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The Effects of Idealised Images on an Individual's Aspirations to their Ideal Self.

By

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A Masters dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Commerce (Marketing) in The School of Economic and Business Sciences, the University of the Witwatersrand.

30 November 2017

DECLARATION FORM

The Effects of Idealised Images on an Individual's Aspirations to their Ideal Self.

University of the Witwatersrand

2017

562139

Masters Dissertation

I hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation has been derived from my own originality and knowledge in exception of acknowledged text.

The sources that have been used as reference, or referred to, have been documented and recognised.

The dissertation has not been fully or partially submitted for any other requirements at higher institutions other than the University of the Witwatersrand.

Signature: _____

Busisiwe Nhlapo

30th November 2017

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ABSTRACT

The instigation of the dissertation was prompted by the heightened prevalence of idealised images portrayed on social media platforms. It has therefore undertaken a theoretical framework necessary in comprehending the consequential effects idealised images may have on South African millennials. Five research constructs have been developed to form part of the empirical framework, comprising exposure to idealised images, self-esteem, social comparison, self-congruency and aspiration to the ideal self. The use of prior literature relating to the constructs facilitated the formation of a comprehensive review, forming a foundation upon which empirical evidence could be supported. The employment of a quantitative approach necessitated the data be collected through the dissemination of self-administered questionnaires. The sample comprised 500 students from the University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus, aged between 18 and 36. Respondents of the study were selected in accordance to a probability sampling technique, upon which the relationship between variables identified in the conceptual model were tested through the adoption of measurement scales. The use of SPSS 24 and AMOS 24 software packages, and structural equation modelling were utilised for the analyses of the data set. The empirical findings derived from the hypothetical tests suggested positive relationships between exposure to idealised images and self-congruency, and self-congruency and aspiration to the ideal self respectively. The relationship between exposure to idealised images and self-congruency was rejected due to the lack of significance and support. Despite the limitations encountered in the study, a blueprint has been provided to future researchers seeking to engage in research bearing similar concepts and segments, leading to the extension of literature and the modification of conceptual constructs. The examination of South African millennials and their constant exposure to idealised images on social media platforms provided an overview of the effects it may have on their behavioural motives. The findings obtained in the study enable brand managers, marketers and academics to comprehend the millennials' uses and gratifications of social media in a South African context, inclusive of the varying factors that influence the formations of aspiring to their ideal self-concepts.

Keywords: *Millennials, Social Media, Exposure to Idealised Images, Self-Esteem and Aspirations.*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The following dissertation seeks to study the effects that idealised images portrayed on social media platforms has on South African millennials' aspirations toward their ideal self. Copious amounts of literature have been studied and empirical analyses have been conducted in understanding this particular phenomenon and its contextual relevance to the South African framework.

The dissertation will therefore undertake the commencement of the first chapter.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The intention of the first chapter of the dissertation outlines a brief overview of the main concepts upon which the researcher analysed and evaluated. The chapter provided background information which formed an integral part of the dissertation, followed by the formulation of a research problem, the justification of the study. The chapter was further inclusive of a brief overview of the theoretical and empirical frameworks which were ultimately responsible for the development of a proposed conceptual model. Additionally, the researcher identified research methodology and data analysis approaches that were responsible in undertaking the collection of data alongside the analyses of the collected data. The final section illustrated the sequential structure which has highlighted the sequence of chapters to follow.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Millennials are the successors of the Generation X cohort. They are assumed to be the largest cohort, estimated at approximately 75 million globally (Debevec et al. 2014; Meredith & Schewe, 2002). The term "Digital Natives" was commonly used to associate this generational cohort, as they are the first within the American society to be completely immersed within the digital technological sphere (Debevec, 2014). The use of social media by Millennials is driven by their need to convey a desired persona they would like to communicate not only to themselves, but to others (Trocchia et al. 2015). Morgan (2012) extends the notion by highlighting that millennials' aspirational goods and service perceptions are disseminated through the facilitation of technological avenues as a means of conveying information and entertainment to their intended audiences. Millennials' confidence, self-expressive and liberal traits are often prevalent in their staged self-presentations exhibited on their Social Networking Sites (SNS's) (Kramer and Winter, 2008).

The media has generally been known to construct an augmented reality for their audiences, wherein individuals have been provided the opportunity of publicising themselves through the portrayal of images, videos and ideas to the globalised world (Sparhawk, 2003; Kramer and Winter, 2008). Considering the time people expend on Social Networking Sites (SNS), it would be plausible to assume that it holds the power to have some sort of effect on individuals (Bessenhoff, 2006). Literature illustrating the sociological and psychological effects of media have illustrated that exposure to 'thin' ideal media often has damaging effects on one's self schema (Groesz, Levine and Murnen, 2002).

The augmentation and idealisation of social media images has been a recurrent theme identified by the researcher, wherein the idealisation of images by users formed the foundation upon which the researcher sought to identify the subsequent psychological effects such images have on followers (millennials) and specific aspects of their identity thereof. The following component of the dissertation identified numerous statements pertaining to the problems associated with social media. The statements further substantiated, highlighted and formed a foundation for the formulation of the research problem, which further facilitated the development of the current research study.

The researcher of this study sought to expatiate on the existing gaps in previous literature that have failed to identify how the exposure to idealised images motivates millennials aspirations, while additionally exploring the significant effects idealised images can have on self-esteem, their comparisons and self-congruity. Furthermore, the researcher conducted research pertaining to South African markets, whereby findings of the study are to be permissibly generalized to South African millennials.

The purpose is to provide new literature while also extending existing literature through the fulfilment of a comprehensive literature review on the theoretical constructs relevant to the effects of exposure to idealised images. The proposed conceptual model prompted the development of seven (7) hypothetical statements, where the researcher gained empirical evidence by testing the significance of the relationships between the constructs of *exposure to idealised images* as a predictor variable, *self-esteem, social comparison* and *self-congruency* as moderating variables and *aspiration*s as an outcome variable respectively.

Moreover, the researcher provided literature that held great significance to managers, wherein the empirical evidence obtained from the tested hypotheses enabled marketers and managers alike in formulating and implementing strategies which enabled them in gaining a clearer

comprehension of the numerous factors that may affect their targets in relation to the effects social media can have on their targets' identities, habits and preferences.

The remainder of the chapter has outlined the theoretical and empirical literature reviews, followed by research questions, which were answered by the formulation of hypothetical statements. The final part of the chapter provided a succinct overview of the research design and methods the researcher employed when testing the aforementioned hypothetical statements.

1.2.1 Problem Statement and Research Gap

A significant body of literature exists with studies relating to social media, exposure to idealised images and the consequential effects these two factors may have on individual behaviours and perceptions of self (Zuo, 2014). It is therefore a discernible fact that the internet and Social Networking Sites played a remarkable role in individual's lives, as its power has revolutionized the manner in which users communicate with one another, as well as the way they organize their social lives (Nikolova, 2012). A study conducted by Sparhawk (2003) focussing on the media's influence on body image further identified a recurring theme in portrayal of unattainable thin body images (thin ideal) has consequently had an effect on women's self-esteems. The author further noted that numerous studies have indicated the manner in which the exposure to idealised social media images can consequentially affect women's body images and self-esteems.

Views of body images being a predominantly female issue have gradually evolved as authors like van Bree (2010) conducted a study titled "*The contemporary body image of men"*. The study investigated how images pertinent to the "ideal man" concept affect men's body images and if the images subsequently increase the prevalence of risky behaviours. Although the study identified the constructs on Social Comparison and Self-Esteem, the author firstly failed to identify a specific age cohort, particularly millennials, and how the mentioned constructs can potentially affect their respondent's ideal self-aspirations.

A plethora of literature exists on the prevalence of idealised images and the potential effects such images have on the manner in which individuals view themselves; Gentile's (2012) study titled "*The effect of social networking sites on positive views"* highlighted that the images individuals post on their Facebook profiles are socially desirable; but are, however, not unrealistic as social media users choose to reflect their desired selves to their followers (Gentile et al. 2012). Although their self-presentations are selectively chosen, they remain true;

however, the behaviour portrayed by such individuals holds ramifications for adolescents and young adults seeking to explore their identities (Pew Research Center, 2011). The existing gap in this study, however, highlights Gentile et al.'s (2012) focus on adolescents as opposed to millennials as well as the author's inability to identify the extent to which the Social Networking Site users and followers are being exposed to the idealised image(s).

The identified problems accentuated by the study's researcher have prompted the investigation of the following aspects: millennials' utilisation of social media as an effort of conveying idealised images in a bid to portray a specific message(s), with the ability of further morphing or affecting an exposed individual's realistic perceptions, outlook on life, and/or aspirations and life goals within the South African market. Furthermore, the researcher substantiated the prevalence of the aforementioned idealisation of images by formulating theoretical and empirical constructs to identify the effects that such exposure pertaining to the proposed problems may have on a millennials' aspirational goals.

A study conducted by Sparhawk (2003) "*Body Image and the Media: The media's influence on Body Image"*, focussed on the effects that media exposure has on body image, identified that women who were exposed to media images particularly referencing "thin ideal" images lead to the formation of negative effects on their image (body) perception. An additional study conducted by Alperstein (2012) highlighted the existence of a plethora of research that had placed great emphasis on the pervasiveness of individuals to socially compare themselves to idealised television, magazine and film advertisements inclusive of the consequential effects these images have on one's self esteem. However, the research has failed to study the effects such exposure can have on millennials' aspiration levels.

Finally, the researcher has mainly identified empirical evidence from numerous studies pertaining to aspirational marketing; the scope of the research studied the conceptual construct in relation to millennials' aspirations to luxury brands and celebrity figures as opposed to aspiration related to ordinary individuals and/or millennials (Trocchia, Saine & Luckett, 2015; Grewal, Stephen & Coleman, 2016). A study by Boguslaw (2015) *Predicting consumers' purchase intention toward luxury brands* simply investigated the internal and external factors that drive consumers to purchase luxury brands. The research findings from the study identified numerous factors, but particularly the concept of Self-Identity/Self-Congruity as an indicator for purchase intention; wherein the author's findings concluded that consumers are prone to purchase luxury brands which hold similarities to their self-identity, while also portraying a

specific message regarding their need for uniqueness and conspicuous behaviour. The author, however, did not extend her research to identify the aspirational motives that were associated with the purchase of high-end brands.

The researcher would therefore like to extend the body of literature relating to idealistic images as opposed to limiting it to body movements. The lack of research pertaining to millennials' aspirations indicates that further research needs to be explored as millennials' aspirations and goals are not limited to luxury brands but further extend to other personal goals set by an individual, while also exploring the comparisons and congruities that affect aspirations.

Relevant to this dissertation, the researcher has justified the formulation of the dissertation on the basis of the identified deficits in numerous studies. The majority of the studies identified by the researcher have been based on Western markets (Valencia, 2013), and it is therefore imperative for the researcher to examine the proposed conceptual concepts in the context of the South African markets. The identification of such inconsistencies and lack of research within the identified areas has prompted the researcher of this particular dissertation to deeply investigate and also attempt to fill the deficiency of research within the research sphere pertaining to the consequential and/or beneficial effects social media may have on the concept of aspiration, while further identifying causal variables that may be responsible for affecting the formation of one's aspirations.

1.2.2 Contribution and Significance of the Study

Pertinent to the current dissertation, the researcher intends to make significant contributions both managerially and academically. The managerial contributions of the study are particularly aimed at assisting marketing and brand managers as well as research organisations in deriving essential information necessary for identifying and developing strategies targeted at millennials. Furthermore, considering that the study greatly emphasised the exposure to idealised images and its effects on millennial' aspirations, the information gained from this study is intended to enable managers to gain an in-depth comprehension of the factors affecting their target's exposure to advertisements or brands. The factors comprise of how exposure to idealised images consequently affects the formation of identities, their habits, and preferences. Overall, these contributions will enable marketers to accordingly develop feasible strategies based on the needs of their targets.

