalise the results of the current research towards. Within this age quota, respondents were selected based on convenience.

4.4.3. Sample Size

Much the same as the sampling design, the size of the sample selected is also able to influence the ability of the researcher to generalise findings (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Burton, 2000). The sample size refers to the number of respondents selected to partake in the research (Malhotra, 2010). Williams (2003) acknowledges that the more respondents a researcher is able to obtain, the greater the likelihood that variations that occur naturally in the population will be represented in the sample. Generally, a larger sample is able to reduce the sampling error, thus increasing the desirability of a larger sample (Williams, 2003). Not only does the sample size affect the generalisability of results, the sample size could also limit the statistical analysis (Jha, 2014). The reasoning for this lies in the assumptions of parametric tests requiring data to be normally distributed (Jha, 2014). Larger samples are assumed to

be normally distributed, whereas smaller samples require additional testing to confirm this assumption (Jha, 2014).

Research conducted by Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao (2007) provide guidelines for effective sample sizes. Onwuegbuzie (2004; as cited in Collins *et al.*, 2007) computed sample size guidelines based on a probability analysis using the effects of statistical power at a 5% level of significance. These guidelines suggest that in causal research, there should be a minimum of 64 respondents per group in the research (Onwuegbuzie, 2004 as cited in Collins *et al.*, 2007). Using this as a guideline, the current research undertook to obtain a minimum sample of 64 respondents in each of the designated control and treatment groups.

All respondents in each group were exposed to the same measurement instrument that sought to measure all identified constructs. The only difference between the groups, as previously highlighted, was the presence or lack thereof of a scenario depicting positive or negative Social Media Performance.

4.4.4. Measurement Instrument

Social Science researchers are increasingly making use of Internet-based services in an attempt to collect data in an efficient, yet effective manner (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). In line with this trend, an online, web-based, questionnaire was used in the current study. Monette *et al.* (2014) state that allowing respondents to record their responses on an electronic device is able to produce higher quality data, while seeking to reduce extraneous variation. It is further acknowledged that respondents exhibit a greater preference for electronic-based questionnaires as opposed to pen-and-paper questionnaires (Monette *et al.*, 2014). Research conducted by Haller, Haller, Courvoisier and Lovis (2009) established that questionnaires conducted on an electronic device were completed in a shorter amount of time and exhibited more accurate results than those completed by hand. It is suggested that this is likely to aid in the reduction of respondent fatigue.

The current research made use of Qualtrics, a web-based survey design platform (Qualtrics, 2015). Qualtrics has become a popular tool for data collection amongst academics due to its user-friendly software that allows researchers to effortlessly build their questionnaire online and share a link with potential respondents (Qualtrics, 2015). The software allows respondents to complete the questionnaire on a desktop or mobile device interface, while ensuring that the researcher specifications are adhered to across these platforms (Qualtrics, 2015).

There are numerous built-in features on the Qualtrics platform that allow the questionnaires to be tailored to each research project. The randomisation function that was used in the current research allows the researcher to forward one link to all respondents, who are then randomly assigned to treatment groups (Qualtrics, 2015). The customisation of the questionnaire design guarantees that the researcher holds full control over the online experience for respondents (Carr, 2013). This ensures that

respondents are able to complete the questionnaire in a manner most appropriate to the research.

4.4.4.1. Questionnaire Design Considerations

The University of Cape Town (UCT) logo has been placed in the top left corner of the questionnaire, alongside the department to which the researcher belongs. This has been included in order to establish the credibility of the researcher and acknowledge the association with UCT. The preamble to the questionnaire followed, the same preamble was used for each of the three questionnaires. The preamble highlighted the approximate length of time that it should take in order to complete the questionnaire and made respondents aware that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the research at any point should they wish. Respondents were further made aware that their responses would be aggregated, thus ensuring complete anonymity, with no personal details linking the respondent to their responses.

Respondents were then made aware of the purpose of the research, which highlighted that the questionnaire would measure their use of Facebook, their attitudes towards the Nike brand and the possible link between their online performance evaluation and components of the consumer-brand relationship. While this explanation is in part truthful, the researcher did not wish to bias the respondents by highlighting the exact relationships that would be tested. Coldwell and Herbst (2004) acknowledge that there are circumstances when the researcher may seek to disguise the true purpose of the research in order to avoid biasing the responses. This concealment attempts to ensure the validity of the data obtained, particularly when using the experimental design used in the current study (Coldwell & Herbst, 2004). The researchers contact details were included should the respondents have any queries regarding the research.

The questionnaire then followed with four filter questions in order to ensure that all respondents adhered to the characteristics of the target population (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). These filter questions ensured that all respondents had an active, personal account on Facebook, that they had previously engaged with content related to a brand on an SNS platform and that they were between 18 and 29 years, as required by the research. The final filter question ensured that respondents were aware of the Nike brand. The rationale behind the inclusion of the final filter question was due to the fact that many questions were phrased to incorporate the Nike brand, thus including respondents who were not aware of the brand could potentially bias the results. The online nature of the questionnaire allowed respondents to be referred directly to the end of the questionnaire should they not comply with the characteristics of the target population.

To prevent the issues associated with missing data, the software prompted respondents if they had omitted a question, prior to allowing them to proceed to the next question (Qualtrics, 2015). In order to avoid confusion between differing scale

measurements, questions were presented at the same time only if they were measured on the same scale. If the following question made use of a different measurement, respondents had to click to move to the next subset of questions. A progress bar, a feature available on the Qualtrics platform, allowed respondents to be aware of how much of the questionnaire they had completed and how much more was left to complete (Qualtrics, 2015). There was no time limit placed on the questionnaire and respondents were able to leave and return to the questionnaire and continue from their point of departure. However, if the respondents did not return and complete the questionnaire within five days, the questionnaire was captured and returned as an incomplete submission.

4.4.4.2 Layout of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions aimed at collecting differing types of data. The full breakdown of the measurement instrument, as presented in Table 2, outlines which questions were used to measure each construct, as well as the number of items used to measure each construct. The questionnaire provided to the control group, is attached as Appendix A, the questionnaire provided to the first treatment group is attached as Appendix B and the questionnaire provided to the second treatment group is attached as Appendix C.

Table 2: Questionnaire Numbering

| Scale Construct | Number of Items | Question numbers |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Filter Questions | 4 | 1 – 4 |
| Social Media Intensity | 8 | 5 – 12 |
| Self Esteem | 10 | 13 – 22 |
| Emotion | 20 | 23 – 42 |
| Conspicuous Consumption | 4 | 43 – 46 |
| Demographic Variables | 3 | 47 – 50 |

As previously identified, the first four questions acted as filter questions, ensuring that all respondents displayed the characteristics required for inclusion in the research (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). These four dichotomous questions would only allow respondents to proceed to the following questions if they displayed all necessary characteristics (Jha, 2014). If respondents did not form part of the target population and adhere to all necessary characteristics, they were directed to the end of the questionnaire and thanked for their participation.

The following questions, number 5 and 6, formed part of the Facebook Intensity construct, however they were recorded as open-ended responses. Question numbers 7 to 46, consisted of various Likert scale questions that sought to measure all of the required constructs. Likert scales are commonly used rating scales that require respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of both favourable and unfavourable statements (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Spector,

2004). Researchers typically favour the use of Likert scales for two primary reasons (Spector, 2004). Firstly, Likert scales are relatively easy to develop, and secondly, these scales have been shown to yield reliable results across a variety of research (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Spector, 2004). Respondents are able to easily understand Likert scales, thus rendering its suitability across a variety of research methods (Malhotra, 2010). Likert scales can be summated to form a single measure of a construct for each respondent (Malhotra, 2010). This approach of summating the items of a Likert scale is most frequently used (Malhotra, 2010).

Three demographic questions were included at the end of the questionnaire in order to obtain insight into the composition of the sample (Jha, 2014). Lyon and Driskell (2012) state demographic questions should be placed towards the end of the questionnaire in order to minimize respondent fatigue. A further rationale for including these questions at the end of the questionnaire, is that respondents may be more inclined to provide sensitive information once sufficient trust and rapport has been established in the questionnaire (Lyon & Driskell, 2012; Malhotra, 2010). The demographic questions required that respondents divulge their age, gender and the racial group that they identified with (Jha, 2014). When asking respondents to divulge what they may deem to be sensitive information, an option was included that would preclude respondents from answering these questions truthfully. This *'prefer not to answer'* option was incorporated based on the fact that it could improve data quality and would seek to limit the number of non-responses (Joinson, McKenna, Postmes & Reips, 2007). It is further suggested that excluding this option could have resulted in respondents terminating the questionnaire, as they would not have been able to proceed to the following question.

The rationale for including a question relating to age, despite the specified age parameter of respondents needing to be between 18 and 29 years, was based on the research of McEwan (2011). Research conducted on Facebook users usage of the SNS; found that younger respondents tended to have a much heavier Facebook usage than older respondents (McEwan, 2011; Joinson, 2008). As the current research seeks to examine respondents Facebook usage, the researcher was able to test for this interaction between age and Facebook usage.

Research conducted by Joinson (2008) further examined several significant differences between males and females with regards to their Facebook usage. This is the motivation for including gender as a demographic question in the measurement instrument. In particular, females tended to visit Facebook more frequently and spend longer periods of time online (Korpijaako, 2015; Joinson, 2008).

Research conducted by Hargittai (2012) found that the penetration rate of different social media platforms was significantly different between different racial groups. In particular, different usage rates as well as platform preferences were noted between racial groups (Hargittai, 2012). Similar patterns of differing SNS usage and preference were noted between racial groups in research conducted by Boyd (2012). It should be noted that neither of these published research papers were conducted in

the South African context. Thus, the current research further seeks to determine whether these differences in SNS usage would hold amongst racial groups in South Africa.

While examining these interactions between Facebook usage and demographic variables is not the primary focus of the research, collecting this data has allowed the researcher to further examine these phenomena that have been noted in previous research (Hargittai, 2012; McEwan, 2011; Joinson, 2008).

4.4.4.3. Scales Used in the Study

All scales used throughout the current research were adopted from previous research and had exhibited exemplary reliability. The origins of these scales are discussed in the section to follow.

Table 3: Scale Origins and Associated Cronbach Alpha Values

| Scale Construct | Adapted From the Following Research Studies | Cronbach Alpha in Original Research Study |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Facebook Intensity | Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). | 0.83 |
| Self Esteem | Rosenberg (1965) with adaptations from Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). | 0.77 – 0.88 |
| Emotion | Watson, Clark and Tellegen, (1988). | 0.88 (Positive Affect) and 0.85 (Negative Affect) |
| Conspicuous Consumption | Thoumrungroje (2014). | 0.90 |

The current study sought to examine the hypotheses in the Facebook context, thus it was vital that a scale be used that was able to be adapted to suit this platform. The scale measuring Facebook intensity was developed by Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007) and obtained a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.83, rendering the scale a reliable measure. The scale seeks to obtain a measure of Facebook usage beyond that of simple measures of frequency or duration (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). The scale consists of two self-reported questions that seek to measure the extent to which a respondent is actively engaged in Facebook activities, in particular examining the number of friends a respondent has on Facebook and the amount of time they have spent on Facebook in the past week (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). The scale then includes 6 Likert scale items, which range from one to five, where one represents ‘*strongly disagree*’ and five represents ‘*strongly agree*’ (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). The Likert scale questions are designed to examine the emotional connection that a respondent has towards Facebook as well as the extent to which Facebook has become part of a daily routine (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). This scale has been cited and implemented in many academic

articles and has exhibited exemplary reliability (Pettijohn, LaPiene, Pettijohn & Horting, 2012; Ellison, Lampe, Steinfield & Vitak, 2011; Page, 2010).

The self-esteem scale was adopted from Rosenberg (1965) and seeks to measure a respondent's global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings. This particular scale is the most widely used measure of global self-esteem (Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). The original scale obtained Cronbach Alpha values between 0.77 and 0.88 when tested on different samples, all exceeding the threshold of 0.7, indicating the presence of internal consistency reliability (Fleming & Courtney, 1984 as cited in Witherspoon, Latta, Wang & Black, 2013; Malhotra, 2010;). The scale consisted of 10 items and was reported on a one to five scale, where one represents '*strongly disagree*' and five represents '*strongly agree*' (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). The one to five rating was adopted from the research of Ellison *et al.* (2007), where the scale received a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.87. The scale includes five negatively worded items, namely questions number 20, 23, 24, 26 and 27. The inclusion of negatively worded items seeks to limit the number of respondents that mark any point on the Likert scale without fully acknowledging each separate item (Malhotra, 2010). These negatively worded items further seek to ensure that respondents are consistent in their responses throughout (Malhotra, 2010). This seminal paper written by Rosenberg (1965) has been cited in numerous academic articles (Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Ellison *et al.*, 2007; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003; Robins, Hendin & Trzesniewski, 2001; Bagley, Bolitho & Bertrand, 1997).

The scale measuring emotion was developed by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988). The positive and negative affect schedule, commonly referred to as the PANAS scale, seeks to measure two primary dimensions of mood, namely positive and negative affect, through a series of 20 items (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). Each item is reported on a 5-point Likert scale, where one represents '*not at all*' and five represents '*extremely*' (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). Throughout the scale development process, a range of different emotion was included and researchers considered the length of time that respondents had experienced a particular emotion, altering the wording to incorporate this (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). The ultimate scale developed by Watson *et al.* (1988:A) is a shortened version that was able to overcome difficulties associated with existing scales. The current research asked respondents the extent to which they have experienced a particular emotion over '*the last few days.*' The rationale for this time period lies in the fact that when shorter periods of time are referred to, for example, *right now*, or *today*, it is likely that responses would be sensitive to a respondent's fluctuations in mood (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). The PANAS scale was deemed to be a reliable, valid and efficient measure to evaluate both positive and negative affect (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A).

The final scale measuring conspicuous consumption has been adopted from Thourungrroje (2014). The scale consisted of four-items, reported on a six-point Likert scale, where one represented '*strongly disagree*' and six represented '*strongly agree*' (Thourungrroje, 2014). Thourungrroje (2014) had adopted the scale items

from previous literature and had altered the number of response categories. The current research has implemented this scale with six response categories based on the exceptional reliability statistics that were achieved (Thoumrunroje, 2014). In Thoumrunroje's (2014) research, this scale achieved a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.90 and an associated composite reliability measure of 0.82, thereby ensuring the reliability of the measure.

While all scales were deemed reliable in previous research, it was necessary to conduct a pretest in order to validate these scales in the current context and ensure all items were correctly understood.

4.4.4.4 Measurement Instrument Pretest

The data collection instrument can have a significant effect on the quality of the data collected (Collins, 2003). Malhotra (2010) suggests that testing the research instrument on a small sample of respondents in order to detect any potential problems. These problems may stem from a lack of understanding of instruction, ambiguity in questions or possible issues with the layout of the measurement instrument (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). Malhotra (2010) further suggests that pretesting research instruments is most effective when conducted as a personal interview, despite the fact that the final sample may not be collected as personal interviews, as the researcher is able to observe respondents reactions.

