Assignment 1

Title:
What sacrifices do we make in order to blend in between online and offline communities and how much of our self-identity do we lose?

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There are many variables in today's society which occur to truly impact who an individual portrays themselves to be. Self-identity is believed to be one of two major key aspects of the human mindset (Horowitz, 2020). Although social media enables the expression of multiple identities, normative beauty standards prevalent in Instagram communities are popular with users, helping them blend into their offline communities. However, is blending into these social norms the right thing to do? I believe we should be able to express ourselves using these social media platforms, not confine ourselves to blending in.

Expression of Multiple identities

Social media enables the expression of multiple identities because self-identity is made up of a variety of conscious and unconscious decisions one will make over time in order to fully form their self-identity and place within a social or cultural setting. Thus theory can apply to both online and offline social and cultural settings, sometimes more commonly than not it can result in one's self-identity changing to different levels depending on the different variables around each platform (Horowitz, 2020). According to **Instagram versus Snapchat: Self-expression and privacy concern on social media;** "Individuals adjust multiple selves to match a given social environment and societal and interpersonal value". Thus meaning many individuals will adjust themselves and how they want to be portrayed depending on the social environment and the audience they are being viewed by (Choi & Sung, 2018). Social media allows users to self-express to any extent they desire. Values, beliefs and individuals' mindsets all play a role in how one wants to display themselves and how they choose to interact with people and the relationships they form. According to the book **Culture and social media: An elementary textbook,** it's quite common to see the younger generations trying to keep up their public image and identity on social media which usually results in spending more time updating their status' or posting new pictures resulting in them missing out on creating the opportunities of real-life events and relationships offline (Acar, A. (2014). With this said, social media users and in particular the younger generations use social media to keep up to date with their everyday lives. Many even go so far as to portray themselves with multiple identities in order to reach their ideal self-image, which is ultimately their end goal. Instagram is a huge platform for individuals to use for self-expression. According to figure 1.1 Instagram is more commonly used to gain the self-identity of one's ideal self rather than their true self (Choi & Sung, 2018).

Figure 1.1 - Statics of an experiment Instagram VS Snapchat
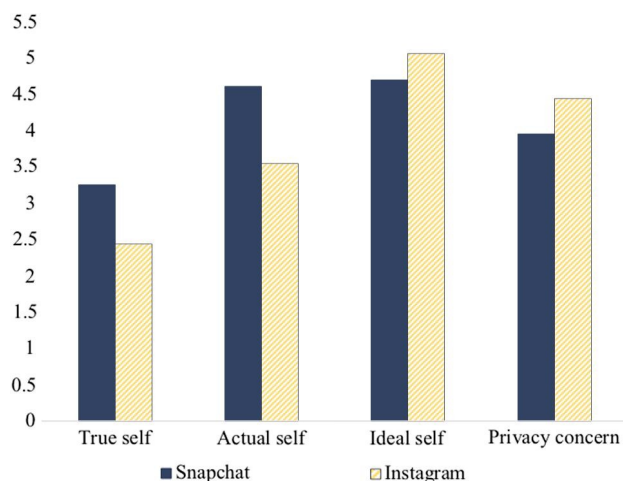
Notes. SNS usage frequency is included as a covariate

(Choi & Sung, 2018).

Instagram Beauty Community Standards

Despite this Instagram beauty communities tend to promote similar visual standards for users forming their identities within the platform. Beauty communities are one of the most popular categories of communities within the Instagram platform. According to **Popular Communities on Instagram** the aesthetics of the online platform allow users to showcase the beauty communities with ease ("Popular communities on Instagram: Fashion and beauty | Union Metrics", 2020). Instagram is a photo based online platform, users are simply able to capture their vision and post it with a click of a button, compared to other online platforms like Facebook and Twitter; which both are word base platforms and therefore can be more timely to the user (Choi & Sung, 2018). The journal article; **Insta-Identity: The Construction of Identity Through Instagram** shows research from **Pictures Speak Louder than Words: Motivations for Using Instagram** and **Instagram: Motives for its use and relationship to narcissism and contextual age,** has found a few motives for using this particular platform. These being: to gain surveillance/knowledge about others, being cool and creative, for self-expression, boredom, and escaping and/or documenting real life (Lee et al., 2015,Seibel, n.d., Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

These motives plus the conveniences of posting a picture allows the beauty communities to influence a user's idea of the self-image they want and that is expected of them in order to make a name for themselves on this platform. This is due to the rise in becoming Instagram famous. Sarah Young, a blogger for **Independent**, wrote an article called "**Why we should be worried about the rise of "Instagram Face",** in this article Sarah expresses how Instagram is becoming a platform for fake beauty standards and an increasingly large number of users are following trends and even starting to reform themselves to look more like celebrities and beauty influencers (Young, 2017).