Academically, the researcher formulated new conceptual concepts that were tested in providing new researchers with the opportunity of utilising the current study as a foundation upon which

future studies of a similar nature can be broadly explored. The identification of the researcher's conceptual model can additionally be further tested and extended, so as to broaden the literature pertaining to studies focussing on similar conceptual constructs.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is twofold: Firstly, to probe the relationship between *exposure to idealistic images* and *aspirations to ideal self* as predictor and outcome variables. Secondly, to further investigate the inter-construct relationship between *self-esteem*, *social comparison* and *self-congruency* in relation to *exposure to idealised images* and millennial *aspiration*s to ideal self alike.

1.3.1 Research Objectives

Theoretical Objectives

- To comprehensively review literature on the research construct of exposure to idealised images;
- To comprehensively review literature on the research construct of self-esteem;
- To comprehensively review literature on the research construct social comparison;
- To comprehensively review literature on the research construct of self-congruency; and
- To comprehensively review literature on the research construct of aspirations to ideal self.

Empirical Objectives

- Test the relationship between exposure to idealised images and self-esteem;
- Test the relationship between exposure to idealised images and social comparison;
- Test the relationship between exposure to idealised images and self-congruency;
- Test the relationship between exposure to idealised images and aspirations to ideal self;
- Test the relationship between self-esteem and aspiration;
- Test the relationship between social comparison and aspiration; and
- Test the relationship between self-congruency and aspirations to ideal self.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary Question:

Can the exposure to idealised images influence the formation of an individual's aspirations on their ideal self?

Sub-questions:

RQ1*:* Does a relationship exist between exposure to idealised images and self-esteem?

RQ2*:* Does a relationship exist between exposure to idealised images and social comparison?

RQ3: Does a relationship exist between exposure to idealised images and self-congruency?

RQ4: Does a relationship exist between exposure to idealised images and aspiration?

RQ5: Does a relationship exist between self-esteem and aspiration?

RQ6: Does a relationship exist between social comparison and aspiration?

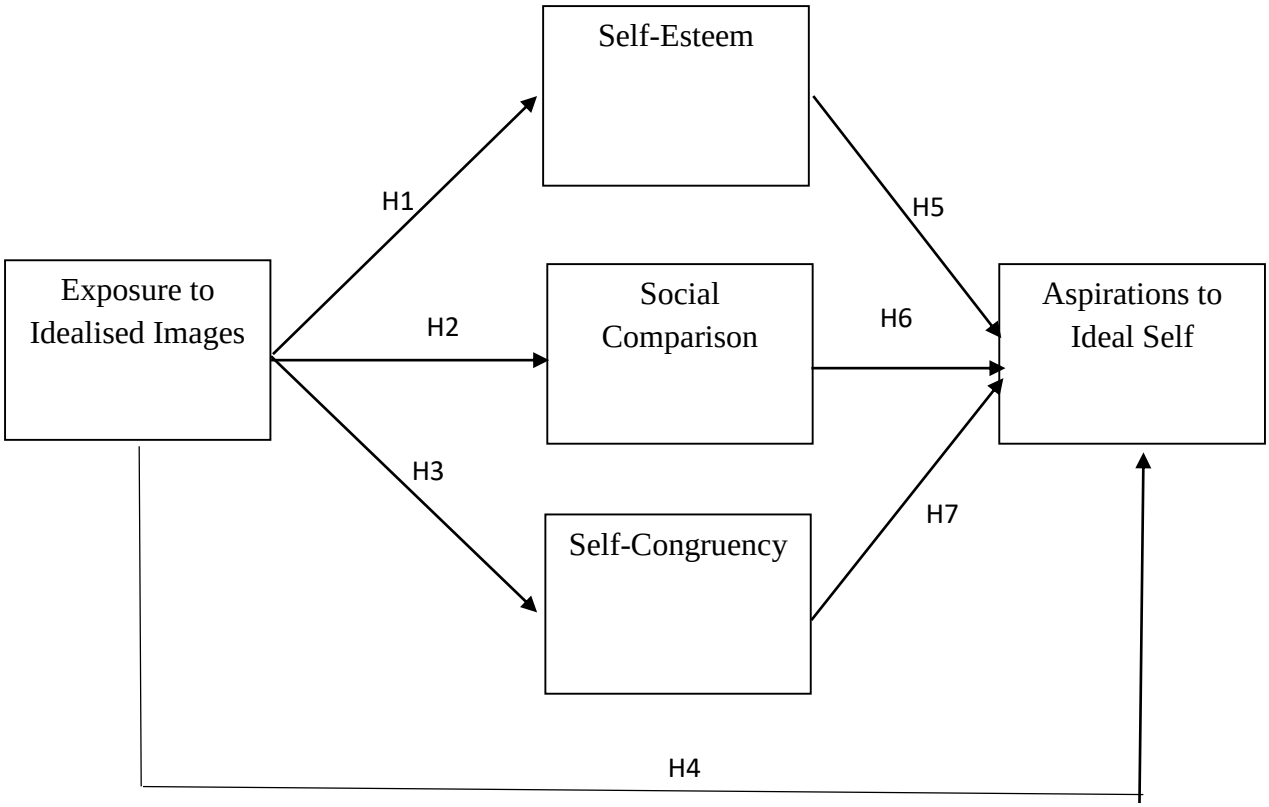
RQ7: Does a relationship exist between self-congruency and aspirations to ideal self?

1.5 CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH MODEL

1.5.1 Identification of Predictor, Mediator and Outcome Variables

The formulation of a proposed conceptual model was based on the identification of relationships between variables the researcher plans to test in order to facilitate the production of empirical evidence. In developing the research variables, the researcher therefore identified one (1) predictor variable: Exposure to idealised images, three (3) mediating variables: Self-Esteem, Social-Comparison and Self-Congruency, as well as one (1) outcome variable: Aspirations to Ideal Self. Furthermore, the relationships of the research constructs were tested through the development of hypotheses statements.

Figure 1.1: Diagrammatic Illustration of the Research Model



Source: Compiled by researcher (2017)

1.5.2 HYPOTHESES STATEMENTS

The following hypotheses statements are proposed for the present study:

H1: Exposure to idealised images negatively influences self-esteem.

H2: Exposure to idealised images positively influences social comparison.

H3: Exposure to idealised images positively influences self-congruency.

H4: Exposure to idealised images positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

H5: Self-esteem positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

H6: Social comparison positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

H7: Self-congruency positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following dissertation's literature review was categorised by two (2) sections, that comprised the theoretical grounding and empirical literature reviews respectively. The theoretical review has been grounded on two consumer behavioural theories which are ultimately responsible for the formulation of the empirical review. The theories of *self-concept* and the *social cognitive theory* are explored as they form the bases of the study, while the empirical review covered existing literature on the concepts of *exposure to idealised images, self-esteem, social comparison, self-congruence* and *aspiration to ideal self,* and the suggested relationships that exist thereof.

1.6.1 Theoretical Grounding

1.6.1.1 Self-Concept

Studies pertaining to the concept of 'self' date back to Grubb & Grathwohl (1967), who suggest that self-concept results from an engagement process between individuals, where self-enhancement is sought to be achieved by individuals during the interactive process. Self-concept's significance and appropriateness was based on consumer behaviour theories; simply put, the concept is defined as an individual's cumulative thoughts and feelings, often with particular reference to oneself as an object (Rosenburg, 1979).

With reference to a marketing perspective, authors have extended studies of "self'' by identifying the self-concept as a mechanism of formulating a self-image which often equates to a conscious or unconscious preference to a brand (Upamannyu, Mathur & Bhakar, 2014).

As a mechanism of fully comprehending the concept of *self* within the millennials of this study, numerous studies suggest it be categorised into four (4) components, which will be necessary in identifying the influences idealised images have on the actual and ideal selves:

- *Actual self:* The way in which individuals identify/see themselves
- *Ideal self:* The manner in which individuals would like to be viewed by themselves;
- *Actual-social self:* The manner in which individuals perceive they are viewed by significant beings;
- *Ideal-social self:* The manner in which individuals desire significant beings to view them (Sirgy, 1997, 2000).

1.6.1.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is a human behaviour and motivation theory that enables individuals to exercise their control of their thoughts, feelings and actions on through a system of self-belief (Mills et al. 2007). Bandura (2005) suggests that human agency is supported by the presence of numerous core features, with particular emphasis on intentionality and the temporal expansion via forethought. The former core feature postulates that the intentions formed by individuals often comprise action plans and strategies that are set in place as a means of fulfilling the said intentions, while the latter defines the anticipated likely outcomes of prospective actions. The individual's actions are said to be predictably guided and motivated by their future directed plans (Bandura, 2005). In relation to this particular study, the researcher will have to note that the evaluation of the individual's thought processes, pertaining to their personal experiences and self-assessments, the employment of their self-reflective capacities will inherently enable a better comprehension of not only themselves, but also the inclusion of their environments and disparities in situational demands (LaRose, Mastro & Eastin, 2001).

1.6.2 Empirical Review

1.6.2.1 Exposure to idealised images

In relation to media studies, the terms 'use' and 'exposure' are used interchangeably when asking respondents of the frequency of use of specific mediums (Hollander, 2006). In accordance with communication theories, constant exposure to media contents can influence the acceptance of media portrayals as representations of reality. Therefore, the repetitive depiction of the media's ideals (thin) will lead to the interpretation of such ideals as normatively expected and central to attractiveness (Hyde, 2008). In measuring the effects of exposure to idealised images on a millennial, the researcher will employ the use of one's actual and ideal self as a comparative mechanism.

1.6.2.2 Self -Esteem

Self-esteem or self-image defines the manner in which an individual would desire to be seen by others (Schenk & Holman, 1980). A study conducted by Sirgy, 1982; Ross, 1971) identified that decisions based on a brand choice were motivated by self-image, where they further poised that a consumer's choice in products is principled on the portrayal of images that are congruent with their own self-image. In relation to social media use and self-esteem, empirical evidence suggests that the enhancement of an individual's self-esteem and well-being is a result of

positive feedback posited from their self-presentations (Valkenburg et al. 2006). Furthermore, exposure to idealised stimuli often leads to pro-social behaviour and low self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

1.6.2.3 Social Comparison

The Social Comparison Theory was formulated by Leon Festinger in 1954, whereby he proposed Social Comparison as the process upon which individuals would compare themselves with others as a means of determining their behaviour (Russello, 2009). Smeesters, Mussweilers & Mandel, (2011) stated that the Social Comparison Theory is a focal attribute of human social life (Smeesters, Mussweilers & Mandel, 2011).

Individuals with higher likelihoods to engage in upward comparisons are more susceptible to socio-cultural ideals, with particular reference to appearance (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Social comparison can therefore be referred to as the chain between the internalisation of ideals and media effects (Russello, 2009).

1.6.2.4 Self-Congruence

Saino (2016) cites that the self-congruency theory was first developed by Sirgy (1982) in which he identified the concept as the incongruence or congruence among the perceptions an individual holds against a brand or product. Kressman et al. (2006) further defined the concept of self-congruity in a marketing context as an existing parity between a customer's self-concept and the perception of a product's image. Salecki, Saki and Nekooei (2014) cited the four (4) subtopics self-congruity as actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity.

1.6.2.5 Aspiration to Ideal Self

Wolfram (2015) cited Appadurai (2004) by culturally defining the concept of Aspiration as the ideas an individual possesses about their future and a good life. As can be expected with social constructs, Quagila & Cobb (1996) state that the concept is (Aspiration) susceptible to numerous definitions and interpretations, and therefore requires clarification. In accordance to the Oxford Dictionary, Aspiration is commonly defined as "a desire or ambition to achieve something", whereas, Locke & Latham, (2002) further elaborated the definition, by defining the concept as the extent and/or quality of performance upon which an individual would desire to attain or rather feel they have the potential to achieve. Pertaining to the study, exposure to Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has affected millennial aspirations by driving them to base

their life goals on the achievement or attainment materialistic and idealised lifestyles (Ressel, 2009).