Taking heed of Malhotra's (2010) suggestions, a convenience sample of fifteen respondents was selected from the target population. This allowed five individuals to test each of the three questionnaires in order to determine whether respondents would be able to comprehend each question as well as determine whether the scenario described in the treatment conditions demonstrated sufficient clarity. The online questionnaire was completed in the presence of the researcher and respondents were encouraged to ask questions, in order to determine any specific areas of concern. The researcher observed the respondents completing the questionnaire, ensuring that the online administration of the questionnaire was seamless and presented all questions in the correct order. Following the completion of the questionnaire, each respondent was further questioned as to their experience as well as any suggestions to further improve the user-friendliness of the data collection procedure.

One respondent indicated an issue with some of the items seeming to be repetitive in the questionnaire. No other concerns were raised from the remaining fourteen respondents. Upon inspection, it was found that one item had been erroneously included twice and the necessary changes were made prior to the fieldwork. These responses, used in the pretest, were discarded and thus were not included in the final sample.

4.5. DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION

Data could only be collected following the receipt of approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town. Once obtained, the data was collected over a two-week period in October and November 2015. The researcher was able to gain indirect access to the database email addresses of all students currently registered at the University of Cape Town (UCT). It should be noted that this access was not available to the researcher in their personal capacity, but was able to be utilised through the administrative function of the university. All registered students received an email explaining the purpose of the research and providing them with the link to the online questionnaire.

The first stage in the data preparation process relates to checking each questionnaire for completeness and data quality (Malhotra, 2010). This step was completed during the data collection process in order to determine whether respondents were being assigned to all three distinct groups and to ensure that group sizes remained relatively equal (Malhotra, 2010). Any unsatisfactory responses, where respondents had abandoned the questionnaire with more than 50% of the questions unanswered, were discarded from the sample.

The following stage in the data preparation process that was completed occurred once all responses had been obtained. This phase relates to the coding of all responses (Malhotra, 2010). Coding refers to assigning each possible response with a particular numerical code (Malhotra, 2010). In the current research, a large majority of the questionnaire comprised structured questions, thus the questionnaire was able to be pre-coded prior to data collection, ensuring consistency (Malhotra, 2010). Following the completion of the data collection, all data was manually recorded from each respondent's set of responses into a data file (Malhotra, 2010). Qualtrics was able to export the coded data; however the format in which the raw data was exported was not suitable to the data analysis required in the current research. The data was manually transcribed, thus increasing the potential for human error. To counteract this potential bias, an external third party was contracted to validate the data file.

The following phase in the data preparation process relates to data cleaning (Malhotra, 2010). This process typically refers to extensive checks of the data file in order to ensure consistency and identify any missing data (Malhotra, 2010). Consistency checks ensure all responses fall within the designated ranges, eliminating any errors made while manually transcribing responses (Malhotra, 2010). Further to the consistency checks, all missing values were identified and received a distinct coding. While there were no missing values for any structured questions in the current research, given that respondents could not proceed to the following question if they had erroneously missed a question, the open-ended questions were subject to missing values. While the two open-ended questions in the questionnaire required that respondents complete them before proceeding to the next question, several ambiguous responses were noted. In cases where respondents had not

answered the open-ended questions to an acceptable standard, or offered more than one acceptable response, these responses were coded as missing data so as to avoid the researcher imposing any bias.

As the data did not require any statistical adjustment, the final phase of the data preparation process relates to the selection of an appropriate data analysis strategy (Malhotra, 2010). This strategy is outlined in the following section.

4.6. DATA ANALYSIS

IBM SPSS version 22, a statistical predictive analytics software was used to determine the reliability of the scales used, descriptive statistics as well as the inferential statistics (IBM, 2015).

4.6.1. Reliability Testing

In order to determine the reliability of the scales in the measurement instrument, both exploratory factor analyses and examinations of the respective Cronbach Alpha values was conducted. Exploratory factor analyses (hereinafter referred to as EFA) are used to examine the interrelationships amongst a set of variables (Pallant, 2013). EFA is a data-driven approach that allows for relationships to be identified (Koekemoer, Nel & du Toit, 2016). EFA provides an effective method to identify items that failed to correlate highly with other items (Santos, 1999). The Cronbach Alpha value is one of the most commonly cited measures of internal consistency (Pallant, 2013). The Cronbach Alpha statistic provides an average of all split-half reliability coefficients (Malhotra, 2010). It should be noted that Cronbach Alpha values are sensitive to the number of items in the multi-item scale, thus for all scales with fewer than 10 items, the mean inter-item correlation has been reported (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010). Using the EFA, the Cronbach Alpha values and the inter-item correlations, the researcher was able to determine the reliability of all scales used.

4.6.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics seek to describe the composition of the sample and ensure variables do not violate any underlying assumptions required by the inferential statistics (Pallant, 2013; Gayle, 2000). They are a classification of univariate analyses, which seek to provide information about one variable at a time (Adler & Clark, 2015). Descriptive statistics were thus calculated for the control group and for each treatment group separately. Measures of location, variability and spread have been reported on, where appropriate (Malhotra, 2010). Frequencies were reported for all nominal data collected, while means and standard deviations were reported for all interval data collected (Malhotra, 2010). Measures of shape have been examined in order to ensure that data adheres to underlying assumptions of normality (Malhotra, 2010). Creating the descriptive statistics for each individual control and treatment group has allowed the researcher to determine whether any significant

differences existed in terms of the demographics of each group, using inferential statistics.

4.6.3. Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics have been used in order to make statistical generalisations about the population of interest (Gayle, 2000). The current research has made use of bivariate correlations and multivariate regression analyses in order to test the hypotheses (Malhotra, 2010; Gayle, 2000). Bivariate analyses focus on the relationship between two distinct variables (Adler & Clark, 2015; Malhotra, 2010). These analyses have been used to test hypotheses H_1 , H_3 , H_5 , and H_6 , as each proposes a relationship between two distinct variables. Multivariate analyses examine the relationship between variables, while controlling for and investigating the relationship with other variables (Adler & Clark, 2015). Multivariate analyses were conducted for hypotheses H_2 , H_4 , H_7 and H_8 . In particular, multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to test for moderation effects. This test for moderation has been used to determine whether the moderating variable is able to affect the strength and/or the direction of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

4.7. CONCLUSION

The current study has adopted a conclusive, causal, experimental design in order to evaluate whether the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content is able to influence an individual's conspicuous consumption. In particular, a pre-experimental design, namely the static group design, has been implemented. This design was slightly altered, allowing for the inclusion of one control and two treatment groups. The target population for the current research consists of young adults, between the ages of 18 and 29 years, that are active SNS users and that have previously engaged with brand-related content on an SNS platform.

This research made use of a non-probability sampling technique, namely quota sampling in order to achieve a minimum sample of 64 respondents in each group. The measurement instrument consisted of 50 questions measuring the four identified constructs as well as demographic variables. Data was collected via a web-based survey design platform and distributed to all registered students at the University of Cape Town over a two-week period. A statistical package, SPSS, has been used in order to calculate univariate statistics in order to describe the composition of the sample. Bivariate analyses have been conducted in order to test the possible correlations between two distinct variables and lastly, multivariate regression analyses have been conducted in order to examine the potential moderating effects.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the methodological approach of the current research. The research has used a conclusive, causal, experimental design to evaluate whether the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content was able to influence conspicuous consumption. This relationship has been examined with the introduction of three moderating variables, namely self-esteem, social media usage and emotion. The target population was defined as young adults, between the ages of 18 and 29 years, that are active SNS users and that have previously engaged with brand-related content on an SNS platform. The previous chapter provided a justification for the use of a non-probability sampling technique and explained the practical means through which data has been collected.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the research question and hypotheses that were examined. Thereafter an outline of the fieldwork conducted and the achieved sample size is discussed. The descriptive statistics, of both the sample and the key constructs, are then analysed. Thereafter, the normality of the data is assessed prior to the discussion of the results obtained in the inferential hypothesis tests. Lastly, concluding remarks are made.

5.2. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

The current study has examined whether an individual's Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content is able to influence an individual's conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption refers to the consumption of products that seek to ostentatiously display one's wealth (Thoumrungraje, 2014; Page, 1992). These wasteful displays of wealth engage a signalling effect that seeks to reinforce one's social standing (Kaus, 2013; Weatherford, 2013; Trigg, 2011). When an individual posts brand-related user-generated content on a social media platform, the responses that are received to that content are able to influence the user in a number of ways (Thoumrungraje, 2014; Connelly, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.*, 2006). The response that an individual receives on their user-generated content, conceptualised in the current research as Social Media Performance, is able to indirectly influence an individual's conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungraje, 2014). Literature has highlighted three variables that are able to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. These three variables, self-esteem, social media usage and emotion, are posited to directly and indirectly influence an individual's conspicuous consumption. In order to examine these proposed relationships, the following research question was developed.

How do self-esteem, social media usage and emotion influence the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption?

In line with the above research question, the following eight hypotheses were developed. These hypotheses seek to examine the direct influences of self-esteem, social media intensity and emotion on conspicuous consumption, as well as the indirect effect on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

H₁: There is a correlation between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour.

H₂: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption.

H₄: Social Media Usage moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₅: A correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.

H₆: A correlation exists between negative affect and conspicuous consumption.

H₇: Positive affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

H₈: Negative affect moderates the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

The section to follow will practically discuss the fieldwork component of the current research.

5.3. FIELDWORK

An online questionnaire was developed on Qualtrics, a web-based survey design platform (Qualtrics, 2015). Following the pretest of the questionnaire amongst 15 respondents, minor changes were made prior to the fieldwork; more specifically one erroneously duplicated question was removed. The responses of these 15 respondents were discarded and thus not included in the final sample, due to the potential bias created with the interaction with the researcher. It should be noted that respondents did not receive an incentive for participating in the research.

The online questionnaire went live on the 27th of October 2015 and was available for a period of two weeks. All students registered at the University of Cape Town for the year 2015, received an email inviting them to partake in the research. The email

provided a brief synopsis of the research as well as the link needed to access the online questionnaire. Respondents were able to exit the questionnaire and return to their point of departure. Respondents received five days to complete the questionnaire, once they had opened the link. Once the five-day period had lapsed, the questionnaire was finalised and recorded as either a complete or incomplete response.

On average, respondents completed the questionnaire in 34 minutes, however it is possible that allowing respondents to abandon the questionnaire and then return at a later stage may have skewed this average. The trimmed mean, a more accurate representation of the data that eliminates extreme scores (Field, 2013), indicated that on average, respondents completed the questionnaire in 16 minutes. The sample size obtained in the two-week period is discussed below.

5.4. SAMPLE SIZE

In line with previous literature, the current research sought to obtain a minimum of 64 respondents in the control and each experimental group (Onwuegbuzie, 2004; as cited in Collins *et al.*, 2007). The sample size for the control group was 93 respondents, for experimental group 1, 91 respondents, and for experimental group 2, 98 respondents. This resulted in an overall sample size of $n = 282$. Qualtrics was able to randomly assign respondents to one of the three groups ensuring equality of the groups; respondents that did not adhere to the characteristics for inclusion in the research were however counted as a completed response by the software. Eliminating all incomplete responses resulted in finding the usable sample sizes.

The descriptive statistics relating to the sample as well as the key constructs are discussed below.

5.5. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

This section examines the descriptive statistics of the data collected. Descriptive statistics seek to explore and describe the composition of the sample and to check all variables for violations of underlying assumptions of statistical tests (Pallant, 2013). The subsection to follow highlights the composition of the sample in terms of the demographic variables collected. The descriptive statistics for the key constructs are then reported. The reliability and normality of the scales used in the measurement instrument is then determined.

5.5.1. Composition of the sample

The four filter questions ensured that all respondents adhered to certain characteristics to warrant inclusion in the sample (Jha, 2014; Malhotra, 2010). These questions ensured all respondents held a personal account on the Facebook platform, had interacted with brand-related content on an SNS before, were between

the ages of 18 and 29 years and were aware of the Nike brand. Table 4 below, provides the sample composition statistics for the control group and both treatment groups separately.

Table 4: Sample Composition Statistics

| Variable | Control Group | Experimental Group 1 Positive SMP | Experimental Group 2 Negative SMP |
|----------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| Gender | | | |
| Males | 40.2% | 33.0% | 33.7% |
| Females | 59.8% | 67.0% | 66.3% |
| Race | | | |
| Asian | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Black | 25.8% | 18.7% | 20.4% |
| Coloured | 10.8% | 14.3% | 10.2% |
| Indian | 6.5% | 11.0% | 5.1% |
| White | 50.5% | 46.2% | 65.2% |
| Prefer not to answer | 6.5% | 9.9% | 2.0% |
| Age | | | |
| Minimum | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Maximum | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| Mean | 23.00 | 22.51 | 22.70 |
| Standard Deviation | 2.60 | 2.65 | 2.74 |
| Nike purchase | | | |
| Yes | 87.1% | 89.0% | 87.8% |
| No | 12.9% | 11.0% | 12.2% |

Regarding the gender composition of the sample, all three groups exhibited a strong female bias. The control group had a composition of 40.2% male respondents and 59.8% female respondents. Experimental group 1 had a gender composition of 33.0% male respondents and 67.0% female respondents. Experimental group 2 had a gender composition of 33.7% male respondents and 66.3% female respondents. The apparent female bias could be due to the fact that Facebook tends to attract a largely female audience, with recent research suggesting that 77% of online females make use of Facebook, while only 66% of online males have adopted Facebook (Anderson, 2015). Research conducted by Babatunde and Tella (2015) appears to confirm this female bias on the Facebook platform.

The race composition of each group was relatively similar, following the same order of composition. All three groups exhibited a strong majority of White respondents, followed by Black, Coloured and Indian respondents and lastly respondents who selected not to answer the question. There were no Asian respondents that took part in the research. It should be noted that these racial demographics are not representative of the South African population as a whole (Govinder, Zondo &

Makgoba, 2013). Research conducted by Govinder *et al.* (2013) highlighted that Black individuals constitute the majority (79.2%) of the South African population, followed by White (8.9%), Coloured (8.9%) and Indian individuals (2.5%). The racial composition of the current research, although skewed, does follow the composition breakdown of students at the University of Cape Town (GroundUp, 2015).

The ages of respondents appeared relatively standardised across all three groups. The minimum age was 18 and the maximum age was 29 in all groups, which were the age limits imposed by the research. The means across the three groups were not statistically different, as determined by a one-way analysis of variance (hereinafter referred to as ANOVA) hypothesis test ($F_{2,279} = 0.802$; $p = 0.449$). Again confirming that the groups can be directly compared. The mean for the control group indicated that the average age was 23 years ($SD = 2.60$), the mean for experimental group 1 was 22.51 years ($SD = 2.65$) and the mean for experimental group 2 was 22.70 ($SD = 2.74$). The means indicate that on average the respondents tended towards the lower bound of the age range, with the standard deviations indicating that the ages did not vary greatly.

