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Online Private Self-Disclosure's Potential for Experiential Value Co-creation

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Abstract

Purpose – This study integrates and extends existing approaches from self-identity literature by examining the underexplored aspects of online private self-disclosure. The study first explores the experiential value co-created when consumers voluntarily self-disclose on public platforms. Second, it sheds light on what motivates such consumers to disclose private self-images and experiences, thus giving up some degree of privacy on an unrestricted platform.

Design/methodology/approach – We conducted 65 laddering interviews and observed the profiles of ten consumers, who actively posted self-images on Instagram, through a netnographic study. Then, we implemented a means-ends chain analysis on interview data. online posts of self-image

Findings – We found that online private self-disclosure can involve a co-created experiential value that consists of consumers' self-affirmation, affective belief, and emotional connection. These value components derive from three higher-order psychological consequences – empowerment, buffering offline inadequacy of self-worth, and engagement – and four functional consequences – opportunity to learn, online control, self-brand authenticity, and impression management.

Implications – Operationally, we propose that Instagram could be configured and synched with other social networking sites to provide a more complete representation of the online self. Using algorithms that simultaneously pull from other social networking sites can emotionally connect consumers to a more relevant and gratifying personalized experience. Additionally, managers could leverage our findings to tailor supporting tools to transfer consumers' private self-disclosure skills learned during online communication into their offline settings.

Originality – This research contributes to the extant marketing literature by providing insights into how consumers can use private self-disclosure to co-create experiential value, an emerging concept in modern marketing that is key to attaining satisfied and loyal consumers. We show that, even in anonymous online settings, consumers are willing to self-disclose and progress to stable intimate exchanges of disclosure by breaking their inner repression and becoming more comfortable with releasing their desires in an emotional exchange.

Keywords: Social networking sites, self-disclosure, private identity, experiential value,

means-ends chain analysis, laddering.

With the emergence of digital communication channels, the role of online self-disclosure (i.e., revealing personal information) has become fundamental to consumers' experiential value co-creation (Lin and Utz, 2017; Shih et al., 2017; Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Disclosing the self through a series of activities (e.g., exchanging knowledge and experiences, co-building content, sharing statuses and videos) can facilitate the development of intimate relationships among consumers (Luo et al., 2015; Muniz and Schau, 2005). It is therefore key to attaining satisfied and loyal consumers (Grewal et al., 2009), and is an important goal for service companies (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009). The extant literature distinguishes between online *public* self-disclosure, which refers to consumers' tendency to expose their public identity to others (Batenburg and Bartels, 2017; Belk, 2013; Kozinets and Kedzior, 2009), and *private* (or *intimate*) self-disclosure, which entails inner liberation of personal desires, affective states, and values (Kozinets et al., 2017). While studies have investigated private self-disclosure on social media platforms with a restricted audience (e.g., Batenburg and Bartels, 2017; Carpenter et al., 2018; Farci et al., 2016; Gruzd and Hernández-García, 2018; Kang and Wei, 2020; Krämer and Schäwel, 2019), no research has considered private self-disclosure's potential to co-create value on a *public* platform, where the audience is unrestricted and the potentiality for co-creating value seems high. However, private self-disclosure on such a platform may also come at a risk, like the rejection of one's intimate self and the violation of one's privacy. Therefore, this study aims to examine online *private* self-disclosure's potential to co-create experiential value for consumers in the context of a public platform.

More specifically, little is known about the attributes and consequences of private self-disclosure on public platforms leading to value co-creation. For instance, some consumers publicly share sensitive and potentially stigmatizing information on Facebook (Nosko et al., 2010). The growth of selfies and other visual forms of communication and

interaction also increase disclosure of the intimate self through the public display of the

personal settings in which many of these images are captured (Lasén, 2015; Park et al.,

2011). One precursor to private self-disclosure is the *online disinhibition effect* (Chiou, 2006;

Joinson, 2007; Suler, 2004), or the decrease in consumers' behavioral inhibitions in online

settings (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012). While this effect is attributed to the anonymity and

invisibility of online communication, it remains unclear what drives consumers to disclose

their private self online. Past research has investigated the motives behind public self-

disclosure in online settings (Kim and Dindia, 2011; Trepte and Reinecke, 2013), but the

attributes and consequences of online *private* self-disclosure and in particular the

experiential value that consumers can co-create when sharing intimate information to a mixed

audience of strangers, acquaintances, and friends are under-researched.

  We contribute to the extant marketing literature on self-identity and self-disclosure by

providing substantive insights into the attributes and consequences (both functional and

psychological) that characterize *private* self-disclosure on online public platforms, leading to

value co-creation. Our findings reveal that, even in anonymous, online settings, consumers

are willing to disclose themselves and progress to stable intimate exchanges of disclosure by

breaking their inner repression and becoming more comfortable with releasing their desires in

an emotional exchange with others. We show that online private self-disclosure encourages

consumers to engage in deep exploration, which in turn promotes an appreciation of diversity

by releasing internal desires through creative energy, herein termed "experiential value."

Experiential value captures the collective creativity as well the differentiated experiences

that engage consumers and empower them to establish long-term relationships (Prahalad and

Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). We categorize experiential value into self-

affirmation, affective belief, and emotional connection. In doing so, we provide a deeper

understanding of the nature of experiential value derived from private self-disclosure by

exploring and identifying its attributes and consequences. Based on our findings from Instagram, we further reveal that consumers participate in online intimate discourses by accepting controversial self-expressions that could be more intimate, discreet, or personal, which may not be acceptable according to offline social norms or only accepted in private message platforms. Our findings have practical implications as they can help social media managers how to guide and activate experiential value by unifying the private self-disclosure with the public self. For instance, Instagram could be configured with other social networking sites to provide a complete representation of the online self. In doing so, Instagram and other social networking sites could provide more tailored supporting tools to help empower consumers achieve a gratifying personalized experience.

In the following section, we discuss the phenomenon of online private self-disclosure and its potential to co-create value. Then, we present our findings and conclude the study with a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications, along with limitations and some directions for future research.

Online private self-disclosure and the role of value co-creation

Online private self-disclosure involves the unveiling of intimate aspects of one's self, such as emotional experiences and deeply personal information (e.g., love affairs, domestic life) (Farci et al., 2016; Lin and Utz, 2017). This is attributed to the disinhibition effect, which consists of a lowered sense of the restraint people use to hide emotions as well as personal needs, desires, and thoughts from others (e.g., Joinson, 2007; Suler, 2004). The disinhibition effect in online settings is typically attributed to both the anonymity and invisibility of online communication (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012).

Anonymity and invisibility are related, but distinct constructs. First, anonymity, or the condition of being unidentifiable to others (e.g., being nameless and of unknown weight, age, occupation, ethnic origin, residential location), is considered a major determinant of

disinhibited behavior (e.g., Joinson, 2007). Usernames and email addresses may be visible, but this information may not reveal much about a person, especially if the username is contrived and the email address derives from a large Internet service provider. More specifically, anonymity can be either visual or discursive (Qian and Scott, 2007). Visual anonymity occurs when the physical presence of a message source cannot be detected due to a lack of any visual representation of a person, such as pictures or video clips (Postmes et al., 2001), while discursive anonymity occurs when verbal communication cannot be attributed to a particular source.

Second, invisibility refers to communicating or disclosing information to an audience without physically seeing or hearing one another. Invisibility amplifies the disinhibition effect (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012), as it renders stereotypes and prejudices related to, for example, gender, age, and skin color, irrelevant (McKenna and Green, 2002). Even if the identity is known, invisibility fosters a unique form of social presence that relies on perception, awareness, recognition, or acknowledgment of others because consumers are not physically seen or heard when posting online. The diminished physical social presence may lead to a process of communication-induced deindividuation, which in turn may produce instances of disinhibition. Although consumers on social networking sites might not always be anonymous, they are always invisible to their audience.

Being physically invisible amplifies the sense of freedom and disinhibition that characterizes online communications (Suler, 2004). Such an online context of enlarged disinhibition provides consumers with the opportunity to co-create experiential value for themselves (Kao et al., 2016; Sorensen et al., 2017), where self-disclosure can serve as a driving mechanism of such value co-creation experience. Unveiling one's inner self to others can be construed as a continuous value co-creation process as it emphasizes consumers' experiences, logic, and ability to extract value from the resources used (e.g., social

networking sites) (Grönroos, and Voima, 2013; Luo et al., 2015). In essence, consumers can

co-create value by revealing their inner thoughts and desires to others through social

networking sites.

Today's various modalities of online communication (e.g., email, chat, video) and

environments (e.g., social, vocational, fantasy) facilitate diverse expressions of oneself. Each

setting indeed provides a different perspective on identity, as these modalities and

environments have been developed to create an atmosphere of "authentic" experiences of co-

created production and consumption (Kurylo, 2020). For example, blogs invite comments,

social media thrive on interaction, and smartphones are increasingly used for text messaging,

taking and posting photos and videos, and geo-locating to connect with others (Belk, 2013).

In particular, social networking sites offer consumers options of self-presentation and, in

these environments, they can choose to be totally anonymous, pseudonymous, or identifiable.

Although the posting itself might reveal something about the message source, in an online

environment, consumers usually feel anonymous when their personal information (name,

email, gender, location, etc.) is withheld (Qian and Scott, 2007). Therefore, one may argue

that online social networking sites provide consumers with a sense of anonymity (Scott et al.,

2011), which encourages them to discover their complete identity without subconsciously

repressing their inner private self as experienced in face-to-face communications.

The sense of anonymity that typically accompanies social networking sites

considerably lowers the threshold to disclose one's identity, opening up opportunities to build

intimate relationships with other consumers and in this way co-create value. Indeed, as

consumers feel less restrained and express themselves more freely online, they begin to better

understand and develop themselves through collaboration, application, and information

sharing (Auh et al., 2007). Thus, consumers can create their own online communities where

they learn from one another's experiences, obtaining reciprocal benefits (Alalwan et al.,

2017). In doing so, consumers explore new emotional and experiential dimensions of their

identity, which encourage deeper and richer forms of interpersonal exchange that help

continue relationships.

Despite the relevance of prior research findings (Eagar and Dann, 2016; Kang and

Wei, 2020; Rokka and Canniford, 2016; see also Table 1 for a summary of prior research

findings on self-disclosure), marketing researchers have given little attention to the process of

value co-creation in which consumers disclose their intimate self in interaction with others on

public platforms. This experiential value co-creation process is aided by the new

opportunities provided by digital media, which allow both consumption and production of

online content (Belk, 2013; Kurylo, 2020). Online consumer experience is constantly

evolving and allows value creation through a temporally accumulative process, emerging

through past, present, and future (envisioned) experiences (Voima et al., 2011). Therefore,

the aggregate self on social media is conceived from a personal perspective, jointly

constructed and shared with others through digitized and shared mementos online (Belk,

2013; Rokka and Canniford, 2016). For example, "selfies," or self-taken photos, are carefully

crafted in an attempt to reach followers and likes. Symbols of this tendency can be found in

popular selfie tags, such as #pickoftheday, #instalook, #instafame, #instasavvy, or

#tags4likes, which are used as signals to accumulate experiences and encourage new

followers.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The feedback gained from online social interaction through signals (e.g., "funny," "useful," "cool") encourages consumers to interact by reciprocating and reinforcing the review content in a more interesting and meaningful way, which in turn accelerates interactions and contributions. Thus, consumers can co-create experiential value by integrating social media resources with the activity of disclosure (process) to achieve an attitudinal response (outcomes) in their own social context (Voima et al., 2011), where self-disclosure increases the overall liking of the discloser.