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

1.7.1 Research Philosophy

Bornmark, Göransson & Svensson (2006) defined research philosophy as the formation of thoughts in relation to the formation of knowledge. Philosophical assumptions are deemed to be a crucial step in defining the stance a researcher would engage in while conducting their study (Cresswell, 2007). Kent (2007) highlights that the perceptions made by researchers are generally analysed through the employment of two philosophical approaches: Positivist and Interpretivist approaches respectively. The former entails a highly structured approach that postulates that the initiation of science or knowledge should be regulated by what the research can observe and measure, while the latter approach is complex to define and is commonly used in business scenarios, as it entails the use of theories and laws, similar to the manner in which physical sciences would define the approach (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Considering that a Positivist approach is likened to quantitative research methods, the researcher's rationale for utilising a Positivist approach as opposed to an Interpretivist is purely based on the dissertation being quantitative in nature and, additionally, on the notion that the employment of a Positivist approach will enable the proposed theories to be directly tested through the use of experiments with particular reference to both online and self-administered surveys (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

1.7.2 Research Design

Calmeyer et al. (2011) defined research design as a plan or blueprint upon which a researcher indicates how they plan on conducting research. Furthermore, the research design process focuses on the creation of a blueprint of activities the researcher will have to satisfactorily undertake in order to answer research questions which were formulated in the exploratory phase. The research design process would require the researcher to therefore select a research method, formulate constructs of interest and accordingly devise appropriate sampling strategies (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

With particular relevance to the current study, the research has employed a descriptive, quantitative design. Blumberg et al. (2008) stated that descriptive research seeks to describe and/or expound a formulated topic, however, lacks the capacity of deducing the occurrence of an event or why variables interact the way they do.

1.7.3 Sampling Design

The following study has identified a target population comprising of millennial men and women within the Johannesburg region but not limited to the University of the Witwatersrand, aged between 18 and 26.

- **Target Population**

  Malhotra (2010) defined a target population as the accumulation of objects or elements that possess information researchers refer to, upon which inferences are made. Considering that a sample's intention is to gain information about a population, it is therefore imperative from the outset that the researcher accurately identifies the population (Aaker, Kumar, Day & Leone, 2011).

  With researchers such as Paulin et al., (2013) and Debevec et al., (2013) having categorised millenials as the generation born between 1982 and 2000, Bolton et al., (2008) defined them as the cohort born between 1981 and 1999. The researcher therefore identified the target population as millennials between the ages of 18-36, within the Johannesburg region limited to the University of the Witwatersrand. The choice of the target population was based on the fact that millennials are deemed to be more active on social networking sites and their propensity to be easily influenced (Keeter, 2010).

- **Sampling Frame**

  The sampling frame can only be determined upon the selection and/or identification of a target population (Aaker et al., 2011).

  Particularly relevant to the study, the sampling frame pertaining to the study's self-administered questionnaires will be obtained in accordance to their strata's (East and West) on the University of the Witwatersrand campus.

- **Sampling Techniques**

  The researcher will employ probability sampling without replacement to ensure an equal chance of each sample being selected inclusive of the assurance of obtaining a representative sample upon which errors obtained in sampling can be estimated (Barreiro & Albandoz, 2009). The choice of stratified sampling as a sampling technique entails the division of homogenous and non-overlapping subgroups into strata (Bhattacherjee, 2012). For the purpose of the study, the respondents will be stratified on the bases of the two (2) University, namely the East and West.

- **Sampling Size**

DiGaetano & Waksberg (2002) have stated that sample size determination presumes numerous "trade-offs" which comprise factors such as cost of time and finance, sample estimates, potentiality of sampling biases and analytical objectives. The determination of a sample size often has often been dependent on the researcher's discretion and in this case a sample size calculator was used, whereby the following formula was employed:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \rho(1-p)}{M^2} \times 100$$

Where: M^2- Margin of error

$$N = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.438)^2} X\ 100$$

= 500

The study therefore collected data from a sample of 500 respondents, where respondents were stratified in accordance to three (3) of the five (5) faculties (namely: Humanities, Engineering and Built Environment, Commerce, Law, and Management found on the University's Braamfontein Campus.

1.7.4 Questionnaire Design

Malhotra (2010) postulates that the categorisation of questionnaires falls beyond the broader contexts of survey research. Self-administered questionnaires foster respondent engagement as there is a higher likelihood of the respondent committing to answering questionnaires that are short, valuable, concise and well presented (Burgess, 2001).

The study's questionnaire comprises six (6) sections; Section A will comprise the demographic section, as well as question relating to their use of and/or non-use of Social Networking Sites. The questions posed in Section A will employ a filtering technique which is necessary in obtaining general information pertinent to the respondent's eligibility to partake in the study. For instance, Section A will comprise the demographic section and screening questions establishing whether or not respondents have been exposed to idealised images or not. Sections B (Exposure to idealised images), C (Self-Esteem), D (Social Comparison), E (Self-Congruence), and F (Aspiration to ideal self) will comprise the measurement items/scales which are responsible for testing the proposed relationships that exist in conjunction to the proposed conceptual model.

The current study therefore employed self-administered questionnaires. The self-administered questionnaires were personally disseminated (by the researcher) in the setting of their respective lecture halls.

Pertinent to measuring the research constructs, the researcher employed the use of Likert scales; the common use of these summated measurement scales are often a great source of measuring attitudes (Blumberg, 2008). In accordance to Vanek's (2012) description, the Likert scales in this study were utilised as a means of measuring the respondents' extent to which they are required to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement to questions related to the dissertation's proposed hypotheses.

1.7.5 Data Collection Approach

Primary Data

Primary data is defined as the collection of data, undertaken by a researcher through the utilisation of interviews, observations, and questionnaires (Wilson, 2010).

The collection of data with reference to the dissertation required the dissemination of 500 self-administered personal surveys to registered students of The University of the Witwatersrand.

Secondary Data

Contrary to primary data, secondary data, commonly referred to as "desk research", can be defined as the prior collection of data, aimed at fulfilling intentions for studies other than the one at hand (Baines et al. 2011).

Relative to the dissertation, the researcher's secondary data was obtained through sources including Google Scholar, textbooks and published journals and/or past theses from research databases (i.e. Elsevier and Science Direct).

1.8 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

The analysis of data entails statistically preparing and structuring raw data upon which valuable information may be inferred (Ullah, 2010).

1.8.1 Data Analysis Software

Upon the completion of collecting data, the researcher was required to analyse the data set, where the cleaned and coded data were analysed through the use of a statistical package and/or programmes such as Statistical Package for Social Science commonly referred to as SPSS 23 and AMOS 23.

1.8.2 Measurement Instruments

Reliability

Reliability tests make inferences to the consistency and accuracy of measurement instrument to quantitative studies (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Shuttleworth (2009) proposed that the purpose of reliability tests lie in their ability to detail a test's repeatability and consistency.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the researcher tested the measurement instruments through the use of the following tests: Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extraction (AVE).

Validity

Testing the validity of measurement constructs is based on the determination of ensuring that the measurement scale employed served their intended purpose (Chuchu, 2015).

The validity of the dissertation's research constructs were estimated through use of eight (8) validity indicators, which were comprised of the Construct Validity test, Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, an Inter-Construct Matrix, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Shared Variance (SV), Model Fit, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Path Modelling (Malhotra 2007).

1.8.3 Hypothesis Testing

1.8.3.1 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is simply a hypothetical test that serves to not only illustrate and test proposed theoretical underpinnings related to a study, but to further test the extent of relationships that exist between model constructs (Chuchu, 2015).

Chinomona (2011) highlighted that Structural Equation Modelling extends beyond customary regression models as it has the ability to incorporate numerous independent and dependent variables, in addition to latent hypothetical constructs where clusters of observed variables have the potentiality of being represented.

For the purpose of the study's hypothetical tests, SEM was employed to evaluate the causal relationships that existed between the proposed constructs, while additionally greatly considering the measurement errors the researcher may have encountered during the approximation of the constructs (Nusair & Hua, 2010).

1.8.3.2 Model Fit Indices

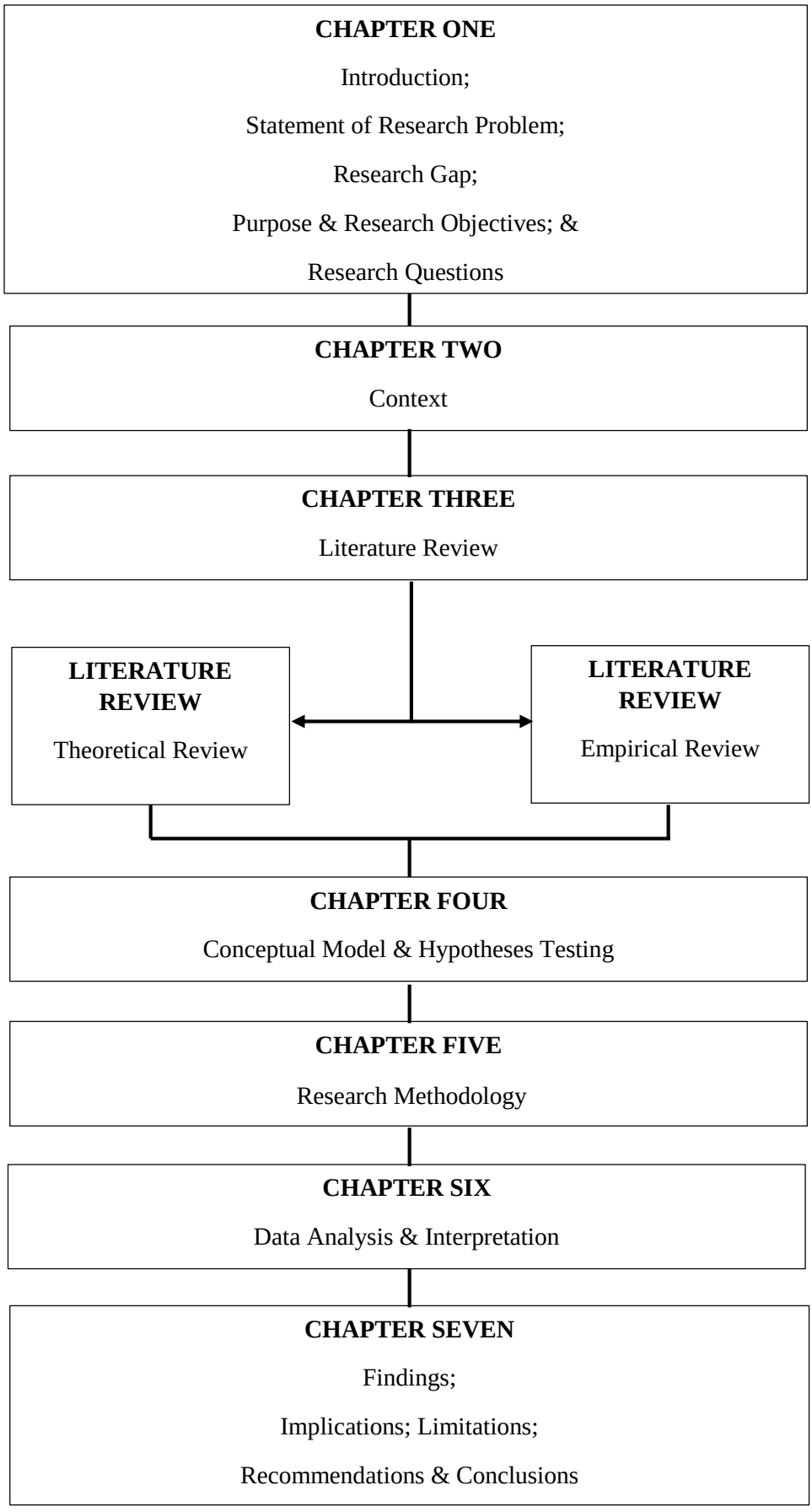
Model fit indices, also referred to as absolute fit indices, ascertain the fit of a model in relation to the data obtained from samples, while also illustrating which of the proposed models have the most superior fits (Hooper et al. 2008). The model fit indices therefore comprised the Chi-Square test, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA). The cut-off values for each of the model fit indices are as follows: Chi-Square value will be acceptable if the value is below 3, GFI values must be between 0 & 1, with a cut-off of 0.9, while NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI and RFI values should not exceed 0.9 respectively, while the RMSEA value should range between 0.05 and 0.10 (Chinomona, 2011; Hooper et al. 2008; Tabachinck & Fidell, 2007; Steiger, 2007).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As with any research, researchers are often required to adhere to ethical considerations. The researcher had to adhere to ethical considerations in data collection and measurement choices (reliability and validity checks). Firstly, data collection ethical issues required the researcher to avoid administering overly long questions, sensitive questions and deliberate biasing of questions as the administration of overly long and sensitive questions deters respondents from answering the questions, while the deliberate biasing of questions negatively affects the results obtained from the questionnaire. The ethical issues addressed therefore affect the reliability and validity of the study (Malhotra, 2010). Secondly, unreliable, invalid or generalizable (to the target population) measurement scales remain questionable and posed serious ethical problems. According to Malhotra (2010) research should by all means avoid biasing scales to