A further categorical variable concerned whether or not respondents had previously purchased a Nike product. Across all three groups, responses were greatly skewed towards individuals having purchased a Nike product before. In the control group, 87% of respondents had purchased a Nike product, in experimental group 1, 89.0% had purchased a Nike product and in experimental group 2, 87.8% of respondents had purchased a Nike product. These statistics showed a high penetration rate of Nike purchases amongst the sample, which was expected, as Nike have acknowledged that the millennial age cohort were a key driver behind their footwear sales (Harwell, 2015). Nike has placed a renewed focus on targeting this young adult market through their use of sophisticated social network and mobile marketing efforts (Madonna, 2013). The high penetration rate of Nike purchases amongst the sample was expected.

The descriptive statistics for the scales of the key constructs are addressed below.

5.5.2. Scale descriptive statistics

This section highlights the descriptive statistics, specifically the means and standard deviations, for all key constructs in the current research. Table 5, below, provides a summary of the means and standard deviations of each key construct, within each of the three groups in the current research.

Table 5: Measurement Scale Descriptive Statistics

| Constructs | Number of Items | Control Group | | Experimental Group 1 Positive SMP | | Experimental Group 2 Negative SMP | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation |
| Self Esteem | 10 | 3.92 | 0.54 | 3.80 | 0.56 | 3.89 | 0.57 |
| Facebook Intensity | 8 | 3.65 | 0.80 | 3.62 | 0.63 | 3.69 | 0.78 |
| Positive Affect | 10 | 3.37 | 0.68 | 3.29 | 0.77 | 3.34 | 0.70 |
| Negative Affect | 10 | 2.41 | 0.73 | 2.39 | 0.75 | 2.41 | 0.76 |
| Conspicuous Consumption | 4 | 3.52 | 1.20 | 3.40 | 1.20 | 3.53 | 1.12 |

The following sections further discuss the means and standard deviations for each key construct, across each of the experimental groups.

5.5.2.1. Self-esteem

The scale self-esteem consisted of ten items where questions ranged from one to five, where one indicated '*strongly disagree*' and five indicated '*strongly agree*.' The means for self-esteem in the control group was 3.92 (SD = 0.54), in experimental group 1 the mean was 3.80 (SD = 0.56) and in experimental group 2 the mean was 3.89 (SD = 0.57), as shown in Table 5. The standard deviations showed minimal variation in responses for all groups. A one-way ANOVA confirms that the means for the self-esteem construct are not statistically different between the three groups ($F_{2,279} = 1.00$; $p = 0.37$). This indicates that on average all respondents tended to typically agree with the statements, further indicating that respondents, on average, exhibited a positive self-esteem.

These findings of a general positive self-esteem appear to be in line with research regarding characteristics of the millennial age cohort of young adults. Research has indicated that individuals forming part of this millennial age cohort typically exhibit high levels of confidence coupled with a positive self-esteem (Ng & Johnson, 2015; Kelan, 2012; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). One researcher has argued that the inflated self-esteem amongst millennial young adults is due to a shifted focus towards effort as opposed to achievement (Ng & Johnson, 2015). Rewarding these individuals for participation as opposed to performance in various aspects of their working and personal lives has resulted in the development of an inflated self-esteem (Ng & Johnson, 2015).

The descriptive statistics for the second key construct, Facebook intensity, is discussed below.

5.5.2.2. Facebook Intensity

The Facebook Intensity scale consisted of an eight-item scale, with two open-ended questions and 6 Likert scale questions. The two open-ended questions sought to examine the number of friends that respondents had on Facebook and the average amount of time spent on the SNS during a weekly period.

In the sample, respondents claimed to have a mean number of 632.91 (SD = 394.81) friends on Facebook. The large standard deviation indicates that these responses varied greatly. The reported minimum was ten and the reported maximum was 3300. These findings are in line with research conducted in 2014, which highlighted that individuals within the specified age bracket had, on average, 649 friends on Facebook (Statista, 2014).

Question six required respondents to report on the number of minutes that they had spent engaging on Facebook in the past week. The mean number of minutes spent on Facebook per week was 342.04 (SD = 541.06). This indicates that on average, respondents spent approximately five and a half hours engaged with the SNS on a weekly basis. The sizable standard deviation indicated that the responses varied greatly, with the reported minimum being zero minutes and the reported maximum being 4320 minutes per week. This mean fell below a recent poll of Internet users, which suggested that average social media use had risen to 1.72 hours per day (Bennett, 2015). One possible rationale for this discrepancy is that the current research concerned only Facebook usage as opposed to overall social media usage. Given that the target population is prone to actively engaging on more than one SNS, it is plausible that an examination of overall SNS usage would be greater (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

The Likert scale for Facebook intensity was recorded on a Likert scale where questions ranged from one to five, where one indicated '*strongly disagree*' and five indicated '*strongly agree*.' The means for Facebook Intensity across the three groups ranged between 3.62 and 3.69, indicating that on average all respondents tended to agree with the statements. The standard deviations for all three groups indicated that a majority of the responses varied from neither agreeing nor disagreeing to moderately agreeing. A one-way ANOVA ($F_{2,279} = 0.26$; $p = 0.77$) revealed that these means did not significantly differ between the three groups.

In line with previous literature, significant differences were noted in the Facebook intensity of males and females (Korpijaako, 2015; Joinson, 2008). An independent samples t-test ($t = -2.22$; $p = 0.03$) revealed that at a 5% level of significance, the Facebook intensity of males and females in the sample differed significantly. An examination of the means indicated that females ($M = 3.73$) exhibited a higher use of the social media platform than males ($M = 3.52$). This finding is in line with the

research of Korpijaako (2015) and Joinson (2008) who found that female SNS users were prone to spending more time engaged with the medium.

Respondents in the current research were asked which racial group they identified with in order to determine whether significant differences in Facebook intensity existed between racial groups. Research conducted by Hargittai (2012) and Boyd (2012) found significant differences in social media usage between racial groups. A one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to determine whether Facebook intensity differed between the identified racial groups in the current research. The results indicated that Facebook intensity was not found to significantly differ between racial groups ($F_{4,277} = 0.51$; $p = 0.73$). It should be noted that racial groups were not equally represented in the current research and this could propose a confounding factor that has influenced the results of this test.

The descriptive statistics for the third key construct, positive affect, is discussed below.

5.5.2.3. Positive Affect

Positive affect was measured as one of the underlying dimensions of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). The scale for positive affect consisted of 10 items, each relating to a positive emotion, measured on a one to five Likert scale, where one indicated 'not at all' and five indicated 'extremely.' The mean for the control group was 3.37 (SD = 0.68), experimental group 1 was 3.29 (SD = 0.77) and experimental group 2 was 3.34 (SD = 0.70) as shown in Table 5. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the means for the three groups were not significantly different ($F_{2,279} = 0.30$; $p = 0.75$)

These means indicated that on average respondents tended to remain relatively neutral with regards to their agreement or disagreement with the statements. The standard deviations across the three groups indicated that the majority of responses tended to vary, ranging from slightly below the neutral point to a fairly positive point. All mean values for positive affect fall above the neutral point in the Likert scale, it therefore can be concluded that respondents, on average, indicated an above neutral presence of positive affect. This indicated that respondents tended to agree with experiencing emotion representing positive affect.

As the nature of the relationship between positive affect and negative has garnered contradictory findings, the results for positive affect should be interpreted in line with negative affect (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984).

5.5.2.4. Negative Affect

Negative affect was measured as the second underlying dimension of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). The scale for

negative affect consisted of 10 items, each relating to a negative emotion, measured on a one to five Likert scale, where one indicated 'not at all' and five indicated 'extremely.' The means for the control group and experimental group two are identical ($M = 2.41$) while the mean for experimental group 1 was 2.39 as shown in Table 5. The standard deviations across the three groups are similar, ranging from 0.73 to 0.76. A one-way ANOVA examined whether these means were statistically different between the groups. The results indicated that the mean negative affect did not differ between the groups ($F_{2,279} = 0.04$; $p = 0.96$). The means indicated that on average, respondents exhibited a level of negative affect below the neutral point. The standard deviations indicated that the majority of responses range from being strongly negative to moderately negative, this indicated that respondents tended to disagree with experiencing emotion representing negative affect.

The researcher sought to examine this relationship between positive and negative affect further given the inconsistencies in the literature (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984). A paired samples t-test found that a significant difference existed between the level of positive and negative affect experienced by all respondents. This difference is significant at the 1% level of significance, with a test statistic of 13.44 and an associated p-value of 0.00, with respondents experiencing a greater level of positive affect ($M = 3.33$) than negative affect ($M = 2.40$). Literature that examines the relationship, or lack thereof, between positive and negative affect garnered inconsistencies regarding this relationship (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1984).

The current research supports the findings of Diener and Emmons (1984), which proposed that a negative relationship existed between the two dimensions of emotion. The current research made use of a bivariate correlation in determining this relationship, given that the relationship between two distinct variables was being examined (Adler & Clark, 2015; Malhotra, 2010). The results indicated that a negative relationship, that was significant at the 1% level of significance, existed between positive and negative affect. The Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.26 and associated p-value of 0.00 indicated that the strength of this effect could be classified as medium, in line with previous literature (Gardner, Abraham, Lally & Bruijn, 2012; Cohen, 1992). This negative correlation concurs with Diener and Emmons (1984) that it was unlikely for both positive and negative affect to occur in the same individual at the same time, given their bipolar nature. This intuitive reasoning indicates that the more an individual experienced positive emotion, the less time is available to experience negative emotion (Diener & Emmons, 1984).

The descriptive statistics for the dependent variable, conspicuous consumption, is discussed below.

5.5.2.5 Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption the dependent variable in the current research was measured using a four-item Likert scale ranging from one to six, where one indicated '*strongly disagree*' and six indicated '*strongly agree*.' The mean for the control group was 3.52 (SD = 1.20), for experimental group 1, 3.40 (SD = 1.20) and for experimental group 2, 3.53 (SD = 1.12), as shown in Table 5. A one-way ANOVA tested whether these means significantly differed across the three groups. The results indicated that the means did not significantly differ ($F_{2,279} = 0.36$; $p = 0.70$). The means appear to fall on the neutral point on the scale, between the two middle points, disagree and agree. It should be noted that the relatively large standard deviations, given the six-point scale, indicated that the responses did tend to vary towards both positive and negative responses.

In order to test the reliability of the scales, factor analyses were conducted and Cronbach Alpha values were examined. These procedures and outcomes are outlined below.

5.5.3. Reliability of Key Constructs

The reliability of a scale refers to the degree to which a scale is able to produce consistent results when repeated measurements are taken (Malhotra, 2010). The current research employed the use of rotated factor analyses and an examination of the Cronbach Alpha value in order to determine whether a scale exhibited internal consistency reliability (Malhotra, 2010). Internal consistency reliability measures the degree to which a set of scale items is consistent in its ability to measure an underlying construct (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010).

Factor analysis is able to determine intercorrelations amongst a set of scale items and is used extensively in the evaluation of scales (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010). In particular, exploratory factor analyses were used as they sought to identify items that failed to correlate highly with other items (Santos, 1999). The factor analysis employed the use of Kaiser's criterion (Pallant, 2013). The implementation of this rule ensured that only factors with eigenvalues greater than one were extracted (Pallant, 2013). Orthogonal rotation, using the Varimax approach, was implemented in an attempt to better align items with the latent constructs (Pallant, 2013).

The Cronbach Alpha values associated with each scale were then examined. This value refers to the average of all split-half reliability coefficients and ranges from zero to one (Malhotra, 2010). A typical value of 0.6 was used as the threshold point, above which a scale exhibits internal consistency reliability (Malhotra, 2010). It should be noted that Cronbach Alpha values could be influenced by the number of items included in the scale, with more items often obtaining a greater Cronbach Alpha (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010). The opposite also holds true, whereby a smaller number of items could achieve a deflated Cronbach Alpha statistic (Pallant, 2013). In order to counter this affect, Pallant (2013) suggests an examination of the

inter-item correlations for all scales with fewer than ten items. All inter-item correlations should be positive, ensuring that they are able to consistently measure the underlying construct (Pallant, 2013). Pallant (2013) further suggests that an acceptable range for the mean inter-item correlation is between 0.2 and 0.4. Mean inter-item correlations above this range indicate a strong positive correlation amongst the items. Table 6 below provides the Cronbach Alpha statistics achieved in the current research as well as those found in the original research from which the scales were adapted.

Table 6: Cronbach Alpha Values for all Constructs

| Construct | Cronbach Alpha in Original Research | Cronbach Alpha in the Current Research |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Self Esteem | 0.77 – 0.88 | 0.84 |
| Facebook Intensity | 0.83 | 0.81 |
| Positive Affect | 0.88 | 0.87 |
| Negative Affect | 0.85 | 0.85 |
| Conspicuous Consumption | 0.90 | 0.87 |

The following sections outline the reliability of each key construct in the current research.

5.5.3.1. Reliability of the Self-esteem Scale

The self-esteem construct had five negatively worded items (questions 20, 23, 24, 26 and 27) that were reverse-coded prior to the analysis of reliability. The factor analysis extracted factors that had a combined explanatory power of 55.15%. All items had factor loadings of approximately 0.60 attributed to one factor, it was noted that two of the items had factor loadings approaching 0.50 on the second factor. The Cronbach Alpha value of 0.84 exceeds the traditional cut-off value for internal consistency. The self-esteem scale did not consist of more than ten items; therefore the inter-item correlations were examined, as suggested by Pallant (2013). All inter-item correlations were positive, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.36, falling in the acceptable range. In light of these findings, the scale was deemed reliable. The reliability of the Facebook intensity scale will be examined below.

5.5.3.2. Reliability of the Facebook Intensity Scale

The rotated factor analysis conducted on the Facebook intensity scale extracted two factors, with eigenvalues of 3.14 and 1.00 respectively. These two factors were able to account for 68.94% of the variation in the data. Two of the items (questions 15 and 17) loaded onto one factor, with the remaining four factors loading onto the other factor. All items loaded onto the two factors with factor loadings of greater than 0.6. Despite the fact that two factors were extracted, the Cronbach Alpha value of 0.81, greatly exceeded the traditional threshold for internal consistency (Malhotra, 2010). The Facebook intensity scale did not consist of more than ten items; the inter-item

correlations were therefore examined, as suggested by Pallant (2013). All inter-item correlations were positive, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.42, slightly above the minimally acceptable range. In light of these findings, the scale was deemed reliable. The reliability of the positive and negative affect scale will be examined below.

5.5.3.3. Reliability of the Positive and Negative Affect Scales

A rotated factor analysis was conducted on all items of the emotion scale and extracted four factors with eigenvalues of 5.76, 3.27, 1.38 and 1.05 and a cumulative explanatory power of 57.28%. All items measuring negative affect loaded onto two factors, with factor loadings all exceeding 0.69, with the exception of one item (question 36) that only loaded with a factor loading of 0.46. All items measuring positive affect loaded onto the remaining two factors with factor loadings exceeding 0.60. The Cronbach Alpha values for positive affect and negative affect were 0.87 and 0.85 respectively. In light of the Cronbach Alpha values exceeding the traditional threshold for internal consistency, question 36 was not deleted. The positive and negative affect scales did not consist of more than ten items; as such the inter-item correlations were therefore examined, as suggested by Pallant (2013). Regarding the positive affect scale, all inter-item correlations were positive, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.40, falling in the acceptable range. In light of these findings, the positive affect scale was deemed reliable. Regarding the negative affect scale, all inter-item correlations were positive, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.35, falling in the acceptable range. In light of these findings, the negative affect scale was deemed reliable. Both the positive and negative affect scales were found to be sufficiently robust to conduct parametric hypothesis tests. The reliability of the conspicuous consumption scale will be examined below.