However, risks are also involved in revealing information about oneself to others, such as rejection by the listener and reduction of one's autonomy and personal integrity (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). In addition, consumers risk a negative outcome if they feel the information may be used in a manner that is harmful to themselves or unfair (Gruzd and Hernandez-Garcia, 2018). When self-disclosing online, privacy can be compromised because the revelation of personal data is public or because social networking sites provide less control over the usage of personal data by other parties than do face-to-face situations. Despite these risks, consumers seem fascinated by the opportunity of disclosing their self to others (Kokolakis, 2017). They seem particularly inclined to self-disclose online as this enables them to communicate with others without having to attend to auditory, visual, and contextual cues (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions; Green et al., 2016).

Method

The present study adopted a netnographic approach, along with qualitative interviews, in accordance with other investigations on consumer identity (Belk, 2013; Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Kozinets et al., 2017; Rokka and Canniford, 2016). Regarding the implementation of this methodology in social media research, Kozinets (2015) explains that netnographic research takes advantage of social media affordances in accessing and archiving data (e.g.,

the ability to conduct searches on hashtags) and therefore offers opportunities to observe the

phenomenon under study much more broadly and systematically than ethnographic research.

The data collection conducted in this study was aimed at providing a rich description

of how digital platforms motivate private self-disclosure and how self-disclosing actions may

represent a form of co-created experiential value.

Research setting

In this study, we focus on Instagram due to its popularity as an online social network.

Instagram embeds social network connectivity, searchable hashtag functions, and the ability

for each photo to become a self-contained conversational thread (Cedillo, 2014). The use of a

"#" ("hashtag") commits the Instagram user to an intentional public display by deliberate

choice (Kedzior and Allen, 2016). As the selfie is tagged, consumers can participate in an

experiential value co-creation process through content and photo sharing (Rokka and

Canniford, 2016).

Additionally, Instagram can capture a true reflection of consumers' devotion to self-

exposure. Instagram has about 800 million users; 61% of Instagram's active users in the

United Kingdom are between the ages of 18 and 34 years (Statista.com, 2018). Instagram

differs from other social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, which are quite

noisy with additional clutter that requires divided attention to other interactive facilities such

as messages, posts, live feeds, videos. Instagram, in contrast, is a photo-sharing service

developed as a mobile phone app that takes advantage of selfies (Kedzior and Allen, 2016),

which, in contrast to other forms of digital self-presentation, feature individual consumers as

the focal subject and typically serve the purpose of representing the self to the fullest extent

possible (Eagar and Dann, 2016; Iqani and Schroeder, 2016). Therefore, selfies represent a

vehicle for the development of the self by fostering social connectedness through visual

expressions and emotions.

Sample selection

The inclusion criteria for this netnographic study consisted of having an open Instagram account for over a year and having been active (i.e., posting at least 50 self-expressive activities a month, such as uploading selfies or representative images of daily activities or commenting on posted images and at least six selfies a week) for six months prior to their interview.

To assess the boundary between private inner desires and public exposures, it was essential that the selection criteria included highly engaged consumers who actively digitize their selves by documenting and annotating their self-expressive lives (e.g., uploading at least six selfies a week via blogs, images, or Instagram stories; see Belk, 2013). Note that active posts do not include browsing behavior; we opted to use this criterion as a benchmark of user's devotion to and enthusiasm for Instagram, which is essential when exploring the attributes and consequences behind online self-disclosure, given that a large portion of an individual's self is produced online (Belk, 2013). The selection criteria were based on Kozinets' (2015) netnographic approach, in which analysis primarily involved observing images and textual discourse. Our sample involved consumers who were engaged in self-expressive activities on Instagram. Photographs were the main focus, as images typically take on a crucial role in communicating the essence of one's identity (Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016; Rettberg, 2014; Van House, 2011).

Using the aforementioned selection criteria, we interviewed a total of 65 consumers who were active Instagram users (age range: 18–40 years; 53% male, 47% female). Of these, 50% were students, 29% were at a senior level of employment, and 21% were at a junior level. Table A1 in the Appendix outlines the sample, with pseudonyms, gender, age and occupation. Additionally, we (the first author and a research assistant) observed 10 of the interviewees by following their online engagement. All interviewees freely volunteered to

participate in the study, after receiving information about the task involved and being assured

of full confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected during the study. We also

obtained ethical approval from the institute in which the research was conducted.

Observational study

We made observations after gaining explicit consent from 10 interviewees to observe

their online posts of self-image. We searched for posts with the hashtag #selfie and captured

up to 50 of the most recent pictures during each engagement with the platform. We also

investigated comments provided by other consumers to posted selfies to shed light on others'

reactions to disclosed private identity. We analyzed the images in the context of other self-

related posts by clicking through to the user's account and capturing posts that occurred

immediately before and after the focal selfie. We observed a total of 12,000 images from

examining threads such as "pickoftheday," "my mood," "my story," "my morning vibes,"

"every day moments," and "live story boards." We chose these threads for their rich content,

descriptiveness, relevant topic matter, and conversational participation by a range of

community members, which we considered important to avoid being misled or unduly

influenced by an unrepresentative minority.

Analysis of observational data

First, we pre-classified identity images into topics either relevant or not relevant to the

disclosure of the core identity. Next, we further evaluated the images and texts to carefully

formulate focused subcategories of what constituted online public and private self-disclosure

and the attributes and consequences behind the disclosures. This was achieved by carefully

evaluating what was on the image, whether it was one person or a group of people, what

comments were left after, whether it was generic or specific to an image, whether the

comments were controversial, and how much conversation was achieved from the posting.

We compared data in each subcategory with the data from other events coded as belonging to

the same category to investigate the similarities and differences (Spiggle, 1994) until data saturation was achieved. The analysis was not aimed to understand all types of identity, but rather to emphasize the prominent themes to the attributes and consequences of private self-disclosure.

Interview: Laddering technique procedure

In addition to the observational study, we used a semi-structured, laddering interview technique (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2008). Each ladder obtained from a respondent results in a hierarchical network that connects attributes to functional consequences, psychological consequences, and personal values. The laddering technique allows the implementation of the means-ends chain (MEC) theory (Botschen et al., 1999), which is based on the belief that consumer behavior is driven by personal values. These values represent higher-order goals or desired end-states in life (Gutman, 1982). This theory posits that attributes (A) derive their relative importance from satisfying (functional and psychological) consequences (C), which, in turn, derive their importance from satisfying higher-order personal values (V) (Grunert and Grunert, 1995). By combining means and ends, the laddering technique can uncover the consequences that help satisfy higher-order personal values associated with online private self-disclosure. Such higher-order values can provide substantial insights into the nature of online private self-disclosure as a phenomenon that is distinctive from online public self-disclosure. Through the conceptualization of a bottom-up process underlying the evaluation of private self-disclosure, we gave meaning to the lower-level attributes, as well as to functional consequences, which reflect tacit skills resulting from social network consumption that facilitate private self-disclosure, and psychological consequences, which reflect the meanings and feelings resulting from the skills gained and are specific to online private self-disclosure.

Consistent with past work adopting this technique (Jüttner et al., 2013; Lemke et al., 2010; Phillips and Reynolds, 2009), in the present study the interviews were executed through direct questioning, while following unstructured interview format. Direct questioning was structured in a way that evoked a realistic situation (see Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). For example, interviewees were asked to think of a realistic occasion on which they would post images/comments or emblems such as #pickoftheday, #instalook, #instafame, #follow4follow, #f4f, or #tags4likes. This method helped generate the attributes most important to interviewees when they thought about online private self-disclosure. The laddering interview began by eliciting concrete attributes. Next, we used the probing technique of asking *why* certain answers were given and whether the disclosure was classified as either private or public self-disclosure to help elicit more abstract elements that informed consequences and values of online private self-disclosure. Essentially, the interviewer asked respondents why each attribute was important, using a simple question like "Why is that important to you?" The interviewer took notes to identify the elements brought forth by the interviewee that might be useful to understand the level of abstraction (i.e., consequence or higher-order value) of each concept. The notes aided the laddering technique by probing into the distinctions each interviewee made regarding attributes and consequences to private self-disclosures. The interviewer ensured the elicited value was regarded as private self-disclosure by asking if the disclosure was perceived as public or private and then which pole (public or private) was preferred. The interviewer conducted a communication check by repeating back what the interviewees said and, if needed, asking for further clarification.

We adopted a soft-laddering technique (Grunert and Grunert, 1995; Veludo-de-Oliveira and Ikeda, 2006), whereby questions were directed to encourage interviewees to produce attribute–consequence–value chains for each given motive behind the inner private self-disclosure due to the elaborate cognitive structures. For example, why would it be

important to post the unspoken images of yourself to your online community? This

encouraged interviewees to become increasingly more abstract as they moved from attributes

through consequences to values, encouraging an extensive use of their cognitive structures.

To eliminate subjectivity, we employed an independent research assistant to

transcribe the data (Kirk and Miller, 1986). The interviewer made notes on contextual

material to ensure data contextualization. Transcripts were cross-checked with the audio

recordings to ensure that detailed accounts of the data were accurately captured (Denzin and

Lincoln, 2000).

Analysis of the laddering data

The laddering technique comprised three steps, which allowed us to develop

attribute–consequence–value chains. The first step of analysis consisted of classifying all the

interview responses as attributes, consequences, or values. By carefully reading and rereading

the interview content, we assessed the context in which discrepant self-meanings surfaced

using the partial open-coded method (Straus, 1989) along with Krippendorff's (2004) content

analysis, by reading between the lines of the transcripts being assessed. Initially, these

transcripts were coded in Microsoft Word and then recoded in NVIVO, with no reference

made to the initial Microsoft Word coding to assess the consistency of coding. We then

compared all themes from the transcripts within and between each transcript. We next

sectioned scripts of texts into broad headings to identify the emerging themes, experiences,

and determinants of private self-disclosure. The transcribed responses were broken down into

tighter categories of themes of consumers' emotions and experiences that emerged. All

transcripts were individually coded where responses were broken down into thought units,

which helped determine the consumer's journey on Instagram and the experiences that led to

the attributes and consequences behind the disclosure of private self-identity.

In the second stage, we examined the laddering data with the goal of developing a

comprehensive list of "content codes." These content codes consisted of single words or

phrases, which together summarized all participant responses. The aim was to group similar

responses and represent them by the same content code. Transcripts were categorized

according to the closeness of the coding system developed, which were matched according to

the closeness of set categories (Altheide, 1996). Texts that could not be categorized within

the initial coding categories were given a new code. The codes were general enough to allow

replication of meaning, that is, to ensure that the cell frequencies in the summary score matrix

were not so low that a hierarchical value map (HVM) could not be created; however, they

were not so general that too much meaning was lost or dissimilar concepts were coded into

the same content code (Grunert and Grunert, 1995; Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). The HVM

helped establish the connection of each attribute of private self-disclosure to functional and

psychological consequences. By establishing the attributes and consequences of private self-

disclosure through functional and psychological consequences, we were able to identify the

key experiential values of private disclosure.

We created a summary score matrix to serve as the basis for determining the dominant

connections between the key elements, which was used to help calculate a frequency count of

the key elements of private disclosures. Importantly, the goal at this level of the analysis was

to focus on meanings central to private self-disclosure and the underlying attributes and

consequences.

In the third stage, one of the researchers and another rater assigned all of the verbatim

interview responses to the content codes (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). Interrater reliability

was achieved through the agreed-upon assessment between the two raters when categorizing

responses. The summary matrix represents the "ladders" elicited from interviewees, showing

the linkages between the concepts (attributes, consequences, and values). The analysis began

by investigating adjacent relations, that is, if A→B, B→C, and C→D, then a chain A-B-C-D is formed. The aim of the HVM is to represent the interview data by ensuring that the dominant connections are illustrated while maintaining interpretability. A summary example of an HVM relationship is reported in Figure 1 to show the dominant path of self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection obtained from the interview data (see the Appendix for more details on this example).