slant findings in their favour, which commonly occurred in Likert Scales, scale descriptors and/or other aspect scales.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION



CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT AND SETTING THE SCENE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two (2) provided an overview of the research context. The chapter focused on two broad sections comprising millennials and social media. The first subsequent section of the chapter defined millennials and the characteristics that describe them thereof. The second component of the chapter comprehensively defined the concept of social media, followed by the history of social media, its various classifications, and its subsequent importance to marketers. Finally, the chapter indicated the relationship that exists between the two primary contextual constructs.

The first section comprehensively defined millennials, brief statistics of their population relevant to the South African market and their importance to marketers, in addition to the characteristics that accompany this generational cohort.

2.2 MILLENNIALS DEFINED

Millennials and Generation Y are interchangeably used to define a cohort of individuals who are born between 1982 and 2000, babies of baby boomers and younger siblings to the Generation X cohort (Debevec et al. 2013; Beirne and Howe, 2008). Similar to sentiments held by Debevec et al. 2013), Paulin et al. (2013) classified millennials as the 'Net Generation' or 'Nexters' as those born between 1982 and 2000, additionally highlighting their significant 30% representation of the population whose growth will hold relative importance (Yerbury, 2010).

Millennials vary from country to country due to globalisation, social media, the acculturation of Western culture and the speed of change. This cohort held more similarities in comparison to older generations within their nations (Stein, 2013). As a result, there have been contrary statements as to when millennials were actually born. For example, Bolton et al. (2008) states that millennials were born between 1981 and 1999, whereas Ressel (2016) cited Young and Hinesly (2012) as defining them as those born between 1980 and 2000.

In the majority of South African publications, millennials are born between 1980 and 2000, however, according to Western publications, millennials are born between 1977 and 1994 (Duh cited Noble et al., 2009; Norum, 2008; Paul, 2001). The generation Y population comprises

individuals aged from 18 to their early thirties, representing approximately 2.5 billion of the world's population (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016).

For the purpose of this study, millennials are regarded as those born between 1981 and 1999 as the study's sampling frame comprised millennials aged between 18 and 36.

2.2.1 Statistics on the size of the Millennial market in South Africa

According to Millennial Week, (2014), this generation comprised 1.8 billion of the world's members, therefore making them the largest generation. Pertinent to the African context, Anvar & Venter (2014) identify that African millennials constitute 84% of the South African population.

Duffet (2014) further indicated that records from Statistics South Africa (2012) deduced that 66% or two-thirds of the South African population are 30 years old and/or younger, while the millennial cohort comprised approximately 13 million individuals of the South African population. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), individuals between the ages of 18 and 39 equated to approximately 34% of the country's population; findings further deduced that the country's spending power among millennials was indicative that 51% of female millennials held relatively higher degrees of spending powers as opposed to their male counterparts who constituted 41% of the millennial cohort (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

2.2.2 The Importance of Millennials to Marketers

Millennials are significantly interesting to service managers, marketers and researchers alike, as Bolton et al., (2013) highlighted that service managers and researchers are particularly interested in this generational cohort's usage of social media as it serves as a fore-warner of their future behaviours in addition to the perceptions held towards brands.

Marketers regarded millennials as a highly important generational or consumer cohort because of the inclinations toward future purchase tendencies they may indicate towards brands. As a result, companies have deemed their perceptions toward social media marketing as highly significant (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016).

A study conducted by Anvar & Venter (2014) established that millennials are representative of the environmentalist future. Relative to their attitudes and purchase behaviours toward green products in South Africa, their significance to marketers make them valuable target markets to the green marketing movement (Anvar and Venter 2014 cite Lee, 2009). Consumer researchers

have particularly monitored the Generation Y cohort, due to their adaptations in their family structure (Duh, 2011). Often referred to as the "Peter Pan Generation," marketers have gained great fascination in this particular segment due to their tendencies to postpone their emergence into adulthood. This segment avoids milestones achieved by baby boomers, such as living independently from their parents, marriage and family planning, due to their fear of encountering their parents' "mistakes" (Carroll et al., 2009). Such characteristics have made it challenging for marketers to resonate with this particular generational cohort as they no longer serve as accurate lifestyle stage indicators, therefore questioning the long-term use and effectiveness of firms' marketing efforts (Bolton et al., 2013).

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS

Millennials have been characterised as being selective, confident and impatient (Byrne, 2014). The Pew Research Center (2010) described millennials as entrepreneurial, self-reliant, ethnically diverse, accepting of diversity, possessing a global mind-set, and ambitious (Debevec et al. 2013). There has been a general consensus between authors where they characterised the Generation Y cohort as "wanting it all" and "wanting it now", with particular reference to their earnings, benefits, career developments and work-life balance, while also managing to make social contributions through their work (Bolton et al. 2008). In addition to this statement, growing up during economic booms and pampering from their baby boomer parents has led to their sense of entitlement and abundance, as stated by older generations (Byrne, 2008). Substantial research also supported this notion as the Boston Consulting Group (2013) highlighted that, in addition to previous generations, organisations negatively connoted them by defining millennials as selfish, lazy, entitled and highly narcissistic.

"Generation Me" and/or "Generation We" is a paradoxical description popular press, blogs and scientific literature use to describe millennials (Twenge et al., 2012). Paulin et al., (2013) cited numerous authors by describing "Generation Me" as highly intrinsic and materialistic, with significant influence being placed on money and personal images. Contrary to the former, "Generation We" is more attentive, empathetic and respectful, while possessing a great desire to change the world for the better, by promoting favourable causes through the employment of social media resources.

According to Parasuraman et al. (2013), managers and academics alike exerted a peculiar fascination to the millennial generation. This is due to the fact that marketers are constantly

striving to gain a better understanding of their buying behaviours and brand loyalty (Byrne, 2014). Giovanni et al., (2015) stated that millennials are the least brand loyal consumers as compared to their older counterparts, as they placed more thoughts on buying reflective and representative brands relative to their personas (Barton et al., 2012). Numerous authors have studied millennials and their attraction towards luxury brands, with findings indicating that a great deal of importance is placed on brands as they communicated an identity to their environment (Ressel, 2009).

Generation Y consumers had more interactions with companies and brands than any other generational cohort before them (Boston Consulting Group, 2014). Interactions between companies and millennials were often facilitated by their direct reach via messages on social media platforms (Ressel as cited by Baron et al., 2012: Cardamenis, 2015). Their influential nature provided companies with the opportunity of identifying how their products are being used and the perceptions held about them. This result strengthened the relationship between brands and consumers, therefore leading to increased brand loyalty (Ressel 2009; Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2009).

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

2.4.1 Social Media defined

Social media interchangeably referred to as the Web 2.0 and User Generated Content was formally defined by constructing a distinctive line between the two concepts, whereby Web 2.0 is the representation of ideological and technological foundation, while the latter equated to the sum of all forms upon which individuals utilise social media (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2009). A recurring theme in literature has focussed on properly defining the concept of social media in relation to the two words from which it is derived: Social and Media (Rouse, 2015).

Social denotes the interaction between individuals belonging to a group or community, while its *Media* counterpart denotes the advertisement and communication of ideas or information disseminated through publications and/or channels (Neti, 2011). Contrary to Neti (2011) definition of social media, Kaplan and Haenlin (2009) defined it in relation to a set of theories adopted from media research (i.e. social presence, media richness) and social processes (i.e. self-presentation, self-disclosure). The two key elements of social media are therefore defined by the four (4) sub-elements:

Social

In the context of social media, Kaplan and Haenlin (2009) assumed the first classification is based on the degree of self-disclosure that is required, alongside the self-presentation it facilitates. Therefore, the two classifications are discussed as follows:

1. *Self-presentation:* In relation to millennial social interactions, more concern would be attributed about the opinions garnered from stronger ties, as more care is put into presenting positive self-views to stronger ties as opposed to weaker ties (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). The objective behind this motive simply influenced others to gain rewards or to rather create an image consistent with a millennial's personal identity (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2009).
2. *Self-disclosure:* This is known to form a critical step in formulating close relationships or even strangers. Relation between the two sub-elements therefore suggests that the self-presentation and/or conscious or unconscious revelations of personal information commonly occur during self-disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2009).

Media

In accordance with the social media context, Kaplan and Haenlin (2009) assumed that the second classification is based on the medium's richness and the extent of the facilitation of social presence. The final two classifications are therefore discussed as follows:

3. *Social presence:* Based on Short, Williams and Christie's (1976) social presence theory, this sub-element of media influence is guided by intimacy and immediacy of the medium. Simply put, higher social presence results in larger social influences among communication in partners' behaviours.
4. *Media richness:* Developed by Daft and Lengel, (1986), the media richness theory postulates media differs in its extent of richness it possesses, or the amount of information permitted to be transmitted in a specific time interval. Additionally, the resolution of ambiguity and uncertainty is dependent on the effectiveness of the media concerned (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2009).

Internet marketing is theoretically considered a fragment of digital marketing, furthermore, social -media is considered a sub-element of internet market, with the internet being considered a collection of sub-medias as opposed to the internet being a media (Simula et al, 2013). Due

to the proliferation of social websites and applications, social media has played an integral role of one's online life (Rouse, 2015). The use of social networking sites by individuals suggested that value is created for individuals through the provision of a space that satisfies consumer needs for self-expression (Lim, 2012). Therefore, social media's power lay in its ability to transform the Web from an information platform to an influential platform, where its users solicit opportunities to influence and engage with their preferred brands (Hanna et al. 2011; Parent et al. 2011).

Social media entails networking in a manner which trust among communities and parties is espoused (Neti, 2011). Boyd and Ellison (2007) conducted a study wherein they defined social networking sites as web-based services that facilitate the:

1. Establishment of a public or semi-public profile within a confined system;
2. Compilation of a list of users with whom a connection is shared, and;
3. Viewing and extension of connection's lists and lists made by other individuals within the system (Lim et al, 2012).