5.5.3.4. Reliability of the Conspicuous Consumption Scale

The rotated factor analysis on all items measuring conspicuous consumption extracted one factor with an eigenvalue 2.88 and a total explanatory power of 72.02%. All items loaded with factor loadings of greater than 0.79. The Cronbach Alpha of 0.87, further reinforces the finding of internal consistency. The conspicuous consumption scale did not consist of more than ten items; as such the inter-item correlations were therefore examined, as suggested by Pallant (2013). All inter-item correlations were positive, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.63, falling above the required range. This highlights that the items in the scale exhibit a strong relationship to one another, a finding that is relatively rare (Pallant, 2013). In light of these findings, the scale was deemed reliable.

As all scales were deemed to exhibit internal consistency, without the need to remove any scale items, all items were summated into their respective scales in order to determine whether the scales were normally distributed. The results of these tests are discussed below.

5.5.4. Normality of the data

The statistical techniques used in the current research assumed that the data was normally distributed and therefore the assumption of normality was tested (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010). A normal distribution is defined as a “*symmetrical, bell-shaped curve, with the greatest frequency of scores in the middle, with smaller frequencies towards the extremes*” (Pallant, 2013:61). In order to test the assumption of normality, hypothesis tests for normality as well as the skewness and kurtosis values required examination (Pallant, 2013; Malhotra, 2010).

The hypothesis test for normality used, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, is a nonparametric goodness-of-fit test that is able to compare the cumulative distribution of a single variable with that of a specified distribution (Malhotra, 2010). The skewness statistic examines the symmetry about the mean of the data, while the kurtosis statistic measures the relative flatness of peakedness of the distribution (Malhotra, 2010). In order for the data to be classified as normally distributed, both the skewness and kurtosis statistics needed to fall in the range between -2 and +2 (Cameron, 2004). The skewness and kurtosis statistics, provided they both fall within the specified ranges, are able to override the outcome of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov hypothesis test. These statistics are summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Normality Statistics for Key Constructs

| Construct | Kolmogorov-Smirnov Hypothesis Test p-value | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Self Esteem | 0.00 | -0.07 | -0.27 |
| Facebook Intensity | 0.00 | -0.57 | 0.40 |
| Positive Affect | 0.00 | -0.31 | -0.31 |
| Negative Affect | 0.00 | 0.48 | -0.41 |
| Conspicuous Consumption | 0.00 | -0.46 | -0.46 |

The p-values for all hypothesis tests for normality were 0.00 as shown in Table 7 above. An examination of this statistic alone would result in a conclusion that the scale data was not normally distributed. However, an examination of the skewness and kurtosis statistics did not support this conclusion. All skewness and kurtosis statistics fell between -2 and +2, as such it could be concluded that the data was normal. This indicated that the distribution of the data was sufficiently robust to be able to conduct parametric hypothesis tests. These hypothesis tests are outlined below.

5.6. INFERENCE STATISTICS: FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO EACH HYPOTHESIS

The following sub-sections discuss the outcomes of the eight hypothesis tests examined in the current research. The results for the moderating effects are

discussed with regards to positive Social Media Performance and then negative Social Media Performance.

In order to use linear regression analyses, there are several assumptions of the technique that first need to be assessed. The first relates to multicollinearity, which occurs when independent variables are highly correlated to one another (Pallant, 2013). Collinearity diagnostics were examined and all tolerance statistics exceeded 0.1 and all variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were lower than 10, thus indicating the lack of multicollinearity in the model. The second assumption relates to the normality of the data (Pallant, 2013; Field, 2013). All scales had undergone statistical testing proving their normality. The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity, a constant error variance (Field, 2013) were verified by examining a plot of standardised residuals and standardised predicted values.

As all assumptions of the statistical analyses were met, the results from the hypothesis tests are discussed below.

5.6.1. Hypothesis One

H₁: There is a correlation between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour.

The first hypothesis posited that a correlation existed between an individual's self-esteem and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour. The direction of this relationship was not specified, due to conflicting results in the literature. Research conducted by Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) found that a negative association existed between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, while Thoumrungroje (2014) and Khann and Dhar (2006) suggested that a positive relationship existed. The current research made use of a two-tailed bivariate correlation in order to test the hypothesis, in particular a Pearson correlation coefficient was examined as the data adhered to the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2013).

The results indicated that the correlation was significant at the 5% level of significance. The test obtained a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.13 and an associated p-value of 0.04. This correlation appears to be a small correlation (Pallant, 2013; Cohen, 1992), the relationship was however found to be statistically significant. This finding supported the findings of Sivanathan and Pettit (2010). This negative relationship indicates that when individuals exhibit low levels of self-esteem they increase their expenditures on conspicuous products (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). This relationship could be explained as a compensatory relationship, in which individuals tend to purchase conspicuous products when they feel that their self-integrity might be under threat (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010).

The following hypothesis examined the self-esteem construct as a moderator of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.2. Hypothesis Two

H₂: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Hypothesis two proposed that self-esteem acted as a moderator on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This hypothesis was tested as when individuals receive positive feedback on their user-generated content, their self-esteem increased, and when they receive negative feedback, their self-esteem reduced (Connelly, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.* 2006). The relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption has been established in the literature (Thoumrungroje, 2014) and it is posited that this relationship can be influenced by the presence of a high or low self-esteem. The rationale for this was that fluctuations in ones self-esteem were dependent on the stable self-esteem traits that an individual bore, as an individual's predisposition to high or low self-esteem could amplify this fluctuation.

In order to test this moderation, dummy variables were created for the scenarios of Social Media Performance, allowing for both positive and negative Social Media Performance dummy variables to be created. Interaction terms were then created to determine whether self-esteem was a moderator of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This moderation was then tested using two linear multiple regression analyses, where one focused on positive Social Media Performance and the other on negative Social Media Performance.

The first model, focusing on positive Social Media Performance, exhibited a relatively low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.04, indicating that the independent variables in the model are able to account for 4% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was significant ($F_{3, 278} = 4.03$; $p = 0.01$) allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. Table 8 below provides the regression coefficients output.

Table 8: Hypothesis Two Regression Coefficients: Positive Social Media Performance

| Model | Standardised Beta Coefficients | T-statistic | P-value |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Positive Social Media Performance | 0.97 | 2.37 | 0.02* |
| Self Esteem | -0.3 | -0.35 | 0.73 |
| Interaction Term | -1.04 | -2.55 | 0.01* |

As Table 8 indicates, two of the independent variables in the model had significant beta coefficients. The positive Social Media Performance dummy variable was significant at the 5% level of significance ($t = 2.37$; $p = 0.02$) with a standardised beta coefficient of 0.97. The beta coefficient for the self-esteem construct was not

significant ($t = -0.35$; $p = 0.73$). The interaction term, testing the moderating effect that self-esteem had on the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption was significant at a 5% level of significance ($t = -2.55$; $p = 0.01$). This indicated that self-esteem did moderate the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, with a standardised beta coefficient of -1.04 . This beta coefficient indicated that the lower an individual's self-esteem, the greater the effect on the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This finding is in line with the research of Thoumrungroje (2014), which highlighted that positive feedback from one's online community had an influence on conspicuous consumption and that this relationship was influenced by an individual's level of self-esteem.

The model was then examined using the negative Social Media Performance. The model exhibited a low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.02 , indicating that the independent variables in the model were able to account for 2% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was not significant ($F_{3, 278} = 4.03$; $p = 0.13$) thus not allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. It is therefore concluded that self-esteem does not moderate the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The following hypothesis examined the relationship between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.3. Hypothesis Three

H₃: There is a positive relationship between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption.

The third hypothesis posited that a correlation existed between an individual's usage of social media and their level of conspicuous consumption behaviour. Kamal *et al.* (2013) proposed that a positive correlation existed between social media usage and materialistic displays. Thoumrungroje (2014) further explained that the more an individual made use of SNS platforms, the more opportunity they had to receive feedback on their user-generated content. This feedback was able to affect the SNS user's conspicuous consumption behaviours by indirectly affecting their self-esteem. The current research made use of a one-tailed bivariate correlation in order to test the hypothesis, in particular a Pearson correlation coefficient was examined as the data adhered to the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2013).

The results indicated a relationship that was significant at the 1% level of significance, with a p-value of 0.00 . The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.24 indicates that a relatively small (Pallant, 2013; Cohen, 1992) positive correlation existed between an individual's usage of Facebook and their conspicuous consumption behaviours. This positive correlation indicated that the more time an SNS user engaged with the Facebook platform, the more likely they were to engage

in conspicuous consumption behaviour. These findings support the findings of Kamal *et al.* (2013) and Thourmrunroje (2014). However, the findings of Thourmrunroje (2014) supported the notion that increased social media usage resulted in an increased self-esteem, which led individual's to make irrational decisions, such as conspicuous consumption behaviour. The current research however, found that a negative correlation existed between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, as noted by hypothesis one. The overall finding of a positive relationship between Facebook usage and conspicuous consumption has been found to support Thourmrunroje's (2014) findings, the mechanism through which this relationship worked had not been supported.

The following hypothesis examined the social media usage construct as a moderator of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.4. Hypothesis Four

H₄: Social Media Usage moderates the relationship between Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Hypothesis four proposed that an individual's usage of social media was able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This hypothesis relied on the feedback mechanism available to SNS users, which, as research has shown, was able to influence users (Thourmrunroje, 2014; Buechel & Berger, 2012; Sivanathan & Pettit; 2010). The higher an individual's social media usage, the more opportunities to engage with this feedback mechanism materialise. It is therefore proposed that the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption is be moderated by the extent to which a user is actively engaging with the platform. This moderation was tested using positive and negative Social Media Performance dummy variables separately and two linear regression analyses were conducted.

The first model, focused on positive Social Media Performance, exhibited a relatively low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.07, indicating that the independent variables in the model were able to account for 7% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was significant ($F_{3, 278} = 6.70$; $p = 0.00$) allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. Table 9 below provides the regression coefficients output.

Table 9: Hypothesis Four Regression Coefficients: Positive Social Media Performance

| Model | Standardised Beta Coefficients | T-statistic | P-value |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Positive Social Media Performance | 0.47 | 1.48 | 0.14 |
| Facebook Intensity | 0.29 | 4.37 | 0.00** |
| Interaction Term | -0.53 | -1.64 | 0.10 |

Table 9 indicates, Facebook intensity was the only significant predictor in the model ($t = 4.37$; $p = 0.00$), with a standardised beta coefficient of 0.29. The interaction term was not significant at the 5% level of significance ($p = 0.10$) it is therefore concluded that Facebook intensity does not moderate the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The model was then examined using the negative Social Media Performance. The model exhibited a relatively low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.09, indicating that the independent variables in the model were able to account for 9% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was significant ($F_{3, 278} = 8.64$; $p = 0.00$) allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. Table 10 below provides the regression coefficients output.

Table 10: Hypothesis Four Regression Coefficients: Negative Social Media Performance

| Model | Standardised Beta Coefficients | T-statistic | P-value |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Negative Social Media Performance | -0.80 | -2.79 | 0.01* |
| Facebook Intensity | 0.10 | 1.42 | 0.16 |
| Interaction Term | 0.85 | 2.93 | 0.00** |

Table 10 demonstrates, that the negative Social Media Performance dummy variable was significant at the 5% level of significance ($t = -2.79$; $p = 0.01$). This independent variable had a standardised beta coefficient of -0.80. The Facebook intensity construct was no longer significant in the negative Social Media Performance model ($t = 1.42$; $p = 0.16$). The interaction term was highly significant, at the 1% level of significance ($t = 2.93$; $p = 0.00$). The interaction term obtained a standardised beta coefficient of 0.85. This indicated that the intensity with which a user engages on the Facebook platform was able to moderate the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The moderating effect reflected that the more an individual used Facebook, the greater influence this exerted on the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This result could support the findings of Wilcox and Stephen (2012) and Thourmrungrroje (2014) as their identification of a loss of self-control could be linked to social media usage and ultimately conspicuous consumption purchases.

Research conducted by Wilcox and Stephen (2012) indicated that when individuals spend time on an SNS, much of that time was dedicated to reading the content of others in their online network. This focus on others, as opposed to oneself, was also able to reduce self-control (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). Thoumrungroje (2014) also found social media usage to be associated with a loss of self-control. This loss of self-control was associated with irrational decision-making, and in the case of the current research, conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

The following hypothesis examined the relationship between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.5. Hypothesis Five

H₅: A correlation exists between positive affect and conspicuous consumption.

The fifth hypothesis posited that a correlation existed between positive affect and conspicuous consumption. The direction of this relationship was not specified, due to conflicting results in the literature. Research conducted on the role of emotion in guiding conspicuous consumption behaviours has garnered contradictory findings with some proposing a positive association, while others proposed a negative association (Baker *et al.*, 2013). The establishment of two underlying dimensions of emotion, namely positive and negative affect, could seek to explain these differences in the literature. The current research examined these sub-dimensions of emotion separately. The current research made use of a two-tailed bivariate correlation in order to test the hypothesis, in particular a Pearson correlation coefficient was examined as the data adhered to the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2013).

Regarding the correlation between positive affect and conspicuous consumption, no significant correlation was found. The Pearson correlation of -0.04 and the associated p-value of 0.55 indicated that this relationship was not significant in the sample. These findings were in contrast to Wang & Griskevicius, (2013) and Belk (2001) who found that an overall positive relationship existed between emotion and conspicuous consumption behaviours, which could translate to a positive correlation between positive affect and conspicuous consumption. The negative relationship between emotion and conspicuous consumption proposed by Baker *et al.* (2013) may be supported in the following hypothesis.

5.6.6. Hypothesis Six

H₆: A correlation exists between negative affect and conspicuous consumption.

The sixth hypothesis posited that a correlation existed between negative affect and conspicuous consumption. The direction of this relationship was not specified, due to conflicting results in the literature. Research conducted on the role of emotion in guiding conspicuous consumption behaviours has garnered contradictory findings

with some proposing a positive association, while others proposed a negative association (Baker *et al.*, 2013). The establishment of two underlying dimensions of emotion, namely positive and negative affect, could seek to explain these differences in the literature. The current research made use of a two-tailed bivariate correlation in order to test the hypothesis, in particular a Pearson correlation coefficient was examined as the data adhered to the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2013).