These beauty standards are popular with users because platforms like Instagram have played a crucial role in a user's self-esteem and positive vs. negative images of one's self. Social media has started to gain a prevalent role in today's everyday life so the influence it can have on individuals is huge. Beauty communities can range from make-up to hair, to nails, to even overall body image. According to the book **Beauty, Body Image, and the Media,** online platforms subconsciously affect users perception of beauty within these communities by "thin ideal images often accompany various advertised products, the pairing of which reinforces the idea that if you buy or use a particular product, you, too, can be beautiful" (Jennifer S. Mills, Amy Shannon and Jacqueline Hogue). This stigma also applies to social media platforms like Instagram that are photo based. Instagram allows users to follow multiple hashtags, other users and official accounts that all display an image of the ideal identity many users want. However, this is an aspect users chose to expose themselves too via Instagram rather than the ideal identity being exposed to them without knowledge. A particular image that is often displayed within the feed of Instagram is a "selfie". Selfies allow users to display their "true self-identity" through one image. These are usually displayed in everyday situations to capture a moment in time. Although with this said the evolution of a selfie has dramatically changed (Seibel, n.d). The definition of a selfie is a photo one would take themselves to quickly post on their social media, usually taken with a mobile phone ("SELFIE | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary", 2020). Yet in today's online societies many selfies are no longer taken with ease. The blog post **"How To Take A Good Selfie: 12 Selfie Tips To Consider"** by Stephanie Saltzman and Jenna Rosenstein is just one example of thousands of blogs and vlogs that give users an insight on how to perfect the selfie taking process. Something so simple that once was done with a click of a button, in the moment, is now idealised as something that needs to be perfected before other users can see it (Saltzman & Rosenstein, 2020). Figure 1.2 shows another example of the extended one would go to to get the ideal selfie look (Cauldron, 2018). Once the perfect selfie has been taken, platforms like Instagram then offer the ability to edit the image sometimes transforming it into a new identity. These key aspects taken for the perfect picture allow users to stick to those social media identity expectations and reach their end goal of one's ideal self, often losing who they truly are in the meantime (Seibel, n.d).

Figure 1.2 - A camera roll full of selfies
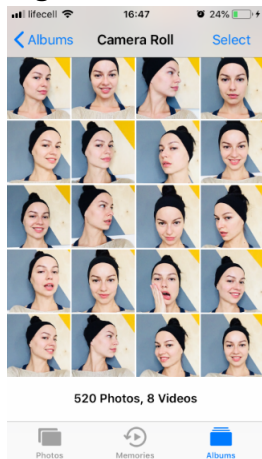
(Cauldron, 2018)

Blending in Offline Communities

Users spend so much time perfecting their online image and identity within the communities they then use these standards to blend into their offline communities. People of today's society who are actively browsing and posting online feel the need to share every little detail about their lives through their platforms of choice. According to the book *Culture and social media : An elementary textbook* our social media platforms have become a great informative tool for many eventful times within our lives that we capture offline to later be posted throughout our online platforms. These are big events like new births, engagements and weddings to smaller events like family gatherings, kids carnivals and/or achievements. There are also the more sorrowful events like a death in the family or a friend/family member's funeral. The book **Culture and social media : An elementary textbook** states a fair few people in our societies use at least one social media platform to announce information to everyone at once, instead of private conversations offline like breakups or new found friendships (Acar, A. (2014).

Many of today's users blend their identity from their online and offline environments together because social media plays such a big role and has such a big impact, that to them these blend their expectations and ideal identities. According to the journal article **Beauty Imbalance: Social Media's Dictation of Worth,** social media has rapidly grown for its overall impact in today's society from 5% to 69% between 2005 to 2018. This dramatic impact on one's everyday life is why many users are blending the standards they feel exist in online and offline communities (Washburn, Aileen (2018). As seen in figures 1.3 and 1.4 online platforms like Instagram are more obvious with their influences on one's mind and expected ideal self, with the availability of so many hashtags, accounts and top posts /and searches. However, offline environments also have this influence; which can be seen in figures 1.5 and 1.6, but we do not realise it as they are such common elements of our everyday lives. Brands no matter the industry are constantly aiming for us to purchase their products, the beauty industry is no exception! Many beauty brands will use multiple marking tools in order to appeal to our ideologies, psychological triggers, our motives and expectations of different brands and products and the effect they can have on us. Many users already have the mindset of not being good enough or not living up the standards that are displayed throughout their social media platforms on a daily basis. There is however no escape as the beauty communities are still streamed offline too between store layouts, advertisements, pop up displays and product placements many brands are influencing their consumers decision subconsciously while in these environments. The same consumers who are then becoming users on their social media platforms (Quelch & Cannon-Bonventre, 1983, Washburn, Aileen (2018).