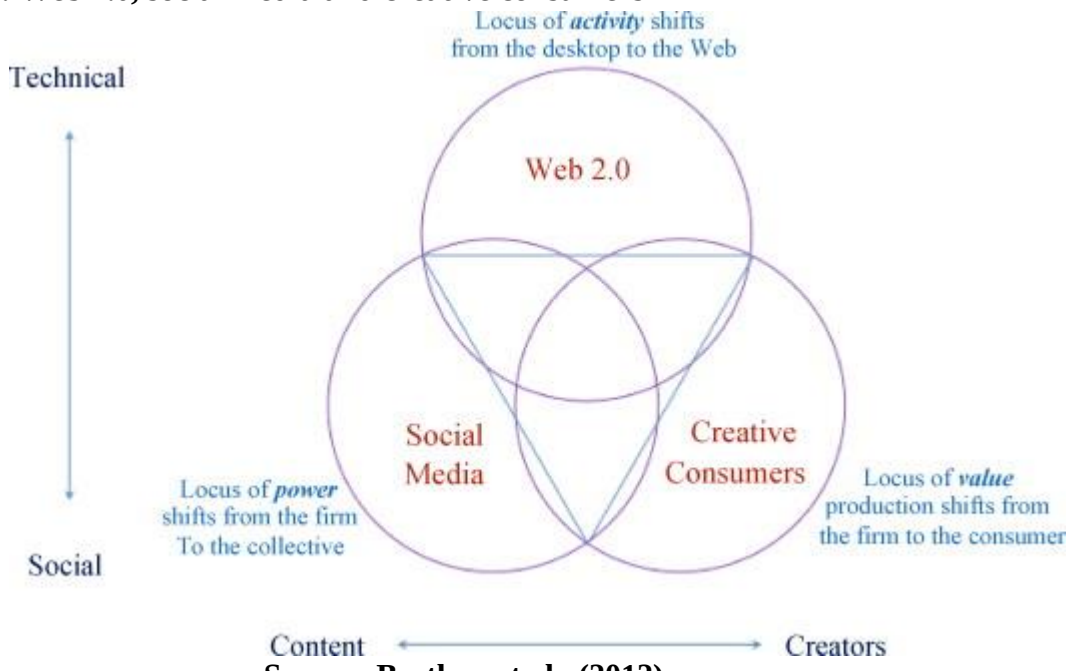
Social media is commonly referred to as media that is utilised for social interaction, through the use of highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques, while further using web-based technologies to alter communication into interactive dialogues (Neti, 2011). Social media platforms are not limited to the publishing of opinions, connecting and building communities, but are also inclusive of the production and sharing of content which are responsible for the creation of the so-called "social media revolution" (Smith, 2009, cited by Simula et al, 2013). The concept additionally considers the use of "wisdom of crowds" as a mechanism of connecting information in collaborative forms (Neti, 2011). Within the scope of the social media definition, numerous ways exist as a means of distinguishing the types of social media. However, research suggests that no systematic way is available to categorise the differing social media applications (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.4.2 The History of Social Media

Although Social Media is slightly over a decade old, the rate of adoption has however been expedited at a faster rate than other interactive historical ICT conduits, while occupying a substantial amount of user's time (particularly digital savvy millennials) (Matthee, 2011). Unbeknownst to the majority of individuals, the social media landscape and services offered thereof are a derivative of more than a dozen years ago (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Researchers have commonly used the terms Web 2.0, social media and creative consumers interchangeably, due to their interdependence and close relations (Berthon et al., 2012). Although the three (3) terms are conceptually discrete, the authors have devised an illustration to that enables marketing managers to comprehend and distinguish the nuances of each dimension through their locus. The three dimensions illustrated in Figure 2.1 entail:

Figure 2.1: Web 2.0, social media and creative consumers



Source: Berthon et al., (2012)

The three (3) locus points of the Web 2.0 explicate the technological effects caused by the Web 2.0 where: 1) Identifies a deviation of a focal point of activity from a desktop to the Web; 2) the locus is placed on the customer from the firm's value production; and 3) the power locus deviates from the firm to the customer (Berthon et al., 2012).

1. **Web 2.0**: The social phenomenon of collective data is enabled through technical infrastructure while facilitating the generation of consumer content;
2. **Social media:** The emphasis placed on content, where the firm's power deviates to the collectives; and
3. **Creative consumers:** The dynamos of the media world who are responsible for the creation of the value-added content, where the 'social' constitutes their friends and associations (Berthon et al., 2012).

2.4.3 Classification of Social Media Platforms

Technologies related to social media prompt profoundly new measures of interaction (Hansen et al., 2011). The social media ecology comprises rich and diverse sites whose variations are identified on the bases of their scope and functionality (Kietzman et al., 2011).

Social media platforms can therefore be classified as the following:

Blogs: Following a slow progression in the late 1990's, blogs, also referred to as weblogs, have gained popularity due to their facile creation and maintenance (Kietzmann et al., 2011), where blog span from everyday individuals to professional celebrities and writers.

The process of blogging can be loosely defined as an online technology necessary for the publication of information, through which consumers (followers, readers and users) and firms are able to communicate messages, thereby establishing a foundation for the formation of cohorts of similar interests (Hameide, 2011; Cuevas, 2016). Since its inception, the 'blogosphere' is comprised of than 100 million blogs, while public opinions have become an integral part of their interconnections (Kietzman et al., 2011). As stated by Kietzman et al. (2011), blogs are less focussed on synchronous connections, but rather emphasise the facilitation of rich, and often lengthy conversations.



Figure 2.2: Tumblr blog logo (Source: Patrick Coombe http://www.elite-strategies.com/guide-tumblr-internet-marketing/)

Twitter: A free micro-blogging platform where users can instantly share fragment of news and information with fellow users and/or followers referred to as tweets (Holton and Lewis, 2011). Tweets are limited to a maximum of 140 characters or less and are disseminated from the user's personal site to their followers (Holton & Lewis, 2011). Twitter allows its registered members to broadcast their tweets and further follow other users through the use of numerous platforms and devices (Rouse, 2015). Twitter is nucleated around the exchange of brief real-time status updates and/or messages necessary for creating ambient awareness of issues (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).



Figure 2.3: Twitter Logo (Source: https://about.twitter.com/en_us/company/brand-resources.html**)**

Facebook: The use of Facebook lies in its ability to maintain pre-existing relationships (bonding social capital) while keeping in touch with old acquaintances (maintaining social capital) wherein bonding social capital (on Facebook) requires a low-maintenance manner of keeping in contact with friends. Contrary to bonding social capital, Ellison et al, 2007 further adds the maintenance of social capital facilitates a connection for the maintenance of weaker ties (Ellison et al, 2007).



Figure 2.4: Facebook logo (Source: https://en.facebookbrand.com/**)**

Pinterest: According to the Pinterest website, it is defined as a tool used to collect and organise things that inspire individuals (Alperstein 2015).



Figure 2.5: Pinterest logo (Source: https://za.pinterest.com/explore/icons/)

Instagram: Introduced in 2010, Instagram provides its users with the opportunity to share their interests to a sizeable online community referred to as followers (Lenhart, 2015). Due to its popularity and visual appeal, Instagram users far surpass the number of Twitter and Tumblr followers (Lee, Lee, Moon and Sung, 2015). Instagram enables individuals to interact while

self-expressing themselves on the platform (Mohr, 2013). Personal inspirations are uniquely incorporated into visual images allowing users to create and share intriguing stories (Visual Creative, 2014).



Figure 2.6: Instagram logo (Source: https://en.instagram-brand.com)

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO MARKETERS

The media is known to significantly influence innumerable aspects of consumer behaviour (awareness, information acquisition, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communications and evaluations). A limitation in research from academic literature and business press provides minimal guidance to marketing managers in appreciating the role of social media for companies' promotional efforts (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Due to the gradual decline in mass marketing efforts, approximately 90% of marketers have adopted social media as a marketing tool (Clark & Melancon, 2013).

A profound amount of executives have been reluctant or possess the inability to formulate and allocate strategies and resources necessary to effectively engage with social media. The ramifications thereof result in the constant ignorance or mismanagement of opportunities and threats by firms often presented by their creative consumers (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Marketers have however realised that consumers are no longer confined to being passive receivers of their marketing exchange processes, and have adopted active roles in the co-creation of activities such as product designs to the promotion of messages (Hanna et al., 2011). Their particular interest in social media lies in its increase in interactivity contrary to traditional media as it provides essential information regarding their target audiences who can no longer be classified as spectators (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016).

The manifestation of the notable shift in the communication between customers and businesses has led to a decline in the effectiveness of mass media; this therefore reflects the significance of the underlying alterations in culture towards interactive dialogues (Clark & Melancon,

2013). The alterative wave in cultural norms and innovation manifested when organisations felt that they had gained an understanding and control of the internet, which subsequently confused managers and rendered them helpless (Berthon et al., 2012). Social media is democratized by individuals as they now possess the power of creating, sharing and consuming blogs which was previously dependent on marketers and public relations (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

In order to stay abreast of their consumer's choices and as a measure of ensuring the effectiveness of their marketing efforts through the use of social media, firms should consider the 4C's. The 4C's act as a guideline to enable firms to instigate strategies necessary in monitoring, comprehending and responding to various social media activities (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The 4C's are as follows:

- *Cognize:* Firstly, organisations are required to recognise and comprehend their social media landscapes, as this will uncover the functionality and engagement implications necessary for gaining a comprehensive understanding of their customers;
- *Congruity:* The formation of the organisation's strategies need to be congruent with the varying social media functionalities and goals the organisation seeks to achieve;
- *Curate:* Considering that the organisation acts as the curator of its social media interactions and content, a comprehensive understanding has to be established of who will act as the firm's representative, and when and how they should engage with their customers online,; and

  Chase: Organisations should constantly monitor their competitor's online activity, which may entail on-going scanning of their environments as a measure of comprehending the impetus of information flows that could potentially harm their current and future market positions. These boundaries can be overcome through inbound conversations and real-time conversations as they facilitate the formation of positive social media exposure (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

2.6 MILLENNIALS AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION

This particular generational cohort has been exposed to widespread Internet adoptions, including the evolution of social media platforms (Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2009). Millennials are deemed to be the first generational cohort to have contributed their entire lives to digital environments, where information technology has a profound impact on the way they live and

work (Bennett et al. 2008). Therefore, the term digital natives as opposed to digital immigrants has been used to describe this Generational cohort (Bolton et al. 2008). Growing up with the Internet has enabled millennials to be technologically savvy, and their constant use of the internet is a great differentiator between them and their predecessors (Debevec et al., 2013). Early and frequent exposure to technology is a key formative characteristic for defining Generation Y, although these characteristics can be both advantageous and disadvantageous in relation to their cognitive, emotional and social outcomes (Immordion-Yang et. 2012). For instance, they may regulate their emotions, interact with others or even find entertainment through their heavy reliance on technology (Bolton et al. 2008).

The relationship between millennials and social media lies in their constant use of various platforms, because their use of social media significantly affects the formation of their identities and habits, their service expectations, the nature in which they interact with brands, their active and/or passive participation in the co-creation of value, brand loyalty and their purchase behaviours (Bolton et al. 2008). Generation Y's enjoyment for socialising and being surrounded by people is prevalent in their lack of refrainment from publicly displaying their lives and experiences on social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest (Ellwood and Shekar, 2012). Millennials use social media as an affirmation of a desired persona they want to communicate to both themselves and others; therefore embracing technological avenues and distributing information and entertainment to generations preceding them in the form of aspirational goods and services (Trocchia et al., 2015; Morgan, 2012).

2.6.1 Social Media Statistics among Millennials

The most commonly used social media platform is Facebook, where the site reported to have 1.49 billion users globally, with 88% of the population accessing the Interactive ICT platform through the use of the mobile devices (Facebook, 2015). Relative to the South African context, a report deduced that 11.8 million South African Facebook users largely comprised the Generation Z cohort which are referred to as teenagers and younger and particularly millennials (Wronski & Goldstruck, 2015 as cited by Duffet, 2015).