The results indicated that no significant relationship existed between negative affect and conspicuous consumption. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.09 and the associated p-value of 0.12 highlighted that this relationship was not found to be significant in the sample. The results of hypotheses five and six have confirmed that emotion was not found to have any direct influence on the conspicuous consumption of respondents within the sample. This finding is in contrast to traditional theories that highlight how emotion is able to affect consumption purchases (Murray, 2013; Bergman, 2010; Kamarck, 2005).

The following hypothesis examined positive affect construct as a moderator of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.7. Hypothesis Seven

H₇: Positive affect moderates the relationship between Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Hypothesis seven proposed that positive affect was able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The rationale for this proposition was that individuals may be heavily emotionally invested in the Social Media Performance of their user-generated content that they post on SNSs in an attempt to boost their emotional well-being. Research has shown that user behaviours on SNSs differ amongst individuals exhibiting varying levels of positive and negative affect (Buechel & Berger, 2012). The performance of this user-generated content has been shown to influence the emotional well-being of the user (Buechel & Berger, 2012). Thourunroje (2014) proposes that when individuals feel good about themselves, they are inclined to make irrational decisions, such as excessive expenditure on conspicuous products. This moderation was tested using positive and negative Social Media Performance dummy variables separately and two linear regression analyses were conducted.

The first model, focusing on positive Social Media Performance, exhibited very low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.01, indicating that the independent variables in the model are able to account for 1% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was not significant ($F_{3, 278} = 0.76$; $p = 0.52$) thus not allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. It can therefore be concluded that positive affect does not moderate the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The model was then examined using the negative Social Media Performance. The model exhibited very low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.01, indicating that the independent variables in the model were able to account for 1% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was not significant ($F_{3, 278} = 0.63$; $p = 0.59$) thus not allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. It can therefore be concluded that positive affect does not moderate the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The following hypothesis examined the negative affect construct as a moderator of the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

5.6.8. Hypothesis Eight

H₈: Negative affect moderates the relationship between Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption.

Hypothesis eight proposed that negative affect was able to moderate the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The rationale for this proposition, as proposed for hypothesis seven, was that individuals may be heavily emotionally invested in the Social Media Performance of their user-generated content that they post on SNSs in an attempt to boost their emotional well-being. The performance of this user-generated content has been shown to influence the emotional well-being of the user (Buechel & Berger, 2012). This moderation was tested using positive and negative Social Media Performance dummy variables separately and two linear regression analyses were conducted.

The first model, focusing on positive Social Media Performance, exhibited relatively low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.05, indicating that the independent variables in the model were able to account for 1% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was significant ($F_{3, 278} = 4.97$; $p = 0.00$) allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. Table 11 below provides the regression coefficients output.

Table 11: Hypothesis Eight Regression Coefficients: Positive Social Media Performance

| Model | Standardised Beta Coefficients | T-statistic | P-value |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Positive Social Media Performance | -0.69 | -3.52 | 0.00** |
| Negative Affect | -0.05 | -0.68 | 0.50 |
| Interaction Term | 0.69 | 3.42 | 0.00** |

Table 11 indicated that the positive Social Media Performance dummy variable was significant at the 1% level of significance ($t = -3.52$; $p = 0.00$). The dummy variable

obtained a standardised beta coefficient of -0.69. The beta value for the negative affect construct was not significant at a 5% level of significance ($t = -0.68$; $p = 0.50$). The interaction term was significant at a 1% level of significance ($t = 3.42$; $p = 0.00$), obtaining a standardised beta coefficient of 0.69. This indicates that negative affect is able to moderate the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The positive interaction term indicated that a higher level of negative affect is able to have a greater influence on the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The model was then examined using the negative Social Media Performance. The model exhibited relatively low predictive ability, with an R^2 value of 0.03, indicating that the independent variables in the model are able to account for 3% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The ANOVA indicated that the overall model was significant at the 10% level of significance ($F_{3, 278} = 2.37$; $p = 0.07$) allowing for the interpretation of the beta values to continue. Table 12 below provides the regression coefficients output.

Table 12: Hypothesis Eight Regression Coefficients: Negative Social Media Performance

| Model | Standardised Beta Coefficients | T-statistic | P-value |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Negative Social Media Performance | 0.43 | 2.16 | 0.03* |
| Negative Affect | 0.19 | 2.50 | 0.01* |
| Interaction Term | -0.43 | -2.11 | 0.04* |

As Table 12 indicates, the negative Social Media Performance dummy variable was significant at the 5% level of significance ($t = 2.16$; $p = 0.03$) and obtained a standardised beta coefficient of 0.43. Negative affect was also significant at the 5% level of significance ($t = -0.68$; $p = 0.01$) and obtained a standardised beta coefficient of 0.19. The interaction was also significant at the 5% level of significance ($t = -2.11$; $p = 0.04$) and obtained a standardised beta coefficient of -0.43. This negative interaction term indicates that the lower the level of negative affect experienced by an individual, the greater the effect on the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

5.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined all results obtained from both the descriptive and inferential tests conducted. The descriptive statistics indicated that the demographic composition across the three groups in the research was relatively similar. The scale descriptive statistics amongst the three groups were examined with hypothesis tests conducted to test whether these means statistically differed across the groups. The reliability of the scales was then analysed, with all scales exhibiting internal

consistency reliability. The normality of the data obtained was then analysed prior to conducting parametric tests.

Regarding the hypotheses that tested direct correlational relationships with conspicuous consumption, support was found for hypotheses one and three. Hypothesis one found that a negative correlation existed between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, while hypothesis three found that a positive correlation existed between Facebook intensity and conspicuous consumption. The remaining two relational hypotheses, hypotheses five and six, were not supported and no correlation was found to exist between either positive or negative affect, and conspicuous consumption.

Hypothesis two found that self-esteem was a moderator of the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This moderating effect was not found when examining negative Social Media Performance. Hypothesis four was fully supported as Facebook intensity was found to moderate the relationship between both positive and negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. Hypothesis seven was not supported, as positive affect was not found to have any moderating effect on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The final hypothesis, hypothesis eight, was fully supported as negative affect was found to moderate the relationship between both positive and negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The following chapter provides a detailed discussion of each hypothesis test, providing the theoretical and managerial implications thereof.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the results for all descriptive and inferential statistics conducted in the current research. The descriptive statistics consisted of the sample composition and the scale descriptive statistics for each key construct in both the control and experimental groups. The reliability of each scale was determined and following this all assumptions for the parametric tests were examined. The inferential statistics related to each of the parametric hypothesis tests were examined. Bivariate correlations and multiple linear regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses.

This chapter seeks to discuss these findings individually and discuss the theoretical and managerial implications thereof. The limitations of the current research are then addressed, followed by recommendations for future research. The dissertation concludes with concluding remarks.

6.2. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES AND FINDINGS

This section provides a brief summary of the hypotheses that were tested in the current research and the results of these tests. These results are summarised in the table that follows, Table 13.

Table 13: Summary Table of All Hypothesis Tests

| No. | Brief Description | Test Used | Test Statistic | P-value | Outcome |
|-----|---|-------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|
| H1 | Correlation between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. | Correlation | $r = -0.13$ | 0.04 | Reject H0 |
| H2 | Moderating effect of self-esteem in the presence of positive Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = -2.55$ | 0.01 | Reject H0 |
| | Moderating effect of self-esteem in the presence of negative Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = 0.96$ | 0.34 | Fail to reject H0 |
| H3 | Correlation between social media intensity and conspicuous consumption. | Correlation | $r = 0.24$ | 0.00 | Reject H0 |
| H4 | Moderating effect of social media intensity in the presence of positive Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = -1.64$ | 0.10 | Fail to reject H0 |
| | Moderating effect of social media intensity in the presence of negative Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = 2.93$ | 0.00 | Reject H0 |
| H5 | Correlation between positive affect and conspicuous consumption. | Correlation | $r = -0.04$ | 0.55 | Fail to reject H0 |
| H6 | Correlation between negative affect and conspicuous consumption. | Correlation | $r = 0.09$ | 0.12 | Fail to reject H0 |
| H7 | Moderating effect of positive affect in the presence of positive Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = -1.09$ | 0.28 | Fail to reject H0 |
| | Moderating effect of positive affect in the presence of negative Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = -1.13$ | 0.26 | Fail to reject H0 |
| H8 | Moderating effect of negative affect in the presence of positive Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = 3.42$ | 0.00 | Reject H0 |
| | Moderating effect of negative affect in the presence of negative Social Media Performance. | Regression | $t = -2.12$ | 0.04 | Reject H0 |

Self-esteem was found to have a significant correlation with conspicuous consumption as support was found for hypothesis one. Self-esteem was also found to moderate the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, however no support was found for the moderation between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, as evidenced by hypothesis two.

Social media intensity was found to have a significant correlation with conspicuous consumption as support was found for hypothesis three. Social media intensity was further found to moderate the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. However, social media intensity was not found to moderate the relationship positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, as evidence by hypothesis four.

Positive affect was not significantly correlated with conspicuous consumption, as no support was found for hypothesis five. Furthermore, as evidenced by hypothesis seven, no support was found for positive affect to moderate the relationship between either positive or negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

Negative affect was not significantly correlated with conspicuous consumption, as no support was found for hypothesis six. However, as evidenced by hypothesis eight negative affect was found to moderate the relationship between both positive and negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

The following section will provide a discussion of each hypothesis individually and provide theoretical and managerial implications thereof.

6.3. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the findings for each hypothesis test. In doing so, managerial implications that can be deduced from the current research are highlighted.

6.3.1. Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis was derived from objective one, which sought to determine whether a correlation existed between respondents' self-esteem and conspicuous consumption behaviour. This correlation was found to be negative. This indicated that the lower an SNS user's self-esteem is, the more they engaged in conspicuous consumption behaviour, supporting the findings of Sivanathan and Pettit (2010). This relationship appears to be compensatory in nature, whereby individuals tend to be willing to engage in more conspicuous consumption when they felt that their self-integrity was at risk (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). This further supports the findings of Truong and McColl (2011) who found that engaging in conspicuous consumption behaviour might be a powerful way to satisfy an individual's need for self-esteem.

It is proposed that the increased desire to engage in conspicuous consumption stems from a need to restore one's self-worth, when threatened (Truong & McColl, 2011; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). When a specific aspect of an individual's identity was threatened, products that conveyed the same specific characteristic not only to the individual, but also to others, was sought out and consumed (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). While the current research did not consider a narrow focus on specific self-views, from a wider perspective these specific self-views seek to impact the 'self' as

a broad concept (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) further found that offering individuals alternative means through which they could alleviate threats to their self-worth, incorporating their self-esteem, would reduce their desire to engage in conspicuous consumption. Souiden *et al.* (2011) suggest that individuals with a lower self-esteem tend to attribute a much greater importance to conspicuous products. Their finding supports the results in the current research. The fundamental drive to maintain one's self-worth is a significant driving force behind why individuals who experience aversive states, tend to seek some form of relief through conspicuous consumption (Truong & McColl, 2011; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). The current research appears to form part of a burgeoning quantity of literature establishing the compensatory relationship between an individual's self-esteem and consumption behaviour (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Tuttle, 2010).

The concept of *predatory marketing* targets specific individuals and seeks to advertise in a manner that preys on the fears and potential vulnerabilities of the persons concerned (Tuttle, 2010). This specific type of marketing is particularly effective as it seeks to remind individuals of some aversive situations which might occur and promises a remedy, thus mobilizing consumers to purchase the product (Tuttle, 2010). A common form of advertising that seeks to take advantage of this compensatory relationship refers to the use of beautiful, successful, high-status individuals in marketing campaigns (Tuttle, 2010). Consumers compare themselves negatively to the high-status individual, thus creating a strong attraction to purchase the product or service being advertised, as a means to reduce this imminent threat to one's self-esteem (Tuttle, 2010). It appears that SNSs make people particularly vulnerable for this type of marketing.

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypothesis two.

6.3.2. Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis was derived from objective two, which sought to determine whether self-esteem moderated the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption. It was found that self-esteem moderated the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The moderation was however not found to influence the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. It should further be noted that in the presence of positive Social Media Performance, self-esteem is a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption, with a standardised beta coefficient of -0.25. This indicated that in the presence of positive Social Media Performance, a one-unit increase in self-esteem resulted in a 0.25 unit decrease in conspicuous consumption, all else being equal. In the presence of negative Social Media Performance, self-esteem was not found to be a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption. This shows that the effect of Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption differs at different values of self-esteem. Figure 8 below shows a graphic representation of how Social Media Performance interacts with self-esteem.

Figure 8: Means Plot Representing the Interaction Between Social Media Performance and Self-esteem

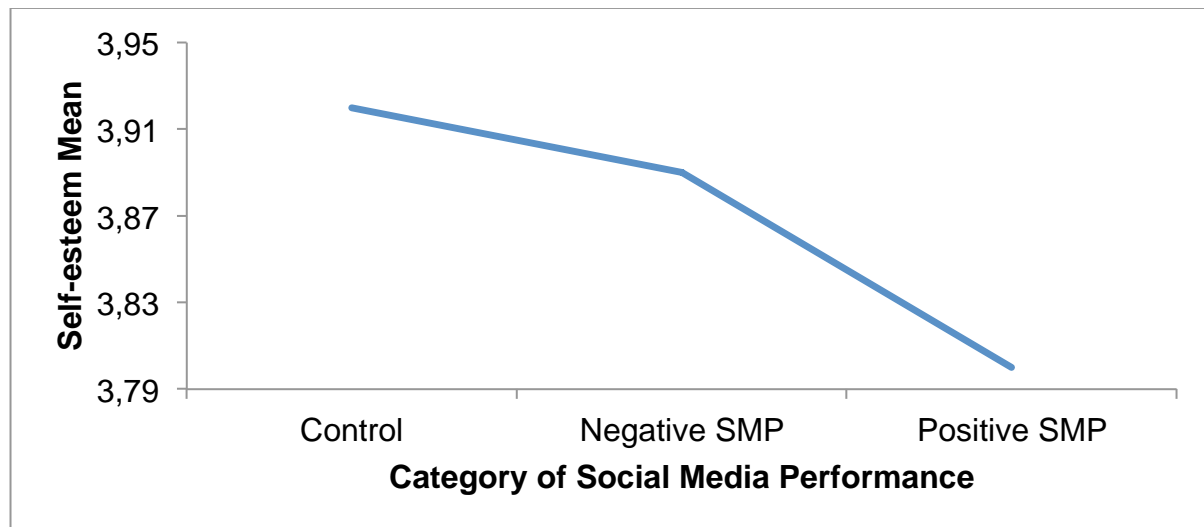


Figure 8 highlights that the control group exhibited the highest level of self-esteem. Respondents in experimental group 1, who were exposed to negative Social Media Performance, exhibited a lower level of self-esteem than those in the control group. This reduction in self-esteem supports Valkenburg *et al.* (2006) who found that when individuals received negative feedback, their self-esteem was reduced. The anomaly, however, concerns experimental group 2 who were exposed to positive Social Media Performance. The results indicated that respondents in experimental group 2 exhibited the lowest mean level of self-esteem. This finding is in contrast to Valkenburg *et al.* (2006) who found that when individuals received positive feedback from their online community, their self-esteem was increased.