Figures 1.3-Showing a search of Beauty hashtags "#beautyroutines"
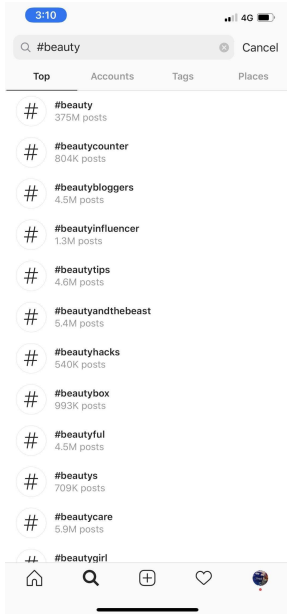
(Tallowin, 2020)

Figure 1.4-Showing top pictures of
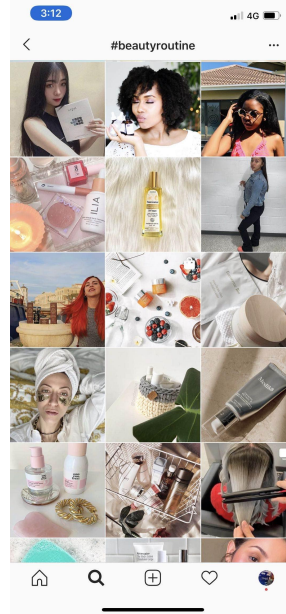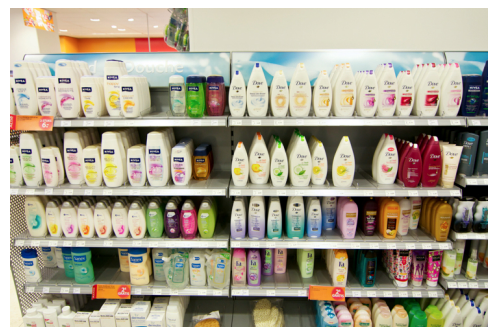

(Tallowin, 2020)

Figures 1.5-Dove pop-up display

(Dove- Mass Merchant, 2020)

Figure 1.6-Product placement

(Harmes, n.d.)

Users feel that to blend in is so important because otherwise feelings of being an outcast, or always being stared at in public can develop. Those feelings of never being good enough because you don't fit into society norms or the lack of self-esteem and body image issues are all affected by the feeling of wanting to and possibly not blending in and being different in some way or another. Usually when people think of fitting in, many think of the period during primary school and high school, where everyone wanted to "fit in" with the popular kids and being different got you picked on or made fun of. Usually this mindset stops once graduation comes around and one outgrows their adolescent phase, however this is not always the case and social media as a result has a lasting impact on these people in particular. These things still stick with us over time, but as we gradually live our lives, as we don't try so hard to "fit in" as to "blend in". Blending in in today's society is not the easiest thing to do as there are still so many influences of who we should

be and the expectation of one's ideal-self. The need to feel accepted and the same as everyone else is still there. Online and offline beauty communities are displaying images of some beauty trends that fall higher than the user's mindset and this then creates the expectation of one's ideal-self. Blending in might not be the easiest thing to do but with the increasing amount of technology, the beauty communities are able to influence users daily thus creating that sense to want to blend in and the gap of not actually blending in (Cannon, 2016, Schall et al., 2014).

Overall the beauty communities whether online or offline have a really big impact on today's society and the beauty image users have when it comes to blending in. The relationship users have inside their minds between their self-identity and their ideal identity they want to be is usually a negative one because of the gap. There are so many platforms available for self-expression and Instagram is a great tool for this, but at what cost? Personally I believe social media plays a big role in our everyday lives but I think it should not really affect who we are as people and even more important how we perceive ourselves. Everyone is guilty of letting some sort of community influence who they are, but is losing your true self-identity really worth it. The extremes we can go to blend in is affecting our societies and subsequently the beauty communities online and offline are not helping. If they were to portray a more positive image of being your "true self" many users would not try to blend in as much as trying to find who they are as a person and who they want to be, not the person society wants them to identify as.

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