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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A summary ladder is therefore represented as follows (words in italics form the dominant pathways):

(D) users are *emotionally connected* as a result of their…

(C) …*online engagement*…

(B) …which *authenticated the individual's self*…

(A) …and gives the user the ability to *correct the misrepresented self*.

The overall matrix of relations among elements was calculated by counting each time an interviewee mentioned a relationship among elements. The formation of each ladder led to several higher-order associations for a given interviewee. These summary codes were aggregated into a smaller number of broad categories with direct and indirect connections to help construct an HVM as depicted in Figure 2. A cutoff level of eight was used for the number of times two content codes were linked on the HVM (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). In the HVM reported in Figure 2, attributes are defined as the individualistic characteristics that encourage online private self-disclosure. In light of the probing (why) questions posed during the laddering interview, we identify the individual attributes that reflect their importance from their functional consequences, which in turn lead to psychological

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consequences. In addition, the psychological consequences lead to experiential values, which are the aggregate accomplishments achieved from private self-disclosure online.

In the HVM displayed in Figure 2, we distinguish the hierarchical levels and connection strengths using different types of arrows; for instance, the attribute "Misrepresentation" was linked 15 times to the functional consequence "Self-brand authenticity," which in turn was linked 17 times to the psychological consequence of "Engagement." This latter element, in turn, was linked 17 times to the experiential value of "Emotional connection." For readability purposes, only connections that were mentioned at least 8 times are depicted. We used a frequency matrix like the one reported in Table A2 (see the Appendix) to detect each pathway connection, which informed the construction of the HVM illustrated in Figure 2.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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By drawing on the multi-method approach through the adoption of a netnographic study along with qualitative interviews, in accordance with other investigations on consumer identity (Belk, 2013; Cappellini and Yen, 2016; Kozinets et al., 2017; Rokka and Canniford, 2016), we captured wider perspectives and trends through a macroscopic lens, while zooming in on the individual level through a combination of observational levels. We used this form of analysis to corroborate the findings from the observational study with the interviews, thus cross-validating the hierarchical network that connects attributes to functional consequences, psychological consequences, and personal values. More specifically, the netnographic study helped establish the three components of experiential value, while the analysis of the interviews established the hierarchical network summarized in Figure 2. The multiple threads

of in-depth analysis helped us establish how *private* self-disclosure in the context of a public

online platform contributes to experiential value co-creation for consumers.

Results

The qualitative analysis yielded different online disclosure attributes, consequences,

and experiential values. Figure 2 provides an overview of MEC elements which are the

attributes, functional and psychological consequences, and experiential values. In this figure,

each attribute connects to one or more consequences. In turn, each of these consequence

elements connects to one or more experiential values. These linkages help establish how

disclosing the private self online represents a form of co-created experiential value, what cues

trigger the desired relational outcome, as well as the attributes and consequences of private

self-disclosure. Based on our findings, we distinguished three categories of experiential

value: self-affirmation, affective belief, and emotional connection. Together, these three

categories shape the experiential value that encourages the deployment of private self-

disclosure. The analysis revealed four functional consequences that underlie the disclosure of

the private self-identities – opportunity to learn, online control, self-brand authenticity, and

impression management – and three psychological consequences – empowerment, buffer

offline inadequacy of self-worth, and engagement (see Figure 2).

Part 1 – Experiential value

In this section, we discuss in depth the findings for each of the three components of

experiential value: self-affirmation, affective belief, and emotional connection. Together,

these three components show that consumers express experiential value to protect their self-

integrity and act as a mechanism to either empower (self-affirmation), buffer offline

inadequacy of self-worth (affective belief), or engage themselves (emotional connection).

Building on Pine and Gilmore (2013), who conceptualized the 4Es model (educational,

entertainment, escapist, and esthetic experiences) to reflect different combinations of

absorption–immersion and passive–active participation experiences, we extend the

application of experiential value to the context of private self-disclosure on social media. Our

findings illustrate how consumers transform real-life experiences into online experiences to

feel a sense of empowerment, buffer offline inadequacy, and engage themselves in emotional

connections with others. The presence of a virtual community allows self-empowerment

through a mutual understanding of synchronized experiences in real time and location. In this

context, escapist experiences can be important, as they place consumers in the middle of the

excitement, which requires that the consumer becomes an actor or participant who affects the

event in a real or virtual environment (e.g., virtual reality tours). To do so, the consumer

walks their followers through the evolved and transformed self, thus providing an opportunity

to express their view through depicted pictures, short video, and text as a way to celebrate

and solidify the current identity (Mennecke et al., 2011). For example:

> "The emotions when posting and receiving comments are fresh so it solidifies and
> synchs my identity simultaneously. I can finally be proud of myself by walking
> my followers through my experiences which helped shape who I am…
> …the endless reaction from the audience makes me feel the effort to
> systematically put the experiences together and in the chronological order is all
> worth the while as I'm empowered to display my experiences which is valued by
> my followers." (Victor, Male, 26)

Field notes and observations make apparent that extreme acts, statements, and images

seem to be the quickest way to grab followers' attention and a way to build a network that

helps transform the flow of experiential value into self-affirmation, affective belief, and

emotional connection. The experiential value is experienced through a hedonic lens:

consumers passionately liberate the core self by creatively exhibiting their lives to the

network; the unrestricted reaction of the audience substantiates the experiential value.

Self-affirmation

The first category of experiential value derived from the data is self-affirmation. Self-affirmation is a collective interaction of shared ritual, tradition, and responsibility among consumers to elicit feedback from others directly or indirectly to increase social approval, acceptance, and general liking (Bazarova and Choi, 2014).

The findings indicate that consumers exercise and push intimate self-disclosure boundaries in an attempt to seek self-validation. Thus, expectations of intimacy and norms in social networking sites guide consumers to the dyadic principle. A dyadic principle in an online context is the interactions shared among recipients across a diverse audience and regarded as acceptable (Bazarova and Choi, 2014; Gilbert and Karahalios, 2009). The dyadic principle is informed by the social network, which facilitates engagement. Interviewees reported that engagement was initiated by friends during interactions in which an element of peer pressure encouraged interviewees to open an account. After they opened their accounts, interviewees expressed that they co-created a relaxed environment of reciprocity in sharing photos of themselves with various filters to help create a more enjoyable and fun experience for themselves and to attract new consumers (see Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). For example:

"Instagram is not like any other social network, it's fun and has a relaxed environment of creating content.… We all create content and co-create content whether it's through images or through the various filters, comments and or short videos." (Isla, Female, 32)

Social network relationships gradually penetrate over time, which interviewees perceived as "boring" unless they are balanced with a dialectic of openness. The openness into personal thoughts and reflections that deal solely with the self helps create an intimate relationship built on trust and respect. Followers who interpret and respond to a user's activities are critical to the circular process of self-disclosure. This form of self-disclosure leads to a form of *diffused intimacy*, as coined by Bucholtz (2013), due to the combination of

trust toward others, self-disclosure, and acceptance of the risks and uncertainties associated

with sharing private information on a public platform (Farci et al., 2016). This process is

diminished when there is nothing stimulating about the post or image and, therefore, no

reaction from followers is activated. As a result, the co-created online experience diminishes

the creativity factor of online engagement. Consequently, such followers would limit

interaction with these consumers and focus on other consumers that post the *unknown*

(private) self to activate a reaction. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

"It's boring to show images that everyone has seen before but in different variations. You see when I post images, my number one objective is followers, and I keep asking myself what will increase my followers, it's setting new trends. Everyone has their own way of setting trends, but it's the creativity that gets the hits.…Creativity is showing others something they probably do but they don't know how to make it cool, like I posted my tattoo that I had done on my hip, it's small and elegant, it's mainly in white with a bit of black. The fact it was white, and I can keep it discreet is what got my hits…. The way I presented it in my gallery, I was able to share the thoughts that went in my mind like a story of my thoughts before I committed to it." (Hannah, Female, 29)

"By posting something as intimate and as discreet as my white tattoo on my profile gave some self-reassurance and affirmed my … belief that there is an online community that I belong to and that makes me feel empowered (I still keep my tattoo away from my family offline, which is why I chose to have it white so they can't notice it – but I'm happy to post it online) …. Through the online interactive engagement, I received from my followers, that were genuinely interested in my personal and intimate disclosure by asking questions that were not judgmental, such as whether it hurts to have it done, where I got it done, etc…. which increased my desire to share intimate and private aspects of my life." (Rose, Female, 29)

These quotes illustrate that posting photos on Instagram is like maintaining a personal

art gallery, in that they capture the holistic value of their experiences. The photos tell a

meaningful story by guiding the viewer through the occurrence of events so that they too can

experience and relive the story.

The obstruction from being public and maintaining the core of privacy in being

discreet provides a sense of community, leading to signals of respect and belonging to

communities that help affirm their self and that desire to share. Essentially, affirming the self-

image through the act of sharing encourages agents and actors to destabilize, channeling the

inner desires to public norms that create interest and direct the communication flow.

Affective belief

The second experiential value that we identify is affective belief, which is an emotional

state directed at an object or experience that produces more diffused responses, such as anger,

pride, and happiness (Frijda, 1993). Social media provide a channel that facilitates an

abundance of image sharing that generates emotions among consumers and adds an

entertaining quality to its active use (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Our findings indicate that a

positive feeling emerges from the ability to update the self in a way that leads others to be

more content about their appearance through positive energy within the online community. A

common theme from the findings is that consumers feel insecure about their appearance.

Thus, updating the self to appear appreciated by the online community creates a positive

belief about the self to restore or sustain one's perception of adequacy by affirming their core

values or personal characteristics. For example:

"Instagram is a platform that helps me become aware of my updated self to lead
and ensure I am at the forefront with rich and trending information about myself."
(Sara, Female, 22)

"Instagram allows me to create a community of positive energy, like I surround
myself with positivity which gives the confidence to post intimate aspects of my
life which makes me feel content. When I share myself and experiences with
others I re-live the experience and events that led to my decisions, and that takes
away my insecurities and gives me control." (John, Male, 32)

The increased number of followers per posting helps foster the affective belief by

forming online relationships with anonymous consumers, which are essential for a

consumer's experience of feeling in control of their online image exposure. For example:

> "People … follow me because it's interesting to follow, I'm real. I do not post
> images of food – that can be interesting for short while but what keeps my posts
> high is how I present myself online.... My account adds value to them and that's
> because I am happy to tell people that have body aesthetics done to my body and
> especially my face. I'm not fake – I'm real – to achieve my looks it does cost
> money because I was not made beautiful that way I want to be, so I perfect and
> update my image the way I want to." (Wendy, Female, 33)

Ultimately, this form of disclosure creates trust due to the emotional bond created

between followers and a poster, enabling them to move beyond rational prediction to take a

leap of faith that trust will be honored and reciprocated (Wicks et al., 1999). Our results

extend Batenburg and Bartels' (2017) findings by providing further insights into why respect

and likeability is achieved when disclosure includes a wider network of followers. Our

findings show how consumers gain affective beliefs about themselves through the desire to

be known and understood by others according to their self-views (i.e., beliefs and feelings

about themselves). Our findings also provide more insights into the *type* of "interaction" and

forms of "self-expression" motives that Lee et al. (2015) find. Displaying and sharing inner

insecurities about the self among followers, who include unfamiliar others, require trust and

belief in oneself. It is the moral character of "being real" in the congruent trusting

relationship between the consumer and the followers. Trust helps structure passions into

externally organized interests of self-image, which are carefully constructed to communicate

honesty. This honesty is likely to gain attention, and the consumer is liked, followed,

commented on, and shared. The new connections are then reinforced to transform the existing

self with connection that becomes salient to the private self. The online platform encourages

more free-flowing energy of simultaneous experiences that encourage private self-identity

expression that otherwise would have been collectively repressed.

Emotional connection

The third experiential value concerns the emotional connection with other consumers.