The interaction term was negative, which indicated that the higher an individual's level of self-esteem, the lower the effect that positive Social Media Performance had on conspicuous consumption. Alternatively, the lower an individual's self-esteem, the higher the influence of positive Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption becomes. The findings of this interaction effect appear to be in line with the findings of Buechel and Berger (2012). Buechel and Berger (2012) found that certain SNS activities were used as tools to regulate emotion, particularly for emotionally unstable individuals. Buechel and Berger (2012) discovered that emotionally unstable individuals tended to create and share emotional content more frequently. Research has indicated that emotional instability is closely linked to low self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, Holden, Enjaian, Southard, Besser, Li & Zhang, 2015).

Individuals experiencing low levels of self-esteem, tend to exhibit emotional instability (Zeigler-Hill *et al.*, 2015). Social media is used as a tool to regulate unstable emotions and such individuals tend to post more user-generated emotional content than those with high self-esteem. When an individual with low self-esteem posts user-generated content, in an attempt to engage social support, the consequences of that performance become amplified, due to their emotional investment in the

performance of the post. The subsequent influence on the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption increases. The opposite would also hold true, whereby individuals exhibiting a high self-esteem may not be as effected by the performance of their online content, as they are not posting content to engage social support (Buechel & Berger, 2012), thus reducing the effect that positive Social Media Performance exerts on conspicuous consumption.

The result of hypothesis two stresses the importance of active online engagement for marketing managers. As indicated, individuals with low self-esteem tend to post more user-generated content as they use their posts as a tool to regulate their emotions. These individuals are greatly invested in the performance of their content and as such will monitor this Social Media Performance closely. As brands have lost absolute control over brand-related information shared on social media, it is imperative that brands made a concerted effort to respond to SNS users that choose to engage with the brand (Mainwaring, 2011). This response would likely vary based on the nature of the content and the engagement, however brands should acknowledge in some way interactions from SNS users. Dolan, Conduit and Fahy (2016) suggest that an understanding of how users engage, both positively and negatively, is the ultimate key to social media strategy success. Dolan *et al.* (2016) suggest that brands post content that encourages responses from SNS users, ensuring that active engagement behaviours are reinforced.

Baird and Parasnis (2011) suggest that brands incorporating social media strategies into their communications strategy consider a new strategy, that of *Social Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM)*. Social CRM stresses the importance of managing consumers and facilitating online dialogue that is beneficial to consumers. Furthermore, a majority of SNS users believe that having a passion for a specific brand is a prerequisite for social media engagement (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). This indicates that a majority of SNS users that choose to engage with brands in the social media environment have already developed a positive attitude toward the brand (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). In a study conducted by Baird and Parasnis (2011) they found that 45% of respondents interacted with brands on social media. A majority of these respondents indicated that they needed to feel that the brand was communicating honestly and was transparent in their online communication. Therefore, ensuring authenticity in social media communication is likely to increase engagement as SNS users appreciate the sincerity of their communication and are thus likely to increase their online engagement with the brand (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Brands are also encouraged to understand that social media cannot be utilised in the same manner as other communication channels. Interactions on social media need to ensure a mutual benefit for both the brand and the consumer (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). The conventional model of brands managing the customer relationship needs to be adapted as social media platforms allow much of the control to lie in the hands of the consumer (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Mainwaring, 2011).

Mainwaring (2011) provides examples of brands that have used social media platforms in order to engage with consumers in the products and services of their

brands. These examples include Mars Inc. inviting online consumers to select a new M & M colour, Levi's allowing Facebook users to select the next face of the brand and Mountain Dew allowing consumers to design packaging for upcoming products (Mainwaring, 2011). While these instances did create interactions between consumers and the brand, Mainwaring (2011) warns that the brands interests primarily drove these interactions. Mainwaring (2011) instead suggests that engagement is used to enhance the brand's broader purpose. This requires engaging in conversations or content exchanges with consumers about significant issues that will serve the ultimate purpose of being mutually beneficial (Mainwaring, 2011).

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypothesis three.

6.3.3. Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis was derived from objective three, which sought to determine whether a correlation existed between social media usage, Facebook usage in particular, and conspicuous consumption. The results indicate that a positive correlation was found to exist. This supports the findings of Thoumrungroje (2014) who also found a positive correlation existed between the two variables. This indicated that the more time an individual spent engaged on Facebook, the more likely they were to engage in conspicuous consumption behaviours (Thoumrungroje, 2014). The current research suggests three possible reasons as to why this positive relationship holds. These reasons concern self-esteem, self-control and brand interactions on social media.

The first possible driving force behind this relationship, relates to the introduction of Social Media Performance. When an individual's user-generated content does not perform as expected, they would experience a state of dissatisfaction as proposed by the ECT (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). Heatherton and Wyland (2003) identified that individuals, predominantly women, who experience a low self-esteem were particularly affected by dissatisfaction, indicating a strong link between dissatisfaction and self-esteem. It is therefore posited that when an SNS user experiences negative Social Media Performance, this decreases self-esteem (Thoumrungroje, 2014). This reduction in self-esteem, as explained by hypothesis one, is able to mobilize SNS users to engage in conspicuous consumption due to its compensatory benefits. The more an individual engages on SNSs, the more opportunities arise to evaluate one's Social Media Performance.

The second possible explanation for the positive relationship between social media usage and conspicuous consumption relates to an SNS user's self-control. Research conducted by Wilcox and Stephen (2012) indicated that when individuals spend time on an SNS, much of that time was dedicated to reading the content of others in their online network. This focus on others, as opposed to oneself, was able to reduce self-control (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). Thoumrungroje (2014) also found social media usage to be associated with a loss of self-control. This loss of self-control was

associated with irrational decision-making, and in the case of the current research, conspicuous consumption (Thoumrungrroje, 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

The third possible driving force behind this positive relationship could be the increased consumer-brand interaction on SNS platforms. SNSs create a great opportunity for brands to attract and engage with consumers. This opportunity has been seized by a multitude of both local and multinational brands resulting in social media strategies being identified as a key component of a brand's promotional mix (Parveen *et al.*, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Lin & Lu, 2011). Interactions with brands on social media allow marketers to regularly interact with consumers, allowing communication to be humanised to the extent that personal relationships can be fostered (Turri *et al.*, 2013; Bushelow, 2012; Hanna *et al.*, 2011). Roesler (2015) reporting on the results of a research study conducted by Deloitte, found that the purchasing decisions of 47% of millennials were by social media. Social media usage has been found to have direct effects on the purchasing behaviours of consumers, it is therefore posited that fostering consumer-brand relationships in the social media context could positively affect purchase decisions. It has further been noted that consumers tend to seek advice and support from online communities regarding brands (Divol *et al.*, 2012; Lehdonvirta, 2010). Creating an online community where users are able to discuss a brand in a positive light could further influence consumption behaviour.

Regardless of the mechanism through which social media usage ultimately influences conspicuous consumption, the relationship is apparent. The longer brands are able to engage SNS users on SNS platforms, the greater the likelihood that they will engage in conspicuous consumption behaviour. The key to increasing social media usage is to drive consumer engagement in social media marketing strategies. Graham and Graham (2012) suggested regular posts, with new content that sought to portray the brand as an expert in a particular field. The key is to drive interaction on posts, increasing the number of SNS users who see the content (Graham & Graham, 2012). Highly interactive posts, such as a question that requires a response from followers, tended to have a positive effect on the number of comments that a post received (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Brands need to ensure that all components of their digital marketing strategy are seamlessly integrated and offer consistent information.

The results of this hypothesis further suggest that brands should seek to increase the SNS usage of their consumers. In order to achieve this, brands could consider the implementation of gamification principles. Gamification is defined as "the application of game design principles in non-gaming contexts" (Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy & Pitt, 2015:411). The use of gamification principles can, to some extent, control the behaviour of consumers (Robson *et al.*, 2015). The foundation upon which gamification is built is rooted in psychological theories regarding behaviour modification and reinforcement (Robson *et al.*, 2015). Successful gamification involves the repetition of a desired outcome (Robson *et al.*, 2015). In the context of the current research, this desired outcome could be the response that an SNS user

receives from the brand on their user-generated content. The theory proposes that a desired behaviour change can be achieved through the consistent reward of the behaviour (Robson *et al.*, 2015). Consistently rewarding SNS users that choose to engage with the brand is likely to result in this becoming a learnt behaviour in which the user will continue to engage with the brand. This learnt behaviour is likely to increase the amount of time that a user engages with the platform, thus increasing their overall social media usage.

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypothesis four.

6.3.4. Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis four was derived from objective four, which sought to determine whether social media usage moderated the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. It was found that social media usage moderated the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The interaction between social media usage and positive Social Media Performance was not found to be significant. It should further be noted that in the presence of negative Social Media Performance, social media usage was identified as being a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption with a beta coefficient of 0.49. This indicates that in the presence of negative Social Media Performance, a one-unit increase in social media usage would result in a 0.49 unit increase in conspicuous consumption, holding all else constant. In the presence of positive Social Media Performance, social media usage was not found to be a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption. This shows that the effect of Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption differs at different values of social media usage. Figure 9 below shows a graphic representation of how Social Media Performance interacts with social media usage.

Figure 9: Means Plot Representing the Interaction Between Social Media Performance and Facebook Usage

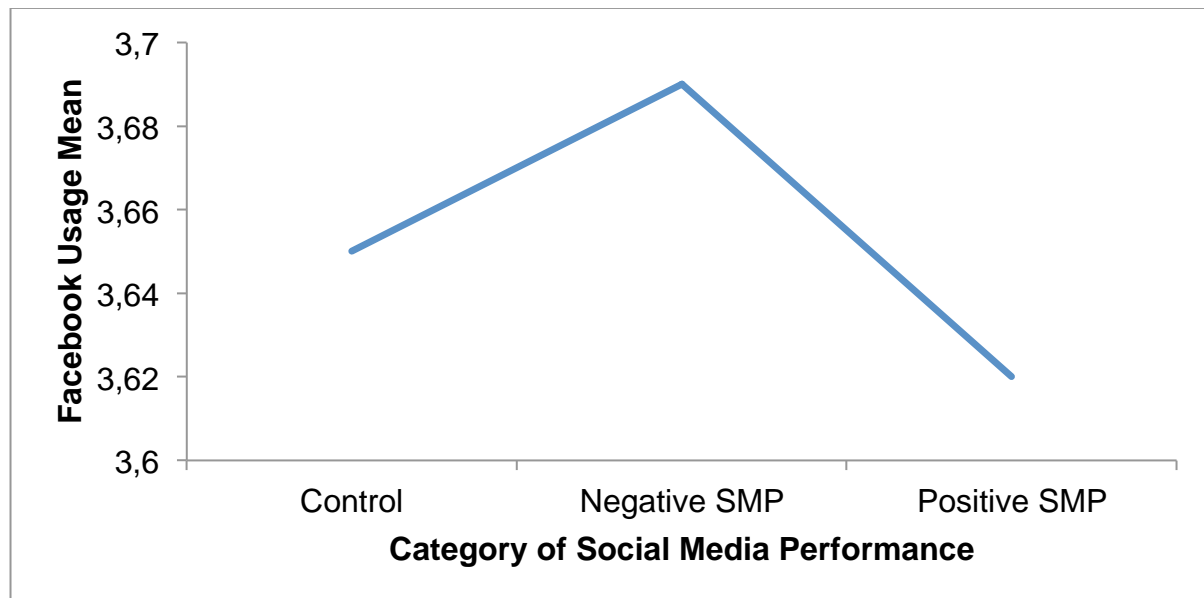


Figure 9 identified that individuals in experimental group 1, who were exposed to negative Social Media Performance, reported a higher level of social media usage than those in the control group and experimental group 2. Respondents in experimental group 2, who were exposed to positive Social Media Performance, reported the lowest mean for social media usage.

As the interaction term, concerning negative Social Media Performance and social media usage, was positive, this indicated that the higher an individual's social media usage, the higher the influence of negative Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption. The opposite also holds true, whereby the lower an individual's social media usage, the lower the influence of negative Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption. Accordingly, when an SNS user has a high usage of social media, more opportunities arise for them to engage with the positive and negative feedback mechanism of Social Media Performance. Carmel *et al.* (2012) indicated that due to the vast quantity of data on SNSs, only small quantities of posts are expected to in fact gain great popularity. Therefore, while a small number of posts will receive responses from a user's network, it is postulated that a large number of posts will be ignored (Carmel *et al.*, 2012). The more time an individual spends on social media; the more opportunities arise for them to experience negative Social Media Performance, as proposed by the interaction term. This therefore provides a rationale as to why the moderation was only significant when considering negative Social Media Performance.

The results of hypothesis four again stress the importance of engagement with SNS users coupled with the need to maintain these interactions, ensuring that SNS users spend more time engaging with the brand online. These two factors appear to go hand-in-hand, as they need to be implemented and maintained simultaneously. If

brands are able to increase the intensity with which their consumers are using SNSs, yet do not actively engage with and respond to user-generated content, they would not be able to receive the benefits of these efforts. This is evidenced as social media usage significantly moderates the relationship between negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The implementation of the principles of gamification combined with a social media strategy that seeks to reward SNS users for their engagement with the brand would result in the greatest benefits for both the brand and the consumer.

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypotheses five and six.

6.3.5. Hypotheses Five and Six

Hypothesis five was derived from objective five, which sought to determine whether a correlation existed between positive affect and conspicuous consumption. Hypothesis six was derived from objective six, which sought to determine whether a correlation existed between negative affect and conspicuous consumption. The results for hypothesis five indicated that no significant correlation was found to exist between positive affect and conspicuous consumption and hypothesis six did not find a significant correlation between negative affect and conspicuous consumption. This is in contrast to traditional psychological theories that propose that emotion often plays a lead role in purchase behaviour (Jung *et al.*, 2014; Murray, 2013). Neither the findings of Baker *et al.* (2013), proposing a correlation with negative affect and conspicuous consumption, nor the findings of Wang & Griskevicius (2013), proposing a correlation with positive affect, have been supported by the current research.

Bergman (2010) suggests that advertising to consumers on an emotional level is a strategy commonly used by brands around the world. The current research however, suggests that brands wishing to encourage conspicuous consumption should focus their efforts in an attempt to take advantage of the compensatory relationship between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. The use of advertising that seeks to take advantage of this compensatory relationship makes use of beautiful, successful, high-status individuals in marketing campaigns (Tuttle, 2010). The rationale for this, is that it creates the opportunity for upwards comparisons between the consumer and individuals used in the marketing campaigns (Tuttle, 2010). These upwards comparisons act as a threat to one's self-esteem thereby creating a strong desire to purchase the promoted product (Tuttle, 2010). Campaigns employing such tactics have been hugely successful. Marketing efforts are therefore focused to take advantage of this compensatory relationship as opposed to a specific emotion of either positive or negative affect.

While the current research did not find support for a direct relationship between either positive or negative affect and conspicuous consumption, this is not to say that emotion is not a successful driver of other actions. Emotional appeals have been implemented in many successful marketing campaigns (Lewis *et al.*, 2012).