According to a study conducted by Forbes, a contributor deduced that although 41% of millennials still use Facebook, the social media platform holds a higher popularity among non-millennials. Millennials are found to be more active on other social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Youtube (Friedman, 2016).

Relevant to the South African market, SpaceStation (2017) suggest that out of the 55.21 million citizens of South Africa, 15 million were “active users of social media”, indicating an annual digital growth of 15% (2million) in “active social media users”.

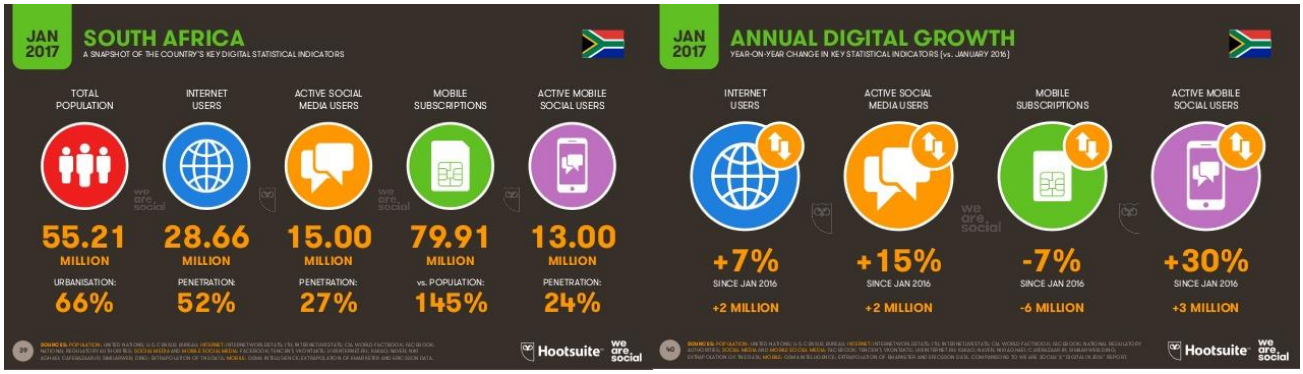


Figure 2.7: South African Digital Growth (Source: SpaceStation, 2017)

Relative to the time spent on Social Media, SpaceStation (2017) further cites that the “average daily use of social media via any device” is recorded as 2H 54M as indicated in figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Time Spent with Media (Source: SpaceStation, 2017)

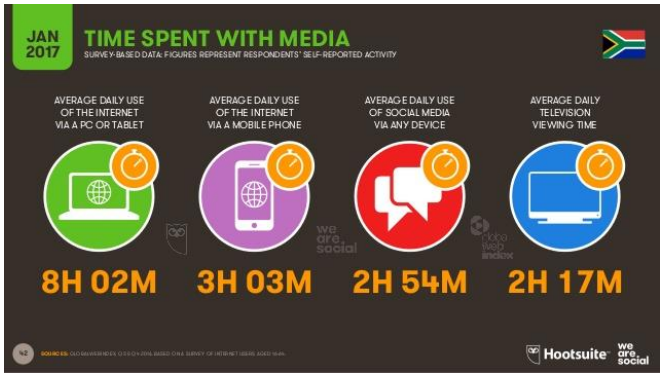


Figure 2.9 below indicates the South African social media use, where the results deduce that out of the 15 million active social media users, 13 million users accessed their social media platforms via their mobile phones. As previously stated, Facebook is the most commonly used platform, which also applies to the South African market, as 48% of users reported to using the particular platform, followed by Youtube with 47%, while Instagram only comprised 25% of the users (SpaceStation, 2017).

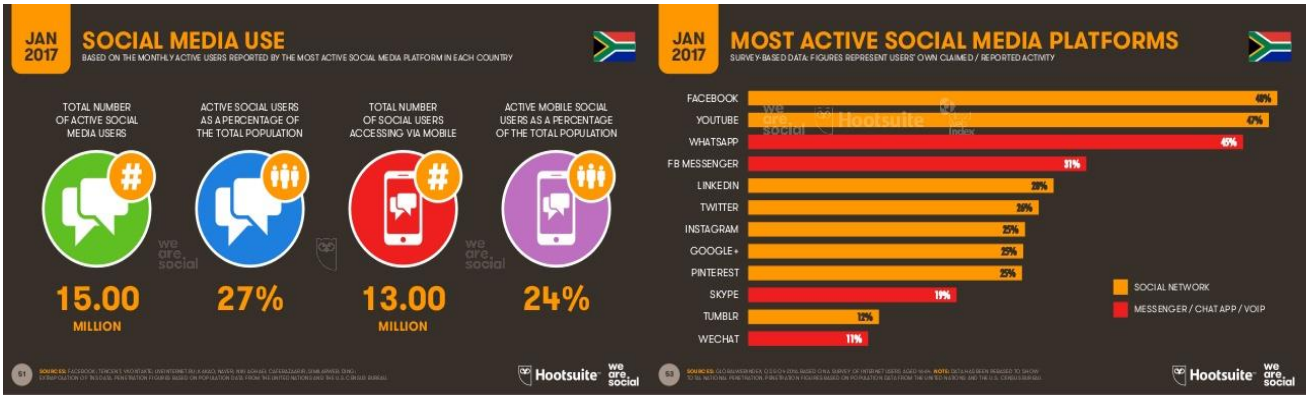
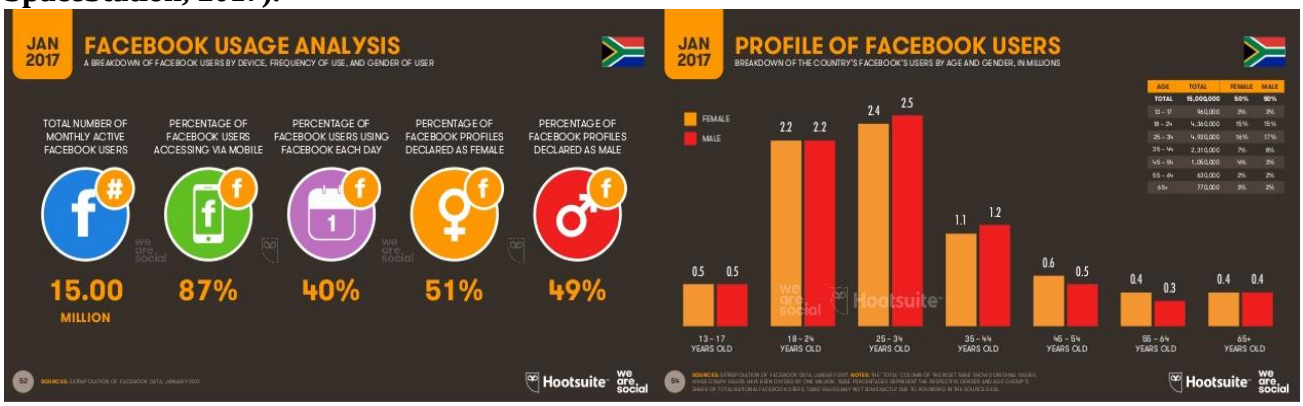


Figure 2.9: Social Media use and the most active Social Media Platforms (Source: SpaceStation, 2017)

With particular reference to Facebook, SpaceStation (2017) highlighted in figure 2.10 that 87% of users reported to have accessed the site via their mobile phone, 40% of users use Facebook on a daily basis, while the use among genders indicated "females" as the highest users comprising 51% of the total number of uses, with their "male" counterparts comprising 49%. Pertinent to the millennial or Generational Y cohort, individuals aged 25-34 years constituted the highest number of users, totalling 4.920 million of active users, where females comprised 2.4 million and male counterparts comprised 2.5 million active users (SpaceStation, 2017).

Figure 2.10: Facebook usage analysis and Profile of Facebook users (Source: SpaceStation, 2017).



2.7 THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA /THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has the power to affect individuals psychologically, Ong et al., (2011) cited Correa et al., (2010). Numerable studies empirically highlight the significant ways in which online marketing communications influence consumers varying attitudes (Duffet & Wakeham, 2016).

Consumers' behaviours are based on a hierarchical sequence which can be categorised into three fragments: cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. The cognitive response is prompted from the awareness and knowledge consumers develop of their social media interests, this response is therefore accompanied by the affective response. The affective response results from the liking or preference indicated towards their particular social media interest. The final stage referred to as the behavioural response, simply entails the action the consumer undertake on the basis of the outcome of the two previous hierarchical stages (Byrne, 2014).

The use of social media by individuals is driven by numerable motives, such as the use of self-disclosure as a means to convey their desired identities (Pempek et al., 2009), where the portrayal of an attractive personal profile results in the improvement of one's self-concept through admiration (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). In a bid to boost their self-concept and self-esteem, millennials create virtual identities which focus on their ideal selves as a means of impressing their online friends Urista et al., 2009). Sponcil & Gitimu (2013) therefore deduced that self-disclosure portrayed on social media is reliant on other's interpretations and act as a determinant of individual's successive behaviours. Therefore the social support received from their social media peers positively influenced self-disclosures, resulting in the maintenance of existing relationships.

Vazire et al., (2008) defined narcissists as exhibitionistic, attention-seeking individuals who placed significant emphasis on their physical appearance. In a bid to identify the psychological effects of social media, several studies highlighted the occurring theme of social media and narcissists. Social media platforms are self-regulating platforms for narcissists, as they enable complete control of their self-presentations in addition to the maintenance of superficial relationships (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Contrary to non-narcissists, narcissists have been identified as possessing more online friends, and wall posts, which lead to the assumption that their self-selections of attractive photographs act as an affirmation of their engorged belief (Ong et al., 2011). In close proximity to narcissists, the constant use of social media often resulted in internet addictions. The detrimental and negative effects such addictions can have on psychological behaviours are commonly linked to depression, social anxiety and loneliness (Skoric et al., 2009 as cited by Bolton et al., 2013). Although oblivious to internet addictions, users engaged with social media platforms as a coping mechanism, which has the potential to exacerbate underlying psychological health problems (Sheldon et al., 2011).

The exposure of inspirational figures to millennials mounted pressure upon the particular segment to adhere to societal norms of their identified reference groups, resulting in the formation of aspirational groups (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009). Although social media has been associated with detrimental effects, the usage of social media can enable individuals to broadly illustrate their physical well-being due to its effectiveness and efficiencies in communicating information pertaining to both their wealth and health to other online friends.

Despite its efficiencies and effectiveness in assisting marketers engage with their customers through numerous touch points, literature has suggested the beneficial and detrimental effects social media has on its users' psychological behaviours.

2.8 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO

As stated in the introduction, the second chapter solely focused on the generational cohort referred to as millennials, in addition to the concept of social media. Millennials were comprehensively discussed as the researcher provided an in-depth overview of the general statistics in a global and local perspective, while further identifying the importance of this segment to marketers as well as the characteristics associated with this cohort.

The second phase of this chapter focussed on the concept of social media, which encapsulated innumerable facets of this form of media. The first facet to be discussed defined the phenomenon, followed by the history surrounding the establishment of the movement. Social media was classified in accordance to its varying platforms, and its importance relative to the use of the tool by marketers.

The final section of the chapter linked the two concepts of millennials and social media, where the researcher discussed caveats behind millennials' use of social media consumption in conjunction with identifying the psychological effects social media has on its users.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The third chapter of the study encapsulated a comprehensive literature review founded upon theoretical and empirical groundings. The theoretical review detailed the theories upon which the main study has been based; namely the Self-Concept Theory as well as the Social Cognitive

Theory. The empirical review further discussed the theories the researcher planned on testing at a later stage of the study. The current chapter, however, identified literature from previous studies wherein numerous authors identified the existence and/or non-existence of relationships between the constructs. The five (5) constructs to be discussed comprised Exposure to idealised images, Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, Self-Congruence and Aspiration to the ideal self.