The emotional value of online interaction has become a crucial link in generating memorable

experiences for consumers, which, in turn, impacts private self-disclosure. This is because the

emotional tie developed from active use of Instagram creates a relationship that solidifies

personal identity. It is a sense of reestablishing the connection one has with oneself. This

form of relational value to one's self-identity creates a loyal relational meaning to other

consumers online (Atkin, 2004). Relational meanings emerge from being able to organize

one's public and private identities into portfolios displayed to consumers, which emotionally

bonds consumers to engage in prolonged use of Instagram. Meanings are collectively forged

and shared among online communities from diverse walks of life and different geographic

locales to experience deeply satisfying feelings of community and solidarity. For example:

> "Instagram is a platform that has helped me transform my inner repressions –
> exposing what my real thought and emotions [are]. All my life I have grown up
> being told how to behave, what is acceptable and not. With Instagram, I can
> finally break free from all these rules and create my rules, which is quite
> empowering. What's surprising is that there are a lot of people out there that are
> experiencing the exact same feeling. I remember posting my imperfect beach
> figure – something I've never done before because I was never happy about my
> figure – so I put the raw photo out there with no filters. I wanted to know people's
> reaction – I think this is the one time when my account had so many followers
> and comments, which made me feel so much better about myself – I felt really
> emotionally connected with people unknown to me but gave me a satisfying
> meaning and affirmed myself. Because of my inner disclosure and active use, I've
> developed a long-term relationship with my online community." (Ella, Female,
> 25)

> "The good thing about designing my own gallery is that I can set portfolios of my
> identity and experiences…. It's like organizing my public and private identity
> giving a holistic view of myself. I'm actually displaying my complete self to
> users, so they get to see me in social contexts and in solitary context, which

solidifies my identity and gives me an inner satisfaction with my online community, and likewise my online community does the same, so we all end up seeing each other's complete selves from different walks of life – and that's what encourages active disclosures and acceptance." (Josh, Male, 30)

Emotional responses are key components of online disclosure experience and value that reside in both hedonic and utilitarian aspects (Sandström et al., 2008). The preceding quote makes apparent that Instagram facilitates the display of a seamless storyline that is consistent with other images that represent the public self and gently penetrate to private self-disclosure (inner repressions), stimulating emotional value through the careful presentation of the private self-identity. For example:

"It is important to me…. My gallery is my art, unlike other arts it's about my ability to portray myself, my chain of thoughts through a story line, where people can see how my thoughts and identity has evolved, which stimulates an emotional connection, and it's what allures people to see my gallery." (Emily, Female, 36)

It is clear from observational and interview findings that the emotional value is recognized through the development of an active online desire to reveal personal information relevant to the core self, organized in a gallery of personal events and thoughts across a timeline. Our findings are consistent with Belk's (2014) research in that the emotional connection is not about building brand communities, but a co-production of an entire system alongside other consumers, who are interlinked in diverse ways. The co-productions are channeled through technology interface into particular interests that promote disclosure of a strong desire to interact. These desires are emotionally interconnected, producing and transcending consumption with a wider social system.

Part 2 – Consequences and attributes

We identified four categories of functional consequences that can motivate consumers to self-disclose online to enhance their experiential value. Each of the functional

consequences has associated psychological consequences, which provide a deeper

understanding of online private self-disclosure.

Opportunity to learn

The first functional consequence we identified is opportunity to learn. "Learning is

the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it" (Kolb,

1984: 41). Learning is actively constructed in consumers' minds from their experiences; thus,

each consumer generates his or her own rules and mental models by reflecting on personal

experiences (Bruning et al., 1999; King and Wertheimer, 2017). Kolb's (1984) learning style

holds that learners actively construct their own knowledge of their reality, which is

determined by their experiences (Elliott et al., 2000). This method of learning involves

cooperation, experimentation, open-ended problems, and real-life scenarios in which people

discover knowledge through active involvement (Kolb,1984). Given the emphasis on

interaction and self-reflection, Kolb's learning style provides a useful foundation for each

component of our findings, namely, task-based learning, interdependent learning, and

intuitive learning. When consumers self-disclose online, they actively engage their minds for

knowledge development through learning experiences. They not only absorb the events

unfolding before them, but are engaged through active participation.

We identified *task-based learning* as an attribute connected to opportunity to learn.

Indeed, being an active member on Instagram encourages consumers to actively experiment

on their image posts by reflecting on and observing followers' reactions. This is because

consumers view Instagram as a learning mechanism that facilitates more stimulating learning

activities (e.g., photography), which improves satisfaction. For example:

> "I [came] to like photography and [become] an indie blogger on traveling from learning to use Instagram.… I feel quite fulfilled to learn a new skill." (Levi, Male, 25)

> "I like to discover new possibilities on how to display my image. I like to be innovative as I hate repetition, a lot of people just copy others' style … and for that reason I spend time when I post my image and decide on which gallery to post on, it's a journey posting these images where time and thought is given." (Hazel, Female, 29)

This form of learning corresponds to Willis' (1996) task-based learning in the sense that the consumer increases fluency in mastering meaning in their galleries and profiles in a naturalistic setting (Ellis, 2009). This is also consistent with Kolb's (1984) learning model, in that consumers reflect on their identity and assimilate and accommodate the best method to disclose their private identity, which involves active experimentation. Interviewees noted that Instagram facilitates their developmental learning, such that they stretch their skills beyond the traditional offline exposure, because online social media facilitate the active, sensing, visual, and sequential dimensions of learning. Consumers who actively use Instagram view their image exposure as active learning through a double loop, by continuously reflecting and analyzing the structure and sequence of their self-disclosure. This process is sequenced through the multiple iterations of identity framing, analysis, and solution development to achieve the consumers' perceived acceptable image exposure, using personal experience to assist the development of private identity disclosure. For example:

> "I find myself constantly reviewing my gallery and reflecting on the sequence of events. It's an iterative process where I'm trying to frame my disclosure in a coherent way as I'm introspectively analyzing my personal experiences – it's a learning process of how to diffuse my intimate disclosure into my gallery by blending the public and private self in a skillful and innovative way. It's a bit like experimenting what works and what gets most followers." (Ian, Male, 28)

Essentially, consumers feel empowered when they are able to post self-taken images to expose their innovative photography skills as well as their identity in a structured manner. Our field notes indicate that interviewees were passionate about the disclosure of their identity, which suggests an intrinsic form of motivation. They were much happier to reflect on their storyboards, which gave them the opportunity to show off their new photography skills in a poetic format in which each image illustrated a specific skill developed from the previous photo, whether it was color coordination or adding filters or even blurring the background. Not only did they develop their skills, but they also focused more on the core private self by pushing the boundary and revealing an extreme desire in a subtle but progressive way.

In addition, we identified *interdependent learning* as a second attribute connected to opportunity to learn. The interviewees noted that their online participation was structured around goals that determined how they interact, while the interaction pattern determined the outcomes of the situation, such as increased number of followers or the excitement of an enhanced self-esteem. This form of interaction extends value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), in that consumers learn by observing the choices being made by others, reflect on their core identity, and then react by either promoting or obstructing the image. Indeed, while value co-creation mainly focuses on the competitive nature of individualistic behavior to obtain goals, our findings suggest there is an element of cooperation to a more holistic view of private self-disclosure, to achieve complete self-disclosure. In doing so, consumers exchange resources, influence, and trust to achieve the mutual goal of private self-disclosure on a public platform.

This type of interdependent learning falls into the cognitive school of thought, as learning is built on active mental processing and connectivism (Siemens and Tittenberg, 2009). We incorporated both Kolb's learning style and Gestalt's theory of learning (King and

Wertheimer, 2017) to gain greater insights into this dimension of learning. Essentially,

consumers are acquainted with the goal of creating content that adds experiential value to

their network, which falls under Gestalt's learning theory. The overall goal is achieved by

acknowledging that different types of tasks will incur different cognitive processes, which is

supported by Kolb's (1984) model, as some consumers are better at learning through

seeing/copying others through the processing continuum. The observations provide the

psychological basis for channeling individual efforts into a coordinated system of action to

move the group toward goal attainment and maintain the viability of the cooperative system.

For example:

> "I learn to sort my gallery out by getting some inspiration of other people's galleries. I usually just browse, but sometimes I stop and stare into a picture. A picture that says a lot about a person." (Ian, Male, 28)

> "I feel more empowered when I see others learn from me – they are able to match my core self with their identity, and this can be observed through their posts, galleries, and stories. It's like they are learning about themselves too, and this form of learning empowers people to move towards a common goal by collegiately learning from each other – it's an unspoken structure to learning about ourselves, being liberated and freed like gaining our independence and achieving the ultimate goal of gaining experiential value." (Chris, Male, 40)

Therefore, an Instagram community unites around a common goal of cohesion,

increasing friendship and affinity through a shared identity. As people's behaviors unfold to

reveal their private identities, they do so in response to their cognitive representations of

situational contexts. It is clear from the observations and field notes that such behavior is

influenced by mutual influence, trust, and constructive management of conflict, which

together accelerate interdependent learning and self-promotion.

Furthermore, we identified *intuitive learning* as a third attribute connected to

opportunity to learn. Our findings suggest that having an Instagram account lends itself to

intuitive learning when consumers commit to posting new information about their daily

activity. This corresponds to Kolb's (1984) model on the perception continuum that

consumers prefer to learn by thinking and feeling. The concrete experience and abstract

conceptualization allow consumers to learn from specific experiences in which they can

relate to the online community as well as logically analyze their own and others' galleries to

find an intellectual understanding of the disclosures. Searching to improve their experiences

and photo sharing through added filters encourages engagement. The acquired entertainment

helps facilitate engagement through the continuation of learning new skills through filters,

observing trends, and day and time for feedback from followers. Essentially, it boils down to

a purposeful act of enhancing the co-created online experience through individual and

situational filters. For example:

> "In the early period of producing a photo on Instagram, I felt a little unsure of
> what a good picture is and what a bad picture is. But once I kept seeing the
> references of cool photos from bloggers' or professional photographers' photo
> streams, I [came] to understand much more of how to appreciate photography…
> observing my followers accounts learning from them and getting feedback…. the
> back and forth an iterative process but fun way of developing new skills and also
> giving something back." (William, Male, 37)

> "At first, I was afraid that my photos will not be appreciated, I didn't really have
> confidence about my photography skills, and initially it felt that Instagram users
> were supposed to be good at it, but once I joined I become addicted to sharing my
> photos, it's fun sharing photos, it's an activity involved in my daily life." (Katie,
> Female, 26)

The active involvement of the value-in-use helps create the enduring experience

through consumers' ability to manipulate images unpredictably and inconsistently. In such a

way, consumers can maximize their intrinsic rewards through the continuously learned

evaluative process of what to expose online, which may represent a similar, different, or

updated version of their self-image. These findings extend Lee et al.'s (2015) finding that

consumers' browsing behavior entails observing profiles; we find that consumers browse other profiles for inspiration, which is more than just merely peeking through other profiles. Our findings show that learning and improving one's self-identity is a skill that stimulates unconscious thoughts, motives, and defenses to engage in an online community.

Online control

We identified *online control* as a second functional consequence. Social media control has often been described in terms of consumers' online control, whereby consumers can limit who accesses their profile pages (i.e., adjusting profile visibility; Tufekci, 2008) and customize profiles to disclose different information to different audiences (Zhao et al., 2008). However, our findings suggest that consumers are fascinated by disclosures of others and motivated to disclose themselves. Consistent with recent research (Hallam and Zanella, 2017), our findings indicate that consumers' decisions are prone to biases and that social media cues might entrap consumers into disclosing information rather than withdrawing. However, consumers believe that they have self-disclosure control—that is, they can control what type of content to disclose—as well as utilitarian control—that is, they can control features that help manage the information displayed. We discuss both types of control next.