Research proposes that content that triggers and emotional response from consumers is able to influence a consumer's behaviour (Lewis *et al.*, 2012).

A possible confounding variable included in the measurement of emotion in the current research related to the time frame of emotion used. The current study asked respondents to identify the extent to which they have felt particular emotion '*over the last few days*' as envisaged in previous research (Crawford & Henry, 2004). It should be noted that both positive and negative affect could be considered as long-term character traits, alternatively they can be considered as states of mind, subject to short-term fluctuations (Watson *et al.*, 1988:B). While a shorter timeframe was adopted in the current research, it is proposed that the relatively short timeframe allows for transient emotional states to take preference over long-term emotional traits (Watson *et al.*, 1988:A). Watson *et al.*, (1988:B) found that the retest stability of the PANAS scale increased over time, as longer time periods become aggregations of the individual's emotion, as opposed to transient states.

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypothesis seven.

6.3.6. Hypothesis Seven

Hypothesis seven was derived from objective seven, which sought to determine whether positive affect moderated the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption. Hypothesis seven found that positive affect did not moderate the relationship between either positive or negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. The lack of any significant moderation indicates that the effect of Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption did not differ at different values of positive affect.

These findings may be consistent with the research of Buechel and Berger (2012) that found that individuals might be heavily emotionally invested in the Social Media Performance of their user-generated content that they post on SNSs in an attempt to boost their emotional well-being. Research has shown that SNS behaviours differ amongst individuals exhibiting varying levels of positive and negative affect (Buechel & Berger, 2012), with individuals exhibiting higher levels of negative affect receiving more benefits from engaging in particular SNS activities. Furthermore Buechel & Berger (2012) discovered that emotionally unstable individuals tend to create and share content more frequently, sharing their emotion when doing so. This indicates that negative affect would be able to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption, as negative affect may be a driving force behind the creation of user-generated content. This would relate to the moderating influence of negative affect, as opposed to positive affect, discussed below.

The section to follow discusses the implications of hypothesis eight.

6.3.7. Hypothesis Eight

Hypothesis eight was derived from objective eight, which sought to determine whether negative affect moderated the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption. This hypothesis found that negative affect moderated the relationship between positive Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption as well as negative Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption.

In the presence of positive Social Media Performance, negative affect is a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption, with a beta coefficient of 0.28. This indicates that in the presence of positive Social Media Performance, a one-unit increase in negative affect is able to increase conspicuous consumption by 0.28 units, holding all else constant. Figure 10 below provides a graphical depiction of the interaction between Social Media Performance and negative affect.

Figure 10: Means Plot Representing the Interaction Between Social Media Performance and Negative Affect

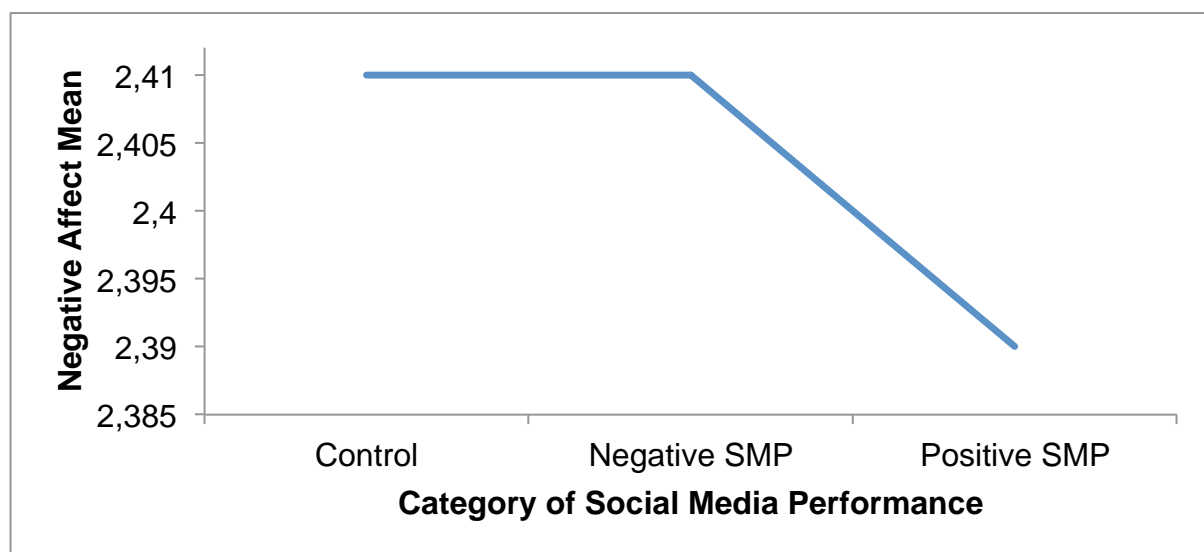


Figure 10 indicated that the level of negative affect remained constant in both the control group and experimental group 1. The mean level of negative affect in experimental group 2 was the lowest reported. The finding that respondents in experimental group 2 exhibited the lowest mean for negative affect is expected as they were exposed to a scenario designed to induce positive affect. The current research supports the findings of Diener and Emmons (1984), which propose that a negative correlation exists between positive and negative affect.

The interaction between positive Social Media Performance and negative affect was positive, indicating that when an individual experienced a high level of negative affect, the influence of positive Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption was increased. In a similar way when an individual experienced a low

level of negative affect, the influence of positive Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption was reduced. Positive performance has been linked to the release of dopamine, an organic chemical that is associated with pleasurable feelings (Leopold, 2015; Ritvo, 2012). Individuals experiencing times of crises, experience increased levels of cortisol, commonly referred to as the stress hormone (Ritvo, 2012). In this state of negative affect, it is proposed that positive Social Media Performance is able to provide individuals with a feeling of social support, thus reducing this state of negative affect and increasing the subsequent effects of Social Media Performance, which, in the case of the current research is conspicuous consumption (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the level of negative affect was the lowest in experimental group 2, who were exposed to positive Social Media Performance. While analysing the mean negative affect within each experimental group was not the sole purpose of hypothesis eight, this is a noteworthy finding. This finding indicates that in the presence of positive Social Media Performance, respondents exhibited a lower level of negative affect than respondents in the control group. Negative emotion has been found to predict certain behaviours, such as consumer complaint behaviour (Tronvoll, 2009). The introduction of positive Social Media Performance in the current research was able to reduce the negative affect experienced by respondents. This indicates that active consumer engagement, resulting in SNS users positively evaluating the performance of their online content, could reduce the propensity for users to engage in negative behaviours, such as complaining.

The interaction between negative Social Media Performance and negative affect was negative, indicating that when an individual experienced a high level of negative affect, the influence of negative Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption was reduced. Likewise, when an individual experienced a low level of negative affect, the influence of negative Social Media Performance on conspicuous consumption was increased. Brown and Marshall (2001) provided a correlation between self-esteem and emotion, indicating that individuals with a high self-esteem tend to exhibit high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect. Individuals with a high self-esteem and thus low levels of negative affect desire to perform at high levels (Aamodt, 2016). It is therefore proposed that when negative Social Media Performance occurs and this performance is greatly below the performance expected by the individual, this would then result in the subsequent effects of negative Social Media Performance being increased.

The moderating influence that negative affect was found to have on the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption highlights the role of emotional appeals in marketing communications. Despite the fact that negative affect was not found to have a direct correlation with conspicuous consumption (see hypothesis six), the significant moderation indicates the significance of emotion in affecting behaviour. The use of rational appeals in marketing communications has been well documented in the literature (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). Research has indicated that consumers are more likely to engage with marketing communication

that exhibits an emotional appeal (Picot-Zane, 2006). Not only do consumers engage on a deeper level when an emotional appeal is present, but this appeal drives behavioural intentions, thus altering consumer behaviour (Bülbul & Menon, 2010). Picot-Zane (2006) does however warn against the use of communication that solely focuses on an emotional appeal with little information appeal. As such, it is suggested that marketing communications need to combine both informational and emotional appeals in order to be effective (Picot-Zane, 2006).

The current research was constrained by certain limitations, all of which have been acknowledged and are outlined below.

6.4. POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations experienced in the current research typically stem from the sampling techniques used, the research design and method chosen and the scales used. These limitations are discussed below.

6.4.1. Limitations Relating to the Sampling Techniques

The first limitation related to the use of a non-probability sampling technique, despite their common use in commercial research (Yang and Banamah, 2014). The use of non-probability sampling techniques relied on the judgment of the researcher; thereby existing a probability that the sample might not be representative of the target population at large (Malhotra, 2010). The research was made available to all students registered at the University of Cape Town for the 2015 academic year, ensuring the heterogeneity of students from various academic majors, departments and faculties (Peterson & Merunka, 2013).

6.4.2. Limitations Relating to the Research Design and Method

The second limitation related to the use of a scenario as a substitute for real-life. The use of scenarios in experimental research is one of the major critiques of the design (Rousseau, 2006). The problem that arises when developing a scenario to be used in experimental research is whether the scenario is representative of a real-life situation, or too abstract to represent a real-life situation (Rousseau, 2006). A scenario closely resembling a real-life situation could result in respondents bringing unique information into the experiment that cannot be controlled, thus increasing the number of extraneous variables (Rousseau, 2006). Using a scenario that is too abstract, may fail to engage with the respondent in any meaningful manner (Rousseau, 2006). While this limitation is noted, the researcher did attempt to moderate this limitation by providing sufficient detail to make the scenario plausible, while ensuring some information, particularly related to Social Media Performance, remained vague (Rousseau, 2006).

The third limitation related to the research design and method concerned the use of one brand in the measurement instrument. While the use of Nike in the current

research was justified, using only one particular brand may limit the ability of the research to extend the results beyond the Nike brand. The current research did not account for preconceived attitudes that respondents held towards the Nike brand. It is suggested that these preconceived attitudes may exacerbate the response that individuals would have to either positive or negative Social Media Performance. Furthermore, including the scenario related to Nike towards the beginning of the questionnaire could have resulted in respondents completing the questionnaire in line with the Nike brand, as opposed to the performance of the content proposed by the scenario.

The final limitation imposed on the research related to the lack of control that the research exerted on the environment in which the questionnaire was completed. The findings suggested that the majority of respondents completed the questionnaire between the hours of 8am and 5pm during weekdays. The use of online questionnaires did not allow the researcher to control the conditions under which the questionnaire was completed (Bartneck, Duenser, Moltchanova & Zawieska, 2015). The ability for respondents to complete the questionnaire at any time and in any environment is possibly able to introduce extraneous variables into the research that may be unknown to the researcher (Bartneck *et al.*, 2015).

6.4.3. Limitations Relating to the Scales Used

While all scales were deemed to be sufficiently reliable to warrant their use in the current research (see Table 6), possible issues were made apparent in the exploratory factor analyses conducted. The scales measuring self-esteem, Facebook intensity, as well as positive and negative affect did not load as expected in the factor analysis. As discussed in Chapter 5, several of these scales loaded onto more than one construct. This could possibly indicate poor convergent validity, as items in the scale did not all positively correlate with other items in the scale (Malhotra, 2010).

The above-mentioned limitations coupled with the findings of the current research have resulted in several recommendations for avenues of future research; these are discussed below.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following subsections provide direction to future researchers seeking to extend the current research. These recommendations focus on the incorporation of a measurement for brand attitude and directions for the future examination and analysis of Social Media Performance.

6.5.1. Incorporating a Measurement of Brand Attitude

While the need for research to provide a clear focus to respondents, particularly when using scenarios, is acknowledged, research that focuses on a single brand should incorporate a measure of the respondent's attitude towards this brand. It is

proposed that an individual's preconceived attitudes towards a particular brand may be able to amplify or reduce their response to either positive or negative Social Media Performance. Future researchers considering examining the concept of Social Media Performance with relation to a specific brand should therefore consider incorporating a measure of brand attitude as a control.

6.5.2. Social Media Performance

The current research formally introduced the concept of Social Media Performance. Social Media Performance has been alluded to in the literature (Odden, 2012), yet lacked distinct operationalisation and formal testing. The following subsections relate to the further examination of the Social Media Performance construct.

6.5.2.1. Sub-dimensions of Social Media Performance

The current research considered the overall number of responses that an SNS user received on their user-generated content, combining the number of 'likes' and comments and treating these responses similarly. SNS users may however hold different perceptions of performance, in terms of differing responses, particularly for different types of user-generated content. The current research examined a particular type of user-generated content, particularly posting a personal, brand-related photograph to an SNS. It is however possible that the overall performance required to be satisfied with the response on a specific type of user-generated content, may not be equal for other types of user-generated content. It is furthermore suggested that the number of different responses, such as likes or comments, may have differing degrees of satisfaction for different types of user-generated content. An example of this would be if an SNS user were to post content that required a verbal response, in the form of a comment, from their online community, they may never be satisfied with receiving only 'likes' on their content, regardless of the number of 'likes'. Alternatively users posting a photograph may be satisfied with the performance of this content if receiving only 'likes' as opposed to comments.

The current research considered the number of responses that an SNS user received on their user-generated content, thus combining the number of 'likes' and comments and treating them as the same. SNS users may however hold different perceptions of performance, in terms of differing responses, for different types of user-generated content. Future research could consider breaking down the concept of *an overall response* into the 'likes' and comments, treating these as separate sub-dimensions of perceived performance.

6.5.2.2. Quantifying Social Media Performance

The current research proposed that Social Media Performance followed the ECT, in that SNS users held some initial expectations of performance of their user-generated content. The subsequent perceived performance either fell above or below this initial frame of reference, resulting in satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). Future researchers could seek to

quantify an individual's expectations of performance on SNSs, with regards to specific types of user-generated content as suggested.

6.5.2.3. Linking Social Media Performance with Self-esteem, Social Media Usage and Emotion

The current research highlighted three moderating variables, namely self-esteem, social media usage and emotion, which influenced the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. These three variables were included based on the theoretical foundations built in the existing research. Much of this research drew strong parallels between the positive and negative feedback mechanism, a likened to Social Media Performance, and each of the moderating variables. It is suggested that for future research, a quantification of an SNS user's expectations of performance of their user-generated content, allowing researchers to establish any possible relationships between this quantitative measure of Social Media Performance and self-esteem, social media usage and emotion. It is suggested that individuals with differing levels of self-esteem, may require different responses to their user-generated content in order to obtain the same level of satisfaction from their Social Media Performance. The same proposition holds true for individuals with differing social media usage patterns as well as differing levels of positive and negative affect.

6.5.3. Conspicuous Displays Without Consumption

A further avenue for future research that was not examined in the current research relates to the concept of conspicuous displays without any actual consumption. The literature has identified that SNS users create associations with particular brands on SNSs in an attempt to develop and maintain their self-identity in a social context (Mensel & Petersen, 2011). It is suggested that future researchers consider the extent of the correlation between SNS conspicuous displays of particular brands and offline conspicuous displays of the same brands.