3.2 THEORETICAL GROUNDING

The following section of the dissertation discusses the Self-Concept Theory and Social Cognitive Theory.

3.2.1 SELF-CONCEPT THEORY

Self-Concept defined

The concept of self is defined as the mechanism through which a consumer's behaviour is influenced by self-congruity (Khoo et al., 2015). It additionally makes reference to the self-evaluations or self-perceptions made by an individual, while further representing the sum of their beliefs regarding their own attributes (Upamannyu et al., 2014). Research has advanced the concept of self as a construct that is useful in comprehending the manner in which customers interact with their friends (Khoo et al., 2015). McLeod (2007) cited Carl Rogers (1959) as assuming that the personality theory is a notion of self or rather self-concept; therefore defining the concept as the organisation of consistent beliefs and set perceptions an individual has toward themselves. Self-concept, empirically defined as the '*me'* self has been commonly associated with the term 'looking glass self'; the concept is analogized on the bases that the construction of the self-concept is related to one's appearance in the mirror (Jones, 2015).

According to social psychology, self-concept is compared to a cup containing a collection of identities, roles and values an individual attaches to themselves (Jones, 2015). In relation to consumer behaviour, the *self* is important as it enables the articulation of the consumer's personal identities and the promotion of social interactions with other individuals through brands embracing psychological and social symbols (Aaker, 1997). Upamannyu et al., (2014) further substantiate this notion as they highlighted the significant and appropriateness the theory holds to their study. The authors postulated that the image an individual perceives of themselves has a direct influence on the majority of purchases a consumer makes.

Classification of Self-Concept

A subset of self-concepts (i.e. the actual and ideal self) can be activated at any particular moment, and therefore impact the behaviour of a millennial (Khoo et al., 2015). A plethora of literature studying the concept of self has developed numerous theories and models, where James Bugental suggested that the formation of the self-concept is accentuated by the predominance of internal perceptual mechanisms, on the basis of individual approaches, with particular reference to personality theories Duguay (2012). As a result, the author developed a conceptual matrix differentiating the integral elements responsible for the formation of a person (phenomenal self) and external person's (phenomenal not-self). It is therefore important to note that a person's self-concept should be analysed through their own opinions (Beguntal as cited by Duguay, 2012). Duguay (2012) suggested the L'Ecuyer's GPS model in further defining the concept of self, whereby the model comprises an organised hierarchy of five (5) structures, with each hierarchy categorised into two substructures:

1. **Material self**: Comprises the references relevant to an individual's body or possessions
    - *Somatic self:* The formation of an individual's perceptions regarding their features, physical appearance and physical condition and health;
    - *Possessive self:* The possessive references about objects and significant other individuals.
2. **Personal self:** Cognitive and affective characteristics
    - *Self-Image*: The formation of an individual's aspirations, likings and interests, capacities and aptitudes, and feelings and emotions.
    - *Identity of the self*: References to an individual's conscious of being, such as their roles and status, consistency, abstract identity and ideologies.
3. **Adaptive self:** The expression of an individual's reactions toward their perceptions of oneself and others
    - The *value of self*: The manner in which an individual will judge their competence and personal value;
    - *Activities of self*: Measures used in defending the self, comprising adaptation strategies, autonomy, ambivalence, actualisation and lifestyle.
4. **Social self:** Defines the ideas or system ideas adopted from communications an individual cherishes as their own.
    - The interactions or desires with others are reassembled by their *preoccupations and social attitudes*, consisting of domination, altruistic nature and receptivity;

- An individual's consciousness of sexual influences is reflected by their *references to sexuality*, which is consists of sexual references and sexual appeal and experiences.

5. **Self-not-self:** The implicit references an individual develops about themselves by forming statements about others.
    - The identification of persons of reference is denoted by the *reference to others*;
    - An individual's perception of relating to what others think of them is denoted by the *opinion of others* (Duguay, 2012; Jones, 2015).

The hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow (1943) is mirrored by the concept of *me* self, which bares similarities with the material *self*-component. However, although there may be differences in emphasis, similarities can be identified in the idealised form of self (spiritual me) and the idealised form of motivation (self-actualizing). In relation to aspirations, the two components of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs share common notions due to their extensions beyond a millennial's self in the contribution or connection to something larger (Jones, 2015).

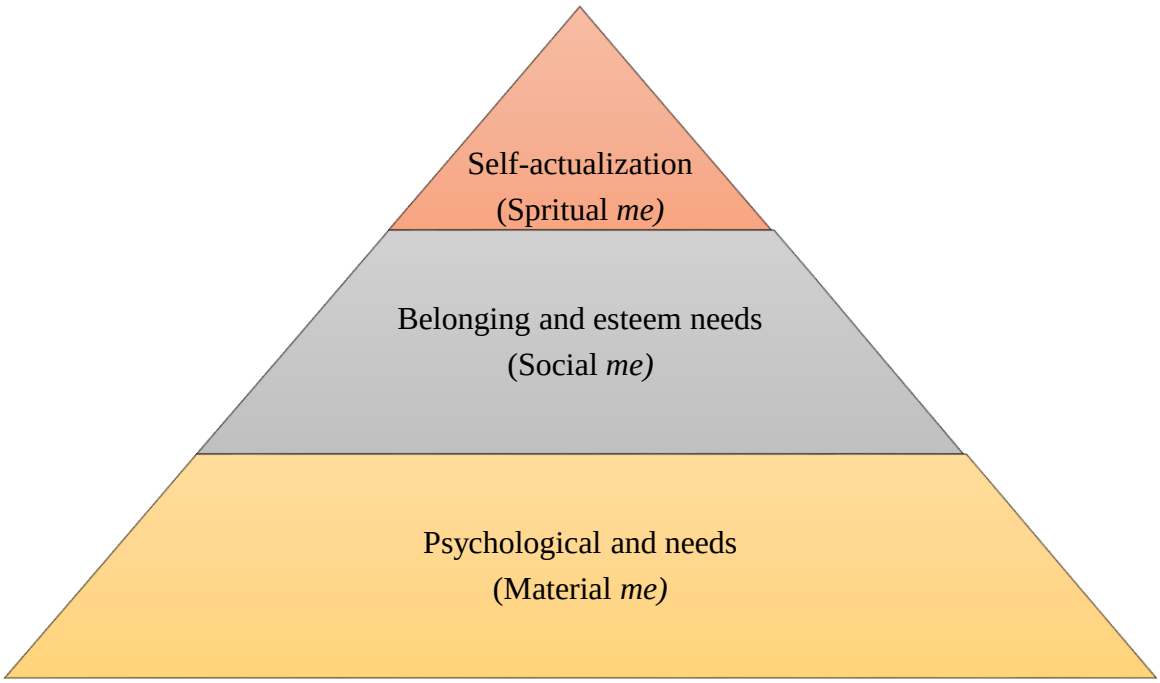


Figure 3.1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Source: Jones, 2015).

The relation between self-concept and social media was studied by Jones (2015) where he postulated that a millennial's attention to self-presentations are driven by the anticipation of rewards from desired audiences, or rather the reward of engaging oneself to an internalised, ideal self.

It can therefore be concluded that the self-concept is:

- **Learned:** Based on the assumption that an individual is not born with the *self,* but instead developed over the years. Due to the perceptions towards oneself being altered and affected by environmental factors, self-concept can therefore be defined as a product of development and socialisation;
- **Organised:** A millennial's congruence with their self-concept leads to the resistance to change in their belief; although feasible, the change may be adapted over a long period of time therefore leading to the conclusion that the self-concept is organised;
- **Dynamic**: Self-concept requires continuous adaptations and rejections of incongruent ideas to one's self, therefore enabling the formation of favourable perceptions of one's self-existence (Sincero, 2012). The rare existence of total congruence can be achieved by the development of self-actualisation (Argyle, 2008).

Upon defining the concept of self, the subsequent theoretical framework to be discussed is the social cognitive theory.

3.2.2 SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

Literature related to the Social Cognitive theory

Developed in 1986 by a psychologist named Albert Bandura, the social cognitive theory posited how people learned from others through observations (Alqubaiti, 2016). According to Bandura (2002) social cognitive theory stated that a millennial's actual behaviour is significantly influenced by anticipated outcomes of potential actions. As a result, their expectations are constructed on direct, indirect and collective experiences of the behaviour being portrayed (Khang et al. 2014). Social cognitive theory, previously referred to as the social learning theory is a reinforced conceptual framework which facilitated the comprehension of factors responsible for influencing human behaviours and processes of learning (Kaiser, 2011). Founded on agentic perspectives, three (3) factors are known to assist in fully comprehending the mechanisms involved in the manner in which human psycho-socials work, comprising the cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors (Alqubaiti, 2016). The three determinants which are facilitated by the processes of interaction and influence, enabled millennials to retain, alter and/or solidify their thoughts, affections and actions (Khang et al. 2014). The determinants constituted plasticity, also referred to as human being's intrinsic nature (Khang et al. 2014). Simply put, the social cognitive theory encompassed a triadic model of reciprocity

that explained human functions, comprising factors that function as interacting determinants of one another (Kaiser, 2011).

In addition to the identification of anticipated outcomes, human behaviours are affected by the organisation of factors such as habit strength, deficient self-regulation and self-efficacy (Khang et al. 2014). Literature has studied social cognitive theory and the effects of mass media, where Bandura suggested that the theory provides a vantage point from which researchers can analyse the manner in which mediated content can influence an audience's attitudes and behaviours (Pajares et al. 2009).

Bandura (2001) supported the notion by highlighting that individuals learn through observations, which comprise four (4) processes: 1) attention, 2) retention, 3) production and 4) motivational (Alqubaiti, 2016).

Separation from other living things enables the demonstration of distinctive capacity of four (4) human capabilities:

- **Symbolisation:** This capability is key for social learning as it entails the assignment of symbols to individual's past experiences with external environments through cognitive processes;
- **Self-regulatory capability:** Determined by an individual's responsiveness to external sanctions and demands. This capacity consists of self-monitoring, goal setting, feedback, self-reward and self-support. Individuals demonstrate the self-regulatory capability through proactive or reactive controls, where the former involves the motivation and guidance of one's actions through the establishment and performance of higher goals;
- **Self-reflective capability:** The ability of an individual to retrospectively assess their adequacy through the bases of their thoughts, feelings and actions, in comparison to indicators of reality such as social norms, direct/indirect experiences and inferences based on knowledge; and
- **Vicarious capability:** Human learning can occur through direct, indirect experiences provided by mass media or information conveyed by models. As a result, modelling can also be considered as being symbolic if it occurs in mass media around symbolic environments (Khang et al. 2014; Kaiser, 2011).

Social Cognitive theory and media effects

Literature studied social cognitive theory and the effects of mass and more recently social media where Bandura suggested that the theory provides a vantage point from which researchers could analyse the manner in which mediated content played influential roles on an audience's attitudes and behaviours (Pajares et al. 2009). Relative to the prolific rise increase in millennials' use of Social Networking Sites (SNS's), the content portrayed (on social media platforms) and its capacity to influence millennials; attitudes and behaviours formed an aspect researchers can deeply explore. Authors like Khang et al. (2014) further extended the influences by identifying the social cognitive determinants of media use behaviours. In opposition to traditional media, new media is more suitable in approaching the challenges associated with the social cognitive theory as it portrays a variety of behavioural reinforcements, which increases the relationship between models and target audiences and ultimately the construction of self-efficacy (Pajares et al. 2009). The determinants of media use have been identified as perceived self-efficacy, deficient self-regulation, vicarious/past/enactive mastery experiences, and expected outcomes (Khang et al. 2014), Pajares et al., 2009; Kaiser, 2011). However, a majority of studies have widely analysed self-efficacy as determinant of media use. Self-efficacy defines an individual's beliefs pertinent to capabilities to perform particular behaviours in the light of adversities, such beliefs are likelier predictors of individual accomplishments as opposed to their prior attainments (i.e. knowledge and skills) due to their strong ties to persistence, resilience and goal related efforts (Kaiser, 2011;Pajares et al. 2009). Therefore, higher perceived self-efficacies will lead to higher goals and an increase in their determination to change (Kaiser, 2011).