First, we identified *self-disclosure control* as an attribute connected to online control. Consumers are motivated to disclose their self-identity on social media platforms as they feel they are in control by means of regulating how much (or how little) disclosure they maintain with others. For example:

> "I like posting images of myself to everyone because it increases the number of followers, which to me is important to maintain the large volume of followers, but there is a small community that I constantly interact with on a one-to-one level, but that's not as important as my large number of followers…. It creates a 'self-brand' in the virtual society when I have more followers." (Jack, Male, 28)

"I like posting images of myself – even intimate images like my wedding photos – online because out of choice I post it and I do it because I know I'm in control – I can be selective on what images to disclose and how much of the event I want to disclose.… For example, on one of my galleries I posted all the details of the best man's speech and other galleries I would only provide a glimpse of the event to maintain closeness to my community. The point is I'm in control of what and how much I disclose to my followers – essentially my followers are the extended me, they are my new family, so I feel that I can disclose intimate aspects of my life to them and open up to them." (Lucy, Female, 26)

The breadth dimension of self-disclosure is prevalent in the wider community of followers as consumers perceive broader discussion points as a defensive device to regulate and limit contact. Since self-disclosure tends to be reciprocal, one's decisions about self-disclosure determine who has access to the discloser as well as to whom the discloser has access. Like offline self-presentation, which is contextual (Goffman, 1959), online self-presentation is less static.

The adjustment of self-disclosure outputs and inputs is a boundary regulation; the extent of control one maintains over the exchange of images contributes to the amount of privacy consumers choose to disclose to maintain their followers. For example:

"I set up an Instagram account because it's about me, my story. It's how I view myself, an introspection of my identity. I'm not saying this is what everyone should be like but it's an expression of myself. Gaining feedback is self-assurance; it helps modify and boundary of disclosure whether more detail is needed or even explanation per photo, it's what gives me confidence in selecting what I want others to see and how I want others to see it.… There're lots of help with the features such as filters etc. that allows for a fluid presentation of the self. There's also privacy setting which I sometime use to block my family from seeing some of my real thought images because they will never be able to understand me." (Nicola, Female, 33)

The process of sharing, co-creating, discussing, and modifying content encourages consumers to consciously regulate their interpersonal boundaries, which, in turn, affects the kinds of relationships consumers maintain with others when online (as in followers). As Instagram is solely focused on the individual, consumers only reveal their own identities

without construing others', which empowers consumers to reveal their private identities as they feel their privacy is regulated by themselves alone.

We identified *utilitarian control* as a second attribute connected to online control. Utilitarian control in the context of online social media refers to mechanisms or processes that adjust consumers' behaviors to adhere to the controlling privacy aspect of self-identity. Indeed, researchers have argued that, in a networked online environment, information privacy is no longer under consumers' control but rather rests with the organizations that hold the information (Conger et al., 2013). However, given the rising interest in personal data privacy, legal changes to the enforcement of the GDPR across Europe have empowered online consumers with greater privacy controls. Consequently, our findings reveal that consumers who disclose their online identity essentially feel in control of what they post in addition to how the information is managed. This is achieved by maintaining control over their privacy and the responsibility for the level of disclosure needed to tell their story from their perspective. For example:

"Having active followers is important to me. I like to be in control of what I do, my account has to be interesting, exposing something about myself that is different but reflective of me. If I conform to what everyone [else] posts, it becomes boring, I'm no different to anyone else and as a result I lose my followers – which is like losing control of my account." (Helen, Female, 28)

"Because I feel I have more control of my account, I feel more comfortable disclosing my inner self, knowing that my data will not be violated. When you manage a high volume of followers – you need to be true to yourself so how much you disclose is your management call – but the new legation on GDPR does give more control to users and reassurance that my information will not be used by other third parties." (Elena, Female, 26)

Reciprocating by increasing breadth of self-disclosure as opposed to depth limits the number of active followers. Therefore, consumer interest lies in the depth of disclosures, which we refer to as private disclosure. When consumers disclose generic information that is

broader and not specific to the individual, the disclosure is perceived to be boring, which

decreases the need for reciprocity and diverts attention of followers to other more interesting

accounts. Utilitarian control in the context of social media focuses on the management of

the high volume of followers, which creates a conflict between the depth and breadth of

exposure. It is clear from the field notes that consumers provide new meaning to user

control in the sense that they use the diversity and purpose of images as a means to vary

disclosure in networked environments. It is a creative means of expression that is

attractive and endless to consumers.

Self-brand authenticity

Many consumers post photos online to shape their impressions through *self-brand*

authenticity, the third functional consequence. Doing so facilitates self-brand authenticity

online through misrepresentation and personal security, which offer consumers the benefit of

many new cultures, desires, and passion for vicariously reestablishing and correcting self-

identity through the energetic flow of exhibiting oneself and watching the reaction of others.

We identified *misrepresentation* as a first attribute connected to self-brand

authenticity. Misrepresenting one's true identity offline can lead to abandonment behavior

due to poor impression management. In this scenario, consumers are concerned that what

they share online is more symbolic and relevant to their inner deeper identity and aim to

initiate a thread of discussion that concludes with the acceptance of unique identities. That is,

one's reality does not have to be someone else's reality. Online social platforms provide

consumers with the freedom to express the private identity as a unique quality as opposed to

being criticized or judged as having a dull profile that does not stimulate interest. For

example:

"The reason I post so many pictures of myself on Instagram is because I feel
misjudged by people around me. I feel I can't communicate to others my views,

instead I post pictures of myself online that I probably wouldn't have otherwise. Filters help organize my images…by interconnecting with others helps my confidence and correct misrepresentation of myself….
The comments received from my galleries initiate really good and meaningful discussions that I could never have dreamed to have face to face. People that follow me and respond to posts – it's like we are a tight community where we look after each other, protect each other and help justify the inadequacies because being different can be mispresented in society." (Noah, Male, 34)

"It's very boring to present images of myself known to the public (common images) – to be different, I need to dig deeper to present something about myself….This is what makes my profile unique." (Matthew, Male, 30)

The social process that underlies the misrepresentation of private identity is divergence, by which consumers expose cultural tastes (e.g., attitudes, possessions, behavior) that distinguish themselves from similar others. While divergence is quite pervasive online, most research has focused on convergence (e.g., Berry, 1991; Paulhus and Bruce, 1992). The findings indicate that a consumer's private identity does not conform to the public self but is more focused on distinctive aspects to vent against the commonly displayed public self that otherwise would not have been possible. Therefore, online disclosure provides a connection choice that diffuses the private self to the public by providing a mechanism of empowerment that encourages the expression of one's life in a network of exposure. Additionally, the field notes highlight that consumers seek to release their inner desires, a quest to not be misrepresented. Moreover, social networking sites are used as a mechanism to release deeper aspects of the private self-disclosure to unlock deep desires and emotions that dwell beneath public disclosure. This nuances Lee et al.'s (2015) findings, which suggest that consumers only use social media to escape the reality or forget their troubles. Instead, our results hint at the possibility that consumers may use the social media platform to address their differences. This suggests two different types of social media users.

A second attribute tied to self-brand authenticity is *personal security.* Consumers employ varying self-presentation strategies during both offline and online interactions

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(Schlenker and Pontari, 2000). Our findings indicate a consumers' general tendency to spend

time uploading private self-images on Instagram to avoid the offline feeling of loneliness and

social exclusion, a phenomenon termed "self-derogation" (Kaplan, 1982). Essentially, it is an

attempt to seek self-verification and validation that enhances their interpersonal competence.

A strategy to overcome offline self-derogation is to post the private self-identity online to

initiate emotional response to help decrease interpersonal distance. Accordingly, interviewees

attempted to compensate for the feeling of loneliness by sharing highly aroused emotions to

boost their self-descriptions of private identity and increase their sense of differentiation and

belonging. For example:

> "I use Instagram because I feel socially inept, I don't feel like I can talk to their
> [sic] people face to face without feeling anxious that I can't add much to the
> conversation. But when I use Instagram, I feel I can portray myself through
> images and my story board speak for itself. I mean, well, image speaks a
> thousand words. I also look for feedback, positive or negative, anything as long as
> I'm recognized..." (Alex, Male, 38)

> "I think I'm addicted to Instagram because I have an online community that
> values me as a person, I can be myself and even display my anxieties and
> insecurities, and I'll always find someone who has gone through the same
> experience or is going through the same experience. The act of sharing alone
> helps me validate my self-worth, even though I have no idea who is on the other
> line. But that's not the point, as long as I can be my true self and not constantly
> regulate myself on what impression I have left on others." (Lara, Female, 32)

The preceding two quotes suggest that a desire for self-expression is essential to

maintain an active role in harmonizing the experience in an online community. The online

platforms are a vehicle of expression that is perceived as an extended sense of personal desire

to expose the deep inner emotions and a platform to self-promote the unexposed repressed

self. Exposing the repressed thoughts is a process of harmonization and a mechanism to

celebrate differentiation. Being different online is much more appreciated by the audience

and demonstrated with supporting comments or likes, which underpins the balancing act of

intrinsic reward of pleasurable experience in accepting the self and preserving self-integrity. Such views can be explained through emotion regulation, in which consumers reduce dissonance by challenging a norm to seek self-validation. In doing so, consumers are constantly seeking feedback, counter to the classic theory of self-presentation and self-enhancement (Leary et al., 2007), which affirms that consumers seek to confirm and stabilize their firmly held self-views. Digitalizing personal insecurities is part of consumers' reality. The anonymity and asynchronous communication increase control over interactions, and consumers often seek evaluative feedback to cognitively position their normative self. The difference in online social vulnerability is that the effect is less demoralizing, as interacting anonymously online does not involve the increased vulnerability that usually follows self-disclosure of personal information offline.

Impression management

The fourth functional consequence is *impression management.* Consumers like to expose their private identities to achieve a sense of fulfilment. Generally, social interaction is perceived as a theatrical performance (Goffman, 1959) in which people present themselves to receive a reciprocation to achieve acknowledgment. Online private self-disclosure facilitates self-enhancement by establishing interpersonal competence due to self-derogation offline and correct misrepresentation to maximize the added value of active use.

We identified *reciprocation* as a first attribute connected to impression management. The dyadic environment is important to maintain the energy flow of engagement. This is expressed through the collaborative approach to comprehending the external environmental pressures of what is currently trending and reciprocating to current trends. The pressures encourage consumers to blur the lines between the public and private self. The network reflects consumers' desires, providing a grassroots place to communicate, converse, and increase confidence. This is illustrated through the following quotes:

At first, I couldn't imagine that I'd be taking photos of my body and posting it on Instagram.… It's too personal, but then it was trending, and I felt left out, so I did it, but it's OK for me now because chances are, I might not see many of my followers in real life. So, it's given me more confidence to display like nude images of myself online. I also feel more confident about myself now [offline]." (Hazel, Female, 29)

"If I had lost that gallery, I would probably feel like I miss a part of my representative.… Creating the gallery helps me configure myself, it helps me discover my innovative self, which draws attention of my followers – which they too reciprocate the same act – the back and forth communication or visuals helps me unleash my inner desire and skill, my personal desire to innovate myself." (Amelia, Female, 24)

The exhibition of personal brand galleries leverages an individual's ability to absorb information and knowledge from the environment, consumers, and their value networks, to enable a more therapeutic mechanism of adaptive and reflexive application of dynamic self-disclosure. The extreme acts, statements, and images draw followers' attention, creating a solid foundation to build a network. The reciprocated act keeps the desire flowing, such that sensual excitement occurs through the liberations of personal desires in self-disclosure. These liberations are also creative in the sense that they help channel desires into interest and amplify the expressive function that transcend normative boundaries.