As Veblen's (1994) earliest theories propose, individuals tend to mimic levels of consumption, seemingly beyond their means, in order to give the impression of belonging to a higher social class (Kaus, 2013; Trigg, 2001). Future research should thus determine if these conspicuous displays of non-consumption on social media are able to translate to conspicuous consumption of these particular brands offline, or if these online associations remain just that – an association created to maintain one's self-identity, with little probability of converting to real-life conspicuous consumption behaviour.

6.5.4. Examining Specific Emotions

The current research examined emotion as two distinct dimensions, namely positive and negative affect. A recommendation for future research would be to dissect the overall emotion construct into specific emotions, alternatively to supplement the two-dimensional model with the inclusion of specific emotions. The uncertainty regarding

the relationship between positive and negative affect in the literature (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Diener *et al.*, 1985) indicates that these constructs could be supplemented with specific emotions in order to better understand emotions as drivers of behaviour.

Previous research has considered specific emotions, such as awe, anxiety and sadness, in determining the key motivators behind the sharing of online content (Berger & Milkman, 2012). It is suggested that the evaluation of Social Media Performance may be closely linked to specific emotions while distanced from others and as such it is proposed as an avenue for further research.

6.6. CONCLUSION

This research sought to determine whether self-esteem, social media usage and emotion influenced the relationship between the Social Media Performance of brand-related user-generated content and conspicuous consumption, as per the research question and objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The implications of the results for each moderating variable, as highlighted in the research question, are discussed below.

The findings of the current research stress the importance of active engagement with consumers on social media platforms. This engagement is particularly significant given the ability for positive Social Media Performance to influence short-term states of both positive and negative affect, ultimately influencing self-esteem and behaviour. The implementation of Social CRM would allow brands to engage in meaningful dialogue with SNS users that provides mutually beneficial outcomes. The findings have also indicated how activities on SNSs, combined with user characteristics are able to have real-world effects on the purchase decisions of conspicuous products. User characteristics, such as self-esteem, social media usage and emotion have been shown to amplify or reduce the effect that Social Media Performance exerts on conspicuous consumption. The ability for consumers to create, share and recommend user-generated content provides brands with the necessary tools to engage in meaningful consumer-brand interactions (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). Again, it is imperative that consumer-brand interactions on social media create mutual benefits for both the brand and the consumer (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Mainwaring (2011) warns against creating interactions on SNSs when business interests are the primary driver behind these interactions. It is suggested that online engagement should be used to enhance a brand's broader purpose (Mainwaring, 2011).

This research has also highlighted the importance of implementing gamification principles into social media strategies. These principles create a desired behaviour through consistent rewards (Robson *et al.*, 2015). This ensures that SNS users who choose to engage with the brand on social media platforms are consistently rewarded with acknowledgement from the brand. Not only would this result in repetitive behaviour on behalf of the SNS user, but this would also contribute to the SNS user positively evaluating the performance of their online content. The

implementation of gamification principles would allow users to continue their interactions with brands on social media while maintaining these interactions in the future. Furthermore, this would ensure that SNS users social media usage would increase, which has been shown to directly correlate with acts of conspicuous consumption.

Brands are also encouraged to understand that social media cannot be utilised in the same manner as other communication channels, but it should be viewed as complementary. It should also be noted that SNS platforms cannot be viewed as distinct communication channels; instead brands need to ensure an overarching social media strategy is created that seeks to make consumer experiences a number one priority (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). In line with having one overarching strategy, brands need to ensure that all components of their digital marketing strategy are seamlessly integrated and offer consistent information throughout. Furthermore, it is important that brands are authentic in their communication with SNS users, as users are only likely to engage with brands that they deem to be authentic and transparent in their online communications.

This research has introduced the concept of Social Media Performance, a construct that has been alluded to in the literature, yet lacked distinct conceptualisation and empirical testing. This research has shown that an individual's perceived performance of their user-generated content on SNSs is able to influence their real-life consumption behaviour. This research, through a combination of digital marketing, psychological and consumer behaviour theories, has indicated how certain SNS user characteristics are able to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption. This research has further indicated the extent to which brands are able to influence the relationship between Social Media Performance and conspicuous consumption through the moderating variables.

The current research identified a negative correlation that existed between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, supporting the notion of a compensatory relationship. This compensatory relationship was able to influence consumption behaviour. The positive correlation found to exist between social media usage and conspicuous consumption, further stressed the importance of online consumer engagement on SNSs. Particularly, this engagement should seek to keep SNS users engaged for a longer period of time, ultimately resulting in increased conspicuous consumption behaviours. Neither sub-dimension of emotion was found to significantly correlate with conspicuous consumption, which appears to be in contrast with literature that suggested that emotion drove consumption behaviour.

Recommendations for future researchers that seek to develop the literature on Social Media Performance have been suggested. These recommendations relate to breaking down the Social Media Performance construct into different measures of performance, seeking to quantify subjective measures of Social Media Performance and examining the links between performance and the moderating variables, self-

esteem, social media usage and emotion. The final recommendation concerned the evaluation of distinct emotions as opposed to the summated dimensions of positive and negative affect.

This research was constrained by limitations, and these limitations have been acknowledged. These limitations relate to the use of a non-probability sampling technique, the use of a contrived scenario, the lack of environmental control associated with online questionnaires, the use of a single brand and well as issues with the convergent validity of some scales. While the researcher attempted to curtail the influence that these limitations placed on the findings, the results are generalised with the necessary caution.

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Appendix A: Control Group Questionnaire



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Management Studies

Dear respondent, it would be greatly appreciated if you would take 15 minutes to fill out the following questionnaire and take part in this research project. This study is being conducted by a Masters student in the Management Studies department at UCT. The purpose of this study is to examine your attitudes towards the Nike brand, your use of Facebook and the link between your evaluation of online performance and conspicuous consumption. Please be aware that some social networking sites could infringe on your privacy. Please note that your responses will be completely anonymous and your participation is voluntary. You are allowed to remove yourself from the research at any point if you wish. This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. If you would like any further information regarding the study, please contact: Caitlin Ferreira at caitlin.ferreira@uct.ac.za.

Please answer the following questions by ticking the correct box:

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Question: 1 | Do you have a personal account on Facebook? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 2 | Have you ever posted, commented on, or interacted with any content related to a brand? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 3 | Are you between the ages of 18 and 29 years old? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 4 | Are you aware of the brand, Nike? Note that you do not need to own (or have owned) a Nike product. | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you have answered yes to all of the above questions, please continue with the rest of the questionnaire. If you answered no to any of the above questions, you are not required to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Indicate your choice by circling a number as shown below:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 5: | How many total Facebook friends do you currently have? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 6: | In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes have you spent on Facebook? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '5' represents 'strongly agree.'

| | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Neither agree nor | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 7. | Facebook is part of my everyday activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I am proud to tell people that I am on Facebook. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Facebook has become part of my daily routine. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I feel I am part of the Facebook community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | At times, I think I am no good at all. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | I am able to do things as well as most other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | I certainly feel useless at times. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I wish I could have more respect for myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I take a positive attitude toward myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate the extent to which you have felt this way over the last few days. Note that '1' represents 'not at all' and '5' represents 'extremely.'

| | | Not at all | A little | Moderately | Quite a bit | Extremely |
|-----|--------------|------------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 23. | Interested | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | Distressed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | Excited | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | Upset | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | Strong | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. | Guilty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. | Scared | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. | Hostile | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. | Enthusiastic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. | Proud | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. | Irritable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. | Alert | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. | Ashamed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. | Inspired | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. | Nervous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. | Determined | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. | Attentive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. | Jittery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. | Active | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. | Afraid | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '6' represents 'strongly agree.'

| Before purchasing a product... | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------|----------|-------|------------------|----------------|
| 43. | ...It is important to know what friends think of different brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 44. | ...It is important to know what kinds of people buy brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 45. | ...It is important to know what others think of people who use certain brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 46. | ...It is important to know what brands or products to buy to make a good impression on others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please answer the following questions:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|
| Question 47: | Have you ever purchased a Nike product? | Yes | | No | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|
| Question 48: | Are you male or female? Please tick | Male | | Female | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Question 49: | Please indicate your age? | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Question 50: | Please indicate your race below by circling one of the options provided. |
|---------------------|--|

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|
| Asian | Black | Coloured | Indian | White | Prefer Not to Answer |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|

Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact the researcher should you have any further questions.

Appendix B: Experimental Group 1 Questionnaire



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Management Studies

Dear respondent, it would be greatly appreciated if you would take 15 minutes to fill out the following questionnaire and take part in this research project. This study is being conducted by a Masters student in the Management Studies department at UCT. The purpose of this study is to examine your attitudes towards the Nike brand, your use of Facebook and the link between your evaluation of online performance and conspicuous consumption. Please be aware that some social networking sites could infringe on your privacy. Please note that your responses will be completely anonymous and your participation is voluntary. You are allowed to remove yourself from the research at any point if you wish. This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. If you would like any further information regarding the study, please contact: Caitlin Ferreira at caitlin.ferreira@uct.ac.za.

Please answer the following questions by ticking the correct box:

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Question: 1 | Do you have a personal account on Facebook? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 2 | Have you ever posted, commented on, or interacted with any content related to a brand? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 3 | Are you between the ages of 18 and 29 years old? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 4 | Are you aware of the brand, Nike? Note that you do not need to own (or have owned) a Nike product. | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you have answered yes to all of the above questions, please continue with the rest of the questionnaire. If you answered no to any of the above questions, you are not required to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Indicate your choice by circling a number as shown below:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

SCENARIO: You posted a photo of your new Nike shoes that you just purchased to your Facebook profile. You tag the Nike fan page in your update to ensure that they will see the post. A short while later, you notice that Nike have acknowledged your post and responded. Furthermore, your status has received many likes and comments and was widely acknowledged by your online community, this response has greatly exceeded your initial expectations.

Keeping this scenario in mind, please answer the remainder of the questionnaire.

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 5: | How many total Facebook friends do you currently have? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 6: | In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes have you spent on Facebook? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '5' represents 'strongly agree.'

| | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Neither agree nor | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 7. | Facebook is part of my everyday activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I am proud to tell people that I am on Facebook. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Facebook has become part of my daily routine. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I feel I am part of the Facebook community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | At times, I think I am no good at all. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | I am able to do things as well as most other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | I certainly feel useless at times. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. | I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I wish I could have more respect for myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I take a positive attitude toward myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate the extent to which you have felt this way over the last few days. Note that '1' represents 'not at all' and '5' represents 'extremely.'

| | | Not at all | A little | Moderately | Quite a bit | Extremely |
|-----|--------------|------------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 23. | Interested | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | Distressed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | Excited | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | Upset | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | Strong | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. | Guilty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. | Scared | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. | Hostile | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. | Enthusiastic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. | Proud | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. | Irritable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. | Alert | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. | Ashamed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. | Inspired | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. | Nervous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. | Determined | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. | Attentive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. | Jittery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. | Active | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. | Afraid | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '6' represents 'strongly agree.'

| Before purchasing a product... | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------|----------|-------|------------------|----------------|
| 43. | ...It is important to know what friends think of different brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 44. | ...It is important to know what kinds of people buy brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 45. | ...It is important to know what others think of people who use certain brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 46. | ...It is important to know what brands or products to buy to make a good impression on others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please answer the following questions:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|
| Question 47: | Have you ever purchased a Nike product? | Yes | | No | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|
| Question 48: | Are you male or female? Please tick | Male | | Female | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Question 49: | Please indicate your age? | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Question 50: | Please indicate your race below by circling one of the options provided. |
|---------------------|--|

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|
| Asian | Black | Coloured | Indian | White | Prefer Not to Answer |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|

Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact the researcher should you have any further questions.

Appendix C: Experimental Group 2 Questionnaire



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Department of Management Studies

Dear respondent, it would be greatly appreciated if you would take 15 minutes to fill out the following questionnaire and take part in this research project. This study is being conducted by a Masters student in the Management Studies department at UCT. The purpose of this study is to examine your attitudes towards the Nike brand, your use of Facebook and the link between your evaluation of online performance and conspicuous consumption. Please be aware that some social networking sites could infringe on your privacy. Please note that your responses will be completely anonymous and your participation is voluntary. You are allowed to remove yourself from the research at any point if you wish. This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. If you would like any further information regarding the study, please contact: Caitlin Ferreira at caitlin.ferreira@uct.ac.za.

Please answer the following questions by ticking the correct box:

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Question: 1 | Do you have a personal account on Facebook? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 2 | Have you ever posted, commented on, or interacted with any content related to a brand? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 3 | Are you between the ages of 18 and 29 years old? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Question: 4 | Are you aware of the brand, Nike? Note that you do not need to own (or have owned) a Nike product. | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you have answered yes to all of the above questions, please continue with the rest of the questionnaire. If you answered no to any of the above questions, you are not required to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Indicate your choice by circling a number as shown below:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

SCENARIO: You posted a photo of your new Nike shoes that you just purchased to your Facebook profile. You tag the Nike fan page in your update to ensure that they will see the post. A short while later, you notice that Nike have not acknowledged your post and have not responded. Furthermore, your status has received very few likes and comments and was not acknowledged by your online community, this response falls far below your initial expectations.

Keeping this scenario in mind, please answer the remainder of the questionnaire.

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 5: | How many total Facebook friends do you currently have? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Question 6: | In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes have you spent on Facebook? | |
|--------------------|--|--|

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '5' represents 'strongly agree.'

| | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Neither agree nor | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 7. | Facebook is part of my everyday activity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I am proud to tell people that I am on Facebook. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Facebook has become part of my daily routine. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I feel I am part of the Facebook community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | At times, I think I am no good at all. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | I am able to do things as well as most other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | I certainly feel useless at times. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20. | I wish I could have more respect for myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I take a positive attitude toward myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate the extent to which you have felt this way over the last few days. Note that '1' represents 'not at all' and '5' represents 'extremely.'

| | | Not at all | A little | Moderately | Quite a bit | Extremely |
|-----|--------------|------------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 23. | Interested | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | Distressed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | Excited | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | Upset | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | Strong | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. | Guilty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. | Scared | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. | Hostile | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. | Enthusiastic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. | Proud | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. | Irritable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. | Alert | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. | Ashamed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. | Inspired | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. | Nervous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. | Determined | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. | Attentive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. | Jittery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. | Active | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. | Afraid | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Note that '1' represents 'strongly disagree' and '6' represents 'strongly agree.'

| Before purchasing a product... | | Strongly Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Moderately Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------|----------|-------|------------------|----------------|
| 43. | ...It is important to know what friends think of different brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 44. | ...It is important to know what kinds of people buy brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 45. | ...It is important to know what others think of people who use certain brands or products I am considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 46. | ...It is important to know what brands or products to buy to make a good impression on others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please answer the following questions:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|
| Question 47: | Have you ever purchased a Nike product? | Yes | | No | |
|---------------------|---|-----|--|----|--|

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|
| Question 48: | Are you male or female? Please tick | Male | | Female | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Question 49: | Please indicate your age? | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Question 50: | Please indicate your race below by circling one of the options provided. |
|---------------------|--|

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|
| Asian | Black | Coloured | Indian | White | Prefer Not to Answer |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------------------|

Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact the researcher should you have any further questions.