Furthermore, we identified *self-efficacy* as a second attribute linked to impression management. Hocevar et al. (2014) conceptualized three sources that are most likely to impact social media self-efficacy: *enactive mastery*, which is achieved through prior experience in skillfully producing social media content that contributes to a person's confidence to post specific information sought online; *vicarious experience*, which is consuming social media content and allows for the observations of performance in the social media environment; and *source of persuasion*, that is, the level and type of feedback received (e.g., comments about content producers' contributions), which can influence the amount of

information contributed to a website. Therefore, self-efficacy is based on a consumer's level of social media content production and consumption, perceived social media skill, and confidence in his or her ability to successfully disclose information online. Our findings suggest that interviewees are keen to explore more about themselves, whether it be a skill (enactive mastery), value through experience and the observation of their profile when compared with others (vicarious experience), or the feedback (source of persuasion) that increases their online confidence and serves as a way of getting to know themselves better. Interviewees noted this occurs when they encounter novel, unpredictable, or demanding tasks (Bandura, 2013), which not only stimulate interest among followers but also acts as a mastery skill. Our results suggest that the followers' feedback about performance supports this process, by clarifying the outcomes and patterns of progress being made and by providing images upon which efficacy judgments can be made, which supports past research findings (Heinz and Rice, 2009).

However, interestingly, social network channels facilitate the exposure of the core identity by evaluating personal judgments of consumers' capability to organize and execute their private selves. Confidence in the ability to exert control over a consumer's desire stimulates interest and excitement, which increases consumers' self-efficacy in an online social platform through the intensified self-regulated learning by means of editing images to transfuse meaning, consumption, and innovation as a means to liberate the core self. From the observational notes and interview transcripts, it is clear that the persistence of displaying private images in the face of offline obstacles creates self-efficacy beliefs of enactive mastery (e.g., past performance accomplishments resulting from previous experiences of online self-images and physiological arousal, including changes in emotional states such as anxiety, fear, or positive anticipation), as represented in the following quote:

"I like applying the filters to my photos…It makes my photos look a lot more quality and presentable…it makes it easier for others to accept my quirkiness because it's different, yet cool, it's not like it's out of place or anything. It just makes it easier and more exciting to open up to the world and for the world to readily accept me….
Unlike offline, it's all about how I present myself, I can't really show my skills when faced physically with another person unless the situation permits – and even then, I'm anxious about how others perceive me, but online I don't need to wait for the situation. I'm free to show my skills whenever I want to and, however, I want to and not worry about my anxieties… which is liberating and gives me more inner belief in my desires." (Sophie, Female, 33)

Empowerment

The third hierarchical level pertains to consumers' individual perspective, as the elements at this level are not grounded in the social network operations but in their individual needs. The first psychological consequence is *empowerment*. The following example, drawn from an interviewee who highlighted the role of empowerment, elucidates how this feeling can encourage active dialogue and cooperation as a unified online community.

"I feel really empowered when I post a private image of myself out of choice, it's a way of being transparent and in control. It adds value and is meaningful." (Carter, Male, 28)

The quote shows that empowerment is a central component to maintain relationships (Fournier, 2009). To be empowered, consumers need to be given control over something they perceive as valuable or meaningful or to contribute to a co-created meaning. This echoes Harrison and Waite's (2015) findings that customers' value-in-use of solutions is reflected in the extent to which there is a collaborative effort.

Buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth

The second psychological consequence of private self-disclosure online is a feeling of being able to *buffer the offline inadequacy of self-worth*. This element leads to a feeling of unity, in that consumers have a platform to uncover emotions that are typically concealed

offline. The findings suggest that consumers can fulfill and develop themselves through the

collaborative consumption of online content to unveil emotions and the experiential

dimension of their private identity that would have otherwise been repressed. For example:

> "I enjoy posting images of myself online as this helps me reestablish my self-worth. Being able to widen my network with other people that will understand my differences and my insecurities gives me a sense of self-worth. I don't need to meet them in person (invisible), but they are my virtual family." (Grace, Female, 34)

This echoes Pine and Gilmore's (2013) findings, which suggest the co-presence of the

audience brings together a new form of independence that does not require a face-to-face

interaction, but rather a virtual community that affirms and empowers self-worth through a

mutual understanding.

Engagement

The third psychological consequence is *engagement*, which is a psychological state

that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences (Brodie et al., 2011).

Our findings show that it is important for consumers to be engaged when disclosing their

private identity online by means of interacting, connecting, and participating with the post,

profile, mentions, and messages. For example:

> "To me, it's important to have a high level of engagement on my posts. I exert a lot of time and energy putting posts up to ensure my content adds value. So, it's only natural that I want my followers to interact, connect, and engage in my content…. One way for me to assess how valuable my content is [is] to see how engaged my followers are, how much people have commented, how much people liked my post, shared or developed the content I posted." (Charlotte, Female, 32).

Similar to Brodie et al.'s (2011, 2013) findings, our results show that consumer engagement

process is initiated largely by consumers' need for information. This is inherent to the nature

of the engagement process, which is highly interactive and experiential and includes sub-

processes such as advocating, sharing, and co-developing content and posts.

Discussion

This study provides in-depth insights into how private self-disclosing actions on an

online public platform can be used to co-create experiential value. Private self-disclosure is

rooted in deep, sometimes controversial, and thought-provoking psychological experiences

reciprocated online, which would otherwise not have been disclosed in an offline setting

(Schouten et al., 2007; Senft, 2013). This research explores the phenomenon of online private

self-disclosure on public platforms through the lens of co-created experiential value, with the

aim of providing a deeper understanding of the benefits consumers can receive from self-

disclosing actions.

This research's findings show how rich interpersonal information can invoke

relationships between brands and consumers through their online interactions. Therefore, we

contribute to the extant marketing literature on self-identity and self-disclosure by providing

substantive insights into how consumers resort to online private self-disclosure to co-create

experiential value on public platforms. More specifically, our findings indicate that

experiential value comprises three main categories: self-affirmation, affective belief, and

emotional connection. The process of sharing, co-creating, discussing, and modifying content

encourages consumers to consciously regulate their interpersonal boundaries, thus blurring

the lines between the outer and inner layers of self-disclosure. Unlike public self-identity,

private self-identity is displayed to portray consumers' judgment of subjective desire

communicated through innovative creative energy online to create and establish emotional

ties. The emotional tie creates a relationship that solidifies personal identity by reestablishing

the connection one has with oneself and learning to exercise and push intimate self-disclosure

boundaries in an attempt to seek self-validation. In turn, consumers will have experienced

themselves as capable and in control, which underpins feelings of wholesomeness and completeness.

By establishing the different experiential value components, we identify four main functional consequences: opportunity to learn, online control, self-brand authenticity, and impression management, which inform the psychological consequences of empowerment, buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth, and engagement. Online channels allow consumers the additional time to articulate their cognitive appraisals about their anxious self, which in turn helps reduce the dissonant state of offline self-derogation and exercise self-brand authenticity. As a result, these consumers spend more time online to boost their interpersonal confidence by challenging their normative selves. Such findings demonstrate that the reciprocity norm is deeply rooted in experiential value (Grönroos and Ravald, 2011).

Additionally, our findings validate the assumption that private self-disclosures are constructed in layers, whereby a core, true self exists beneath the various layers of defenses and superficial roles of everyday social interaction (public self) necessary for functioning in everyday life. Therefore, the importance of this research lies in the mutual benefit of protecting self-integrity in an attempt to buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth and social networking sites to address the privacy and transparency needs of consumers.

Managerial implications

Our findings can help practitioners enhance the development of enduring online relationships with and among consumers. To maintain enduring relationships with online social networks, companies should facilitate mechanisms that activate experiential value by harmonizing self-experimentation that creatively unifies private self-disclosure with the public self. Stable relationships are formed when consumers activate their inherent interest in developing their cognitive, social, and physical skills. Therefore, online social networks should strive to curate safe online environments through, for example, real-time online

excursions, or virtual tours that provide a 360° view of a particular location or image that includes a sequence of video or still images, so consumers can view an entire area without physically being present. This technique can provide consumers with a further opportunity to engage and empower themselves with exclusive content to enhance their learning skills, grant them more online control to brand themselves, and formulate accurate impressions of themselves.

Operationally, our findings unveil attributes and consequences behind online private self-disclosure that are relevant to companies interested in fostering consumer engagement on social media. Specifically, our results regarding Instagram suggest that consumers are more likely to disclose private identity when they perceive that doing so provides them with the opportunity to learn, exert control over the surrounding online environment, express their authentic connection with brands, and impress others. These consequences are functional to consumers' empowerment, sense of alleviation of offline inadequacy, and engagement and, hence, to the experiential value components of self-affirmation, affective belief, and emotional connection. Thus, the aforementioned functional consequences represent key aspects that companies should leverage when designing social media marketing strategies.

Instagram can be configured and synched with other social networking sites to provide a complete representation of the online self, as each social network represents a different facet of identity (e.g., Instagram focuses on image caption, Twitter focuses on concise textual caption). Using algorithms that pull from various related social networking sites the likes, dislikes, scrolling feeds, and what has been looked at, might help determine consumers' attitudes, habits, likes, and dislikes, which can bring together consumers with similar interests to achieve a more gratifying personalized experience. Managers can use this information to provide more tailored supporting tools (e.g., live one-to-one videos) and help empower consumers' private self-disclosure skills learned during online communication into

their offline settings as a mechanism to buffer offline inadequacy. This will help consumers

as users have a more gratifying online experience and fill the void from the lack of offline

private self-disclosure. Thus, encouraging consumers to become judges and commentators of

their own disclosures might boost the co-creation aspect of self-branding, which can be used

across marketing activities to directly appeal to private self.

Limitations and further research

The present research leaves several questions unanswered, which should be addressed

in future studies. First, one relevant avenue of future research may be the examination of the

interactions among the four functional consequences (i.e., opportunity to learn, online

control, self-brand authenticity, and impression management), which might affect

experiential value co-creation. For example, there may be a positive interaction between the

functional consequences of opportunity to learn and online control. Indeed, the incentive of

online skills learned when posting images of the self may reduce the offline risks associated

with exposing the intimate self. In addition, functional consequences may interact with

psychological consequences. For instance, Palmatier and Martin (2019) emphasized the

conflict users experience between their desire to share content and be sociable, on one hand,

and their worries about surveillance and privacy, on the other hand. This suggests a negative

interaction between self-brand authenticity as a functional consequence and empowerment as

a psychological consequence. Therefore, future studies should address the occurrence and

impact of such interactions using quantitative approaches and experimental designs.

Secondly, our research findings show how disclosing private aspects of their self can

allow consumers to co-create experiential value. Although such a value is primarily directed

at consumers themselves, the disclosed content, in the form of personal information and

experiences, may also be beneficial to service companies. Companies may use such content

to develop better knowledge of their customers in order to implement more effective

targeting strategies and customize their offerings, which may enhance customers' service experiences (de Jong et al., 2021). Future research could delve deeper into this phenomenon by investigating how companies might exploit value co-creation for targeting strategies and service customization.

Thirdly, since our research only focuses on Instagram, future studies could generalize our findings by applying our netnographic approach to other, emerging social media platforms, such as TikTok and WeChat. Social media platforms possess different characteristics and functionalities to target different segments of users. Therefore, it is relevant to examine whether and to what extent attributes and consequences of private self-disclosure differ across online platforms and differ in their impact on the experiential value components. Such research insights would help companies strengthen the dialogue between customers and their brands.

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Table 1. Summary of prior research into online self-disclosure on social networking sites.

Author(s)	Research aim (and focus)	Type of identity	Context	Methodology	Setting of online identity disclosed	Findings
Batenburg and Bartels (2017)	Self-evaluation motives: self-evaluation and self-enhancement (Organizations).	Private and professional identity	Facebook	Quantitative	Private setting	Posting self-enhancing messages shows higher levels of respect than self-verifying messages.
Bazarova and Choi (2014)	Functional approach to the motives and goals of self-disclosure (Social networking sites, SNSs).	Public self	Facebook	Quantitative	Private setting	Users of SNSs utilize different social media functions for disclosures with different levels of intimacy, depending on their motives and goals.
Belk (2013)	How digital technologies is changing consumer behavior in ways that have significant implications for the formulation of the extended self (Digital consumption).	Digital self		Conceptual	NA	Five changes with digital consumption are considered that impact the nature of self and nature of possession: dematerialization, re-embodiment, sharing, co-construction of self and distributed memory.
Carpenter et al. (2018)	Assessing the appropriateness of using private vs. public messages to communicate different kinds of personal information, and the effectiveness of these types of communication in building relationships (SNSs).	Public self	Facebook	Quantitative	Private setting	Users endorse conflicting expectations about preferences for receiving information publicly or privately. Private messages lead to greater closeness.
Eagar and Dann (2016)	Exploring the purposive use of the selfie in the construction of personal narratives that develop and support individual's human brand (Self-brand).	Public self	Instagram	Qualitative	NA	Selfies were divided into archetypical clusters of "genres". These genres of selfie meta-narratives are autobiography, parody, propaganda, romance, self-help, travel diary and coffee-table book.
Farci et al. (2016)	Investigating how Facebook enables people to achieve a mutually constitutive intimacy	Private self	Facebook	Qualitative	Private setting	Users engage in various strategies: showing rather than telling; sharing implicit content; tagging;

	with their own friendship network (SNSs).					expectation of mutual understanding; and liking. These strategies produce a *collaborative disclosure* that relies on others' cooperation to maintain the boundaries between private and public space.
Gruzd and Hernández-García (2018)	Investigating public and private self-disclosure with users who have at least one public account and one private account (Organizations).	Public self on public platform and private self through a private account	Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, Reddit, Blog	Quantitative	Private setting	There was no difference between patterns of self-disclosure on private versus public accounts.
Kang and Wei (2020)	Investigating how user motivations and self-presentation behaviors were different between real Instagram account (known as 'Rinsta'), and fake Instagram account (known as 'Finsta') (SNSs).	Public self in different settings	Instagram	Quantitative	Private setting	Instagram users rated five user motivations (i.e., social interaction, self-expression, escapism, peeking, and archiving) higher for the Rinsta than for the Finsta. They mainly created the Finsta to provide fun daily update and to socially bond with close friends. In addition, Instagram users presented their actual-self, ideal-self, deceptive-self, and impressive-self to a greater degree on the Rinsta than on the Finsta.
Krämer and Schäwel (2019)	Reviewing recent literature which illuminates how social media users struggle to maintain privacy but at the same time self-disclose to their advantage (SNSs).	Public self		Conceptual	NA	In accordance with the privacy calculus assumptions, users make rational decisions by carefully weigh which behavior leads to gratifications, and which revelation do not convey beneficial impressions (risk). Yet protecting privacy is considered a secondary need.
Lee et al. (2015)	Investigating the structural dimensions of consumers'	Public self	Instagram	Quantitative	NA	Instagram users have five primary social and psychological motives: social

	motives for using Instagram (SNSs).					interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking.
Lin and Utz (2017)	Investigating which factors develop a feeling of closeness on social media sites (SNSs).	Semi-public self	Fake SNS called Social Net, that resembled Facebook.	Quantitative	Private setting	Disclosure frequency, when perceived as appropriate, predicts familiarity and closeness. The roles of disclosure intimacy on closeness and social attraction were constrained by the perceived appropriateness, and the effects of narrativity on closeness and social attraction were mediated by perceived entertainment value.
Nosko et al. (2010)	Examining the differences in disclosure of personal information and use of privacy settings when individuals created profiles for another person using an online media format or a hard copy (i.e., print) version (SNSs).	Private self	Facebook	Quantitative	Private setting	Social media context used to construct online social networking profiles and gender impacted on decisions to disclose information.
Park et al. (2011)	Examining the association between self-disclosure and intimacy. It also examined the antecedents of self-disclosure to relationship maintenance and initiation (SNSs).	Public self	Facebook	Quantitative	NA	The need for affiliation was associated with the motivations for relationship maintenance and initiation, which in turn affected self-disclosure and intimacy.
Rokka and Canniford (2016)	Investigating how consumer-made "selfie" images shared online might contribute to the destabilization of brands as assemblages (Self-brand).	Public Self	Instagram	Qualitative	NA	Brands and branded selves intersect through "heterotopian selfie practices". Accentuated by the rise of attention economy and "consumer microcelebrity", the selfie images can destabilize spatial, temporal, symbolic and material properties of brand assemblages.
Current Study	Explores the experiential value co-created when consumers voluntarily self-disclose on public	Private self	Instagram	Qualitative	Public setting	Insight into consumers' motivation to engage in private self-disclosure and

platforms. Thus, giving up some degree of privacy on an unrestricted platform (Consumer value co-creation).

co-create experiential value on Instagram.

NA = Not Applicable.

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Figure 1. A visual representation of the connection made from the interview data.

Affective belief (2)
- *Satisfying meaning and affirmed myself*
- *Reassurance*

Emotional connection (3)
- *Emotionally connected*

Buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth (5)
- *Desire to share intimate and private aspects of my life*

Engagement (6)
- *Active use*

Self-brand authenticity (9)
- *Feel so much better about myself*

Impression management (10)
- *Followers*
- *Reaction*
- *Comments*

Misrepresentation (16)
- *Correct misrepresentation*
- *Interconnect with community*

Personal security (17)
- *Inner disclosure of self*
- *Confidence*

Reciprocation (18)
- *Followers*
- *Comments*

Self-efficacy (19)
- *Feel* better
- *Liberating about self*

Elements forming the dominant paths are in bold. Numbers in brackets denote the code number in Table A2 and Table A3 (in the Appendix).

Figure 2. Hierarchical value map for private self-disclosure.

ATTRIBUTES	FUNCTIONAL CONSEQUENCES	PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES	EXPERIENTIAL VALUES

Task-based learning

Interdependent learning

Intuitive learning

Self-disclosure control

Utilitarian control

Misrepresentation

Personal security

Reciprocation

Self-efficacy

Opportunity to learn

Online control

Self-brand authenticity

Impression management

Empowerment

Buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth

Engagement

Self-affirmation

Affective belief

Emotional connection

8-10 connections

11-14 connections

≥ 15 connections

Appendix

Table A1. Sample's description.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation
Abigail	23	Female	Student
Adam	24	Male	Student
Aeva	23	Female	Student
Ahmed	33	Male	S.L. Employment
Alex	38	Male	S.L. Employment
Amara	23	Female	Student
Amelia	24	Female	Student
Amy	24	Female	Student
Andrew	21	Male	Student
Angela	22	Female	Student
Anthony	23	Male	Student
Ben	28	Male	J.L. Employment
Camila	22	Female	Student
Carter	28	Male	J.L. Employment
Charlotte	32	Female	J.L. Employment
Chris	40	Male	S.L. Employment
Claire	35	Female	S.L. Employment
Cooper	36	Male	S.L. Employment
Dane	28	Male	Student
David	23	Male	Student
Dean	20	Male	Student
Elena	26	Female	Student
Ella	25	Female	Student
Emily	36	Female	S.L. Employment
Emma	18	Female	Student
Grace	34	Female	S.L. Employment
Hannah	29	Female	J.L. Employment
Harper	39	Female	S.L. Employment
Hazel	29	Female	J.L. Employment
Helen	28	Female	J.L. Employment
Ian	28	Male	J.L. Employment
Illias	22	Male	Student
Isla	32	Female	S.L. Employment
James	18	Male	Student
Jack	28	Male	Student
John	40	Male	S.L. Employment
Jayden	24	Male	Student
Jessie	22	Female	Student
John	32	Male	J.L. Employment
Josh	30	Male	S.L. Employment
Katie	26	Female	Student
Keith	35	Male	S.L. Employment
Lara	32	Female	J.L. Employment
Levi	25	Male	Student
Lucas	36	Male	S.L. Employment
Lucy	26	Female	J.L. Employment
Matthew	30	Male	S.L. Employment
Mia	35	Female	S.L. Employment
Mike	21	Male	Student
Mohammed	26	Male	Student
Nicola	33	Female	J.L. Employment
Noah	34	Male	S.L. Employment
Oliver	24	Male	Student

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Richard	21	Male	Student
Rob	25	Male	Student
Rose	29	Female	J.L. Employment
Sara	22	Female	Student
Scarlet	23	Female	Student
Sophie	33	Female	J.L. Employment
Stella	27	Female	Student
Tim	34	Male	S.L. Employment
Tom	20	Male	Student
Victor	26	Male	Student
Wendy	33	Female	S.L. Employment
William	37	Male	S.L. Employment

Note: S.L. = Senior level; J.L. = Junior level.

Example: The self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection path.

An example of an AVC relationship is reported below to show the dominant path of self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection. The example details the construction of the dominant pathway from the initial interview data and details the various methods of analysis conducted per ladder that helped construct the HVM. (Please note that other variables are considered in the example, as each ladder constructed had indirect pathways to related variables that are not illustrated in detail within the example provided.)

Passage from an Interview transcript:

> *Instagram is a platform that has helped me transform my inner repressions – exposing what my real thought and emotions[are]. All my life I have grown up being told how to behave, what is acceptable and not. With Instagram I can finally break free from all these rules and create my rules which is quite empowering. What's surprising is that there are a lot of people out there that are experiencing the exact same feeling. I remember posting my imperfect beach figure – something I've never done before because I was never happy about my figure – so I put the raw photo out there with no filters. I wanted to know people's reaction – I think this is the one time when my account had so many followers and comments which made me feel so much better about myself – I felt really emotionally connected with people unknown to me but gave me a satisfying meaning and affirmed myself. Because of my inner disclosure and active use, I've developed a long-term relationship with my online community."* (Ella, Female, 25)

From the extract a summary ladder is constructed to illustrate a content classification by level of abstraction (A/C/V). Note that each ladder is contained within the HVM depicted in Figure 1 (in the main document). Also, note that words in bold are the extracts from the interview scripts that later form the dominant pathways.

For example:

A: **Personal security**: *Inner disclosure (17)*
A: **Reciprocation:** *so much followers and comments (18)*
A: **Self-efficacy:** made *me feel so much better about myself (19)*

C: **Self-brand authenticity**: *made me feel so much better about myself (9)*

C: **Impression management**: *I wanted to know people's reaction – I think this is the one time when my account had so many followers and comments (10)*
C: **Engagement:** *active use (6)*

V: **Emotional connection***: I felt really emotionally connected with people (3)*
V: **Affective belief***: gave me a satisfying meaning and affirmed myself (2)*

Following on from this a score matrix was then extracted from the 65 interviews to determine the pathways for the following logic self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection to assess how many other participants made this connection. Figure A1 illustrates some of the combination of pathway connections that interviewees made, which include both direct and indirect connections that led to the dominant pathway for self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection. Note that Figure A1 is a replication of Figure 1 (in the main document) with additional arrows that illustrate the direct and indirect connections. A direct connection is when a MEC element (e.g., an attribute) is directly connected to another element with no mediation. For example, 'Misrepresentation' (code number 16) is directly connected to 'Personal security' (code number 17). For ease of locating this connection we have illustrated this connection with a red arrow in Figure A1. An indirect connection is when an element is connected to another element through a third element. For example, 'Misrepresentation' (Code number 17) is connected to 'Personal security' (code number 18) through 'Self brand authenticity'. For ease of locating this connection we have illustrated this connection with a green arrow in Figure A1.

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Figure A1. A visual representation of direct and indirect connections made from the interview data.
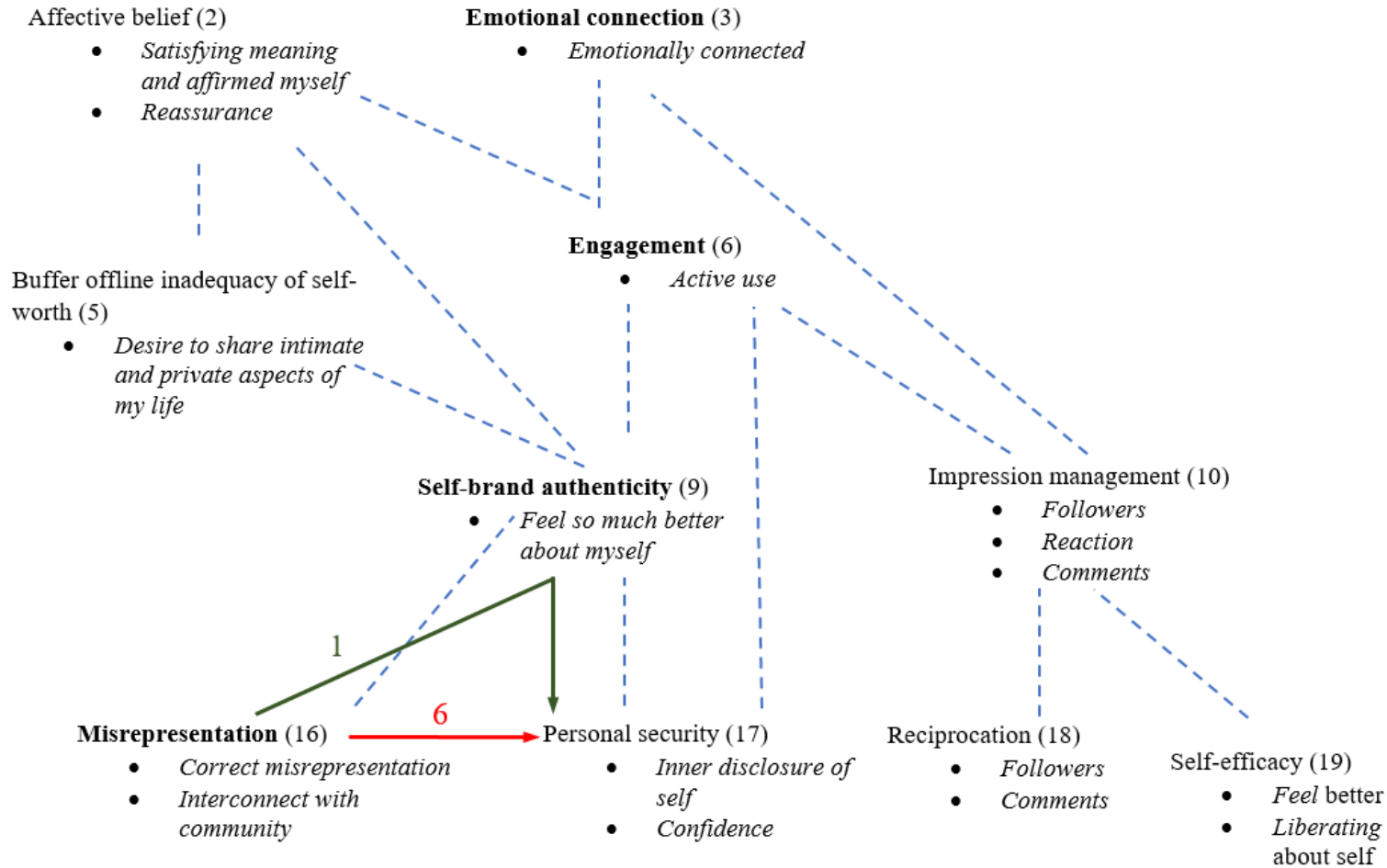
Note: Elements forming the dominant paths are in bold. Numbers in brackets denote the code number assigned per attribute. The red arrow denotes the *direct* connection from 'Misrepresentation' (code number 16) to 'Personal security' (code number 17) along with the frequency count of 6 illustrated above the arrow. The green arrow denotes the *indirect* connection from 'Misrepresentation' to 'Personal security' through 'Self-brand authenticity' (code number 9), along with the frequency count of 1.

The pathways were then summarized in a frequency matrix to illustrate the key

summary pathways. Table A2 provides a section of the frequency matrix in which

interviewees have made both direct and indirect connections to the pathway that leads from

'Self-brand authenticity' to 'Engagement' to 'Emotional connection'. These connections

were guided by the means-ends chain theory that posits the attributes (A), consequences (C),

and higher-order personal values (V). (Please note this has been done for each pathway

ladder extracted from the data.)

Table A2. Frequency matrix of direct and indirect links to the pathway connection of self-brand authenticity–engagement–emotional connection.

Attribute	Code number	16	17	18	19	10	9	6	5	3
Misrepresentation	16		6.1	0.3		10.0	15.0	2.6	0.4	0.6
Personal security	17	7.0		3.0			1.5	5.3		0.7
Reciprocation	18	2.1	4.0		1.0	7.0	1.5	1.4	0.1	0.7
Self-efficacy	19		1.0	2.0		5.3		1.2		0.10
Impression management	10	1.0	7.0		5.4		1	9		12.5
Self-brand authenticity	9	11	1.3	0.2				8.1	5	0.7
Engagement	6	2.7	5.1	2.4	1.2	7.0	8.1		0.1	17.2
Buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth	5	0.4		0.1			5.1	0.1		
Emotional connection	3	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.11	11.5	0.7	17.6		

Note: The numbers in the matrix are expressed in fractional form with the frequency of direct relations to the element to the left of the decimal (in red) and frequency of indirect relations of the element to the right of the decimal (in green). Taking the relationship between 'Misrepresentation' and 'Personal security' (see the cell with a grey background), the number 6 in red denotes the frequency of the direct connection from 'Misrepresentation' to 'Personal security', while the number 1 in green denotes the frequency of the indirect connection between these two attributes.

Each element is coded with a number that is presented horizontally and vertically to

perform a matrix. The frequency counts are expressed in a fraction where direct relations to a

certain element are presented to the left of the decimal and indirect relations are expressed to

the right of the decimal. For example, the attribute 'Misrepresentation' (code number 16) is

'6' times directly connected to the attribute 'Personal security' (code number 17). Instead,

there is one indirect connection ('1') from 'Misrepresentation' to 'Personal security', which

is mediated by the consequence 'Self brand authenticity'. For ease of locating this connection

we have highlighted the cell in grey in Table A2 and illustrated the direct connection with a

red arrow and the indirect connection with a green arrow in Figure A1.

The frequency matrix was then summarized in Table A3 to illustrate the dominant

pathways determined by the frequency of connections being made by the interviewees.

Table A3. Summarizing the matrix displayed in Table A2.

Code Number	Dominant connected variables	ACV
15	Utilitarian control	
16	Misrepresentation	
17	Personal security	Attribute
18	Reciprocation	
19	Self-efficacy	
5	Buffer offline inadequacy of self-worth	
6	Engagement	Consequence
9	Self-brand authenticity	
10	Impression management	
3	Emotional connection	Value

A value map (see Figure 1 in the main document) was then developed to help visually

illustrate the connections extracted from Table A2 as well as a means to double check and

validate the data.

A summary ladder is therefore represented as (words in italics form the dominant pathways):

(D) users are *emotional connected* as a result of their…
(C) … *online engagement* …
(B) … which *authenticated the individual's self*…
(A) … and gives the user the ability to *correct the misrepresented self*.

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A frequency matrix was used for each pathway connection which informed the

construction of the HVM illustrated in Figure 2 (main document).

<div align="center">

Response to the editors and reviewer for
EJM-04-2019-0302.R4

"Online Private Self-Disclosure's Potential for Experiential Value Co-creation"

Detailed Response to Specific Comments of the Editor
(Original comments appear in grey blocks)

</div>

Ref: EJM- 04-2019-0302. R4- Online Private Self Disclosure's Potential for Experiential Value Co-Creation

Dear Dr. Haji,

Thank you for resubmitting your manuscript titled "Online Private Self-Disclosure's Potential for Experiential Value Co-creation" for consideration by the European Journal of Marketing. Based on the reviews and the feedback from the associate editor and the regional editor assigned to your manuscript, I am delighted to offer you a CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE for EJM. On balance, I do believe that your manuscript will be publishable in the EJM, conditional on relatively minor changes being made.

If you choose to revise and resubmit, besides the revised manuscript you must include a complete set of responses on a comment-by-comment basis, indicating how you addressed the issue and where the change is located in the manuscript. Please be thorough and meticulous in taking the comments and translating them into manuscript improvements as you document your changes and explanations thoroughly for the EJM team. Hopefully you will find these final requirements to be straightforward based on the guidance provided.

Please make your decision on whether you will revise and resubmit with the knowledge that EJM's resubmission policy on conditional acceptances allows for a maximum TWO WEEK time frame from the date of this correspondence for getting the revised manuscript and notes back into the ScholarOne system.

Best regards,

Greg W. Marshall
Editor-in-Chief, European Journal of Marketing
EJM.Editor@gmail.com

Response: We are very happy for the positive feedback received and the acceptance you offered us conditional on relatively minor changes as requested by the review team. Thank you for this important opportunity. We would like to express our appreciation for the constructive feedback we received from you and the review team across the different rounds of review. We are thankful also to the regional editor, the associate editor, and the anonymous reviewer for their valuable suggestions. We have worked diligently to address all the concerns they raised.

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Detailed Response to Specific Requirements of the Regional Editor
(Original comments appear in grey blocks)

> Thank you for submitting your revision to EJM and for addressing the comments from the last round so diligently. You review team and I agree that you have advanced your manuscript - well done.
>
> There are some issues that need some attention. R1 points out a potential typo in the appendix and your AE has asked for some details to be added. In addition, in the abstract please clarify what you mean by 'observations from consumers' - do you mean that you observed consumers doing something? or that consumers provided you with observations? (You mean the former, but this is open to a different interpretation).

Response 1: The typo in the appendix has now been removed. With regards to the abstract, we have clarified the observation from consumers that are obtained from online consumer profiles who actively post self-images through a netnographic study.

We thank you for your valuable comments, which helped us further improve our paper. We hope we have understood and addressed all issues raised and remain open to further suggestions from you.

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Detailed Response to Specific Comments of the Associate Editor
(Original comments appear in grey blocks)

Dear Authors,

Thank you for the revision. I found the manuscript has been improved. I further want bit more improvement before publication. My comments are as follows:

1. Please add a small table citing prior literature and show how your work is different from them.

Response 1: Thank you for this comment. We have provided a table that summarizes studies that are relevant to our research. The table shows the aim of other studies, their methodological approach, and the level of self-disclosure along with the main findings (see page 7 and attached Table 1).

2. Broadly mention managerial implications in the introduction section.

Response 2: Thank you for this observation. We have added a paragraph in the introduction that details that main managerial implications of our research, which is unifying the private self-disclosure with the public self (see page 4).

3. Elaborate bit more about the types of value you mentioned in the Means end theory.

Response 3: We have elaborated more on the types of values mention in the Means-end theory. In doing so, we added a sentence that clarifies that means-end chain is based on the belief that consumer behaviour is driven by personal values, and that personal values represent higher-order goals or desired end-states in life (see page 12).

We thank you for your valuable comments, which helped us further improve our paper. We hope we have fully understood and addressed all issues raised and remain open to further suggestions from you.

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Detailed Response to Specific Comments of Reviewer 1
(Original comments appear in grey blocks)

Thank you for your hard work to address my comments. You have managed to improve the areas I have highlighted. I noticed that in figure A1 (in the appendix), number 3 is in the middle of the figure and it is not clear what this is about. Either explain or delete.

Response 1: We thank you for this valuable comment. We have now removed the number 3 from Figure A1.