3.3 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

This section comprehensively explored the following research constructs: exposure to idealised images, self-esteem, social comparison, self-congruency and the theory of aspiration. The constructs are discussed in the chronological order mentioned above, the first construct to be discussed is exposure to idealised images.

3.3.1 Exposure To Idealised Images

The Importance of Exposure to Idealised Images

The media has been widely recognised to have limited influence on dictating what audiences may think, however, a strong relationship exists between what the media has reported as

important and what the public perceived as important (McGown, 2013). The exposure of idealised images portrayed on television are known to illustrate highly attractive people, however, advertising has leaned towards the use of idealised images which increases the likelihood of making heavy views of television advertisement's feel less satisfied about their images, and ultimately evoke efforts of matching up to the idealised images (Dame and Kofi, 2015). In adopting a social media viewpoint, findings obtained from a Dove (2014) study deduced that data attained from Twitter illustrated that women wrote more than five million tweets in 2015 and that an additional 82% of the women felt that beauty standards set by the media are deemed to be unrealistic, while four (4) out of five (5) tweets are negative tweets related to themselves (Lo, 2015). Dove, which is categorised under the Unilever umbrella brand, has fully exploited social media as a vehicle of conveying their empowerment centric advertisements. Dove Real Beauty campaigns attempted to centre themselves on encouraging all generational cohorts through the empowerment of embracing their current bodies and beauty appearances as opposed to aspiring to achieve their ideal self (Proudfoot, 2010). Despite these efforts, critiques have questioned the authenticity of such campaigns as it has been argued that advertisements like the Dove Real Beauty campaign sought to enlighten targets of all ages to avoid comparing themselves to models as opposed to placing emphasis on the notion that "beauty comes from within" and the importance of beauty (Rogers, 2014). In addition, Axe, a sub-brand of Unilever, like Dove, is commonly known for their constant depictions of sexually objectified women in their commercials, which constantly exposes its viewers to constant media crossfire (Bahadur, 2014). Critiques have further added that Dove's efforts have failed to fragment traditions of a beauty-driven society, but has in actual fact reinforced its messages by stressing individual's constant exposure to unrealistic and unobtainable goals that saturate people's lives (Lyons, 2013).

Continuous exposure to media sources inclusive of social media may possibly cause the manifestation of unrealistic perceptions about the existence of the desirable attributes, i.e. wealth or physical ideals (Shrum, Burroughs and Rindflesh, 2005). A study by Smeesters et al., (2010) postulated that overexposure to idealistic images and movements such as thin ideal leads to widely held beliefs that such ideals are normative and central to attractiveness. Dame and Kofi, (2015) further extended the notion by citing numerous authors as having observed that exposure to media ideals is one of the contributing factors that promote the widely held belief that thinner bodies, and now physically fit images, as the ideal for feminine and muscularity schema.

Contextually related to the dissemination of idealised images, the majority of the images disseminated are airbrushed or edited through the use of computer software as a means of eliminating blemishes and/or physical flaws that fail to meet the ideal standards (Derenne and Beresin, 2006). Consequences associated with the exposure of idealised images are highlighted by the unattainable standards for a vast majority of millennials, therefore contributing to low self-esteem. The instability can be attributed to the manifestation of idealised images in fashion, body shape, seminal wedding events and home décor as a reflection of self (Alperstein, 2015).

Previous Literature Pertaining To Exposure to Idealised Images

Literature pertaining to the study of self-esteem and exposure to idealised images noted that media ideals can negatively or positively affect individual self-esteem (Resselo, 2009). Based on previous literature as cited by Frisby (2004), it has been identified that idealised images are said to possess a higher likelihood of affecting females exhibiting lower self-perceptions of self-esteem as opposed of those with higher perceptions of self (Martin and Kennedy, 1993).

Alperstein (2015) states that a significant body of literature exists relating to the social comparison to images portrayed on numerous media platforms, inclusive of social media platforms. The bases of images lies on the idea that exposure to such idealised images (i.e. successful, attractive people and luxurious items) potentially lead to a millennial's dissatisfaction with their own physical traits and economic status among other comparisons (Alperstein, 2015). Literature relating to the relationship between exposure to idealised images and social comparison deduced that social comparison with real and/or imagined others is motivated by the exposure to thin-ideal contents portrayed on media, whether presented in the form of visual images or words (Bessemhoff, 2006).

The study of idealised images dated back to Hirschman and Thompson (1997) wherein the author's exposure to idealised images would be an expected precedent of upward comparisons, while further adding that a millennial would presumably base their evaluation against unattainable idealised images. Contrary to upward comparisons, exposure to images of the less fortunate would direct downward comparisons, resulting in a feeling of superiority to others (Dreze and Nunes, 2009). Therefore, individuals exposed to highly attractive advertisements increases the basis of comparison standards for physical attractiveness (Martin and Kennedy, 1993). In perspective to mass communications, social comparison theories prove relative usefulness in the formulation of theory centric to processing of information and the subsequent effects and uses of mass media messages. Speculation and hypotheses can be formulated on

the notion that individuals exposed to social information pertaining to images or characters in mass media unconsciously or automatically engage in social comparisons (Frisby, 2004).

Conceptualisation of the Exposure to Idealised Images

Alperstein (2015) focused on women's exposure to idealised images portrayed on Pinterest for social comparison, relative to Western femininity. The author further investigated the process of use of idealised images as a mechanism of negotiating their own feminine gender identity on the basis of their body image and self-esteem. As a measure of comprehending these phenomena, Alperstein (2015) proposed the following research questions: **RQ1:** How do women compare themselves to the representation of a Western feminine ideal through the images on Pinterest? and **RQ2:** How do women negotiate the meanings of female gender identity based on their self-esteem and body image?

Oftentimes, individuals compare themselves to other individuals, therefore creating a disparity in congruence between one's ideal self and social media advertisements, which are able to portray ideals that are deemed accessible to an individual (Brown, 2014). The identified disparities lead to the creation of para-social relationships, where real-life interactions are simulated in audience's minds (Gardner and Knowles, 2008). The ties created from these relationships provide a foundation for perceiving media figures as role models (De Backer, 2012).

Relevance of Exposure to Idealised Images to This Study

Upon selecting the first research construct, the author of the study sought to investigate the effects exposure to idealised images would have on consumer's behavioural motives. Previous literature and the manner in which this construct was conceptualised provided reference viewpoints for the empirical evidence the researcher seeks to achieve through the formulation of theoretical and empirical objectives. Theoretically the relevance of this construct therefore lies in the researcher's desire to comprehensively review literature on the research construct of exposure to idealised images. Empirically, the relevance lies in the researcher's objective to examine whether or not the negative relationship between exposure to idealised images and self-esteem, and the positive relationship between research variables respectively, can be used to extend the empirical data obtained from previous literature.

3.3.2 Self-Esteem

Defining Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the inclusive positive evaluation of one's self (Gentile et. 2012). The self-esteem concept measures how an individual feels about themselves (Russello, 2009). A study focussing on self-esteem defined social self-esteem as the assessment of one's self-worth or rather satisfaction in conjunction to three (3) perceptive dimensions of their selves:

- Physical appearance;
- Romantic attractiveness; and
- Their ability to form and maintain close relationships (Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten, 2006).

A study analysing the effects of Facebook on one's social self-esteem found that the three (3) identified dimensions were enhanced by positive feedback obtained from their Facebook friends (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). In extending the definition of self-esteem, research repetitively mentioned a strong relation between self-esteem and well-being, therefore using the words interchangeably (Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten, 2006).

Previous Literature Pertaining to Self-Esteem

Previous studies have addressed the social consequences that the internet and social networking sites have individual self-esteems (Zywica and Danowski, 2008). While extended research has investigated Facebook's role in a millennial's socialisation abilities, and the role online socialisations played in supporting self-esteem (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). Contrary to research pertaining to social media's effects on personality, very minimal literature explores the direct effects it has on millennials' self-views and the configuration of their identities (Gentile et al, 2012). A repetitive theme has presented the synonymous analyses of positive self-views pertaining to social networking sites wherein literature has extended the effects social networking sites (SNS) has on one's self-esteem by interrelating the concept of self-esteem with narcissism (Ong et al, 2011). The characterisation of narcissism as a personality trait is expressed through an elevation of one's positive but unrealistic sense of self, entitlement and overt grandiosity (Gentile et al, 2012; Ong et al, 2011). Campbell and Foster (2007) further describe narcissists as lacking interest in the formation of strong interpersonal relationships, and affirm their positive self-views by engaging in self-regulatory strategies.

The presentation of narcissists on social networking sites (SNS) are characterised by photos and status updates that are particularly self-promoting (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Images posted by narcissists are self-enhanced, and as a results social networking sites (SNS) provide

narcissists with an opportunity of garnering attention from others, while expressing their identity and reinforcing their concept of self (Back et al, 2008; Gentile et al, 2012).

In measuring factors that affect self-esteem, although the study does not relate to millennials who form part of the current research paper, a study analysing adolescent self-esteem proposed the predictors that are said to be pivotal in influencing adolescent's social self-esteem and well-being as peer acceptance and interpersonal feedback on the self (Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten, 2006).

The Conceptualisation of Self-Esteem

The relationship between self-esteem and social comparison is rather complex because self-esteem has been identified as a predictor variable of social comparison while other studies argue it as an outcome variable or even both (Zuo, 2014). Studies dating back to the works of Aspinwall and Taylor (1993) suggested the concept of mood as a mediating variable between self-esteem and its effects on social comparison. The findings of the studies suggested that: Low self-esteem participants and their induced negative mood resulted in an improvement in their mood after exposure to downward comparison information.

An additional study conducted by Frisby (2004), analysed the effects that idealised images have on African American women's self-esteem. As a means of comprehending the effects idealised images have on women's self-esteem, Frisby (2004) proposed the following hypotheses : "Self-evaluations and body esteem will change more in response to idealised images used in advertisements"; "Self-evaluations and body esteem will change more in response to African American models than in response to a White model"**;** and if "Exposure to advertising containing idealised images of physically attractive African American models in advertisements will reduce African American females' satisfaction with their own physical attractiveness".

Numerous studies have particularly analysed ideals (i.e. thin ideal) portrayed in varying media vehicles and their subsequent effects the said ideals have on the views one forms towards themselves (Russello, 2009). The author's hypothesis was guided by the notion that self-esteem was expected to decrease post media exposure. Having conceded the guiding statement, Russello (2009, pg.4) therefore hypothesised that "there are no gender differences in the effects that the media has on self-esteem, the internalization of sociocultural ideals and social

comparison". Contrary to low self-esteem participants, an additional study pre-testing and post-testing self-esteem as a predictor of social comparison effects among high school students deduced that forced social comparison pertaining to the exposure of unattractive individuals (images) impacted students' self-esteem and appearance among both genders (Puric et al, 2011). Furthermore, regardless of the experimentation condition, higher pre-test self-esteem and lower appearance satisfaction predicted an increase on post-test self-esteem. However, low pre-test self-esteem students were exposed to unattractive images exhibited higher self-esteems (Puric et al, 2011; Zuo, 2014).

The concept of self-esteem has been categorised into two forms, namely high self-esteem and low self-esteem, where in relation to social media exposure, high levels of self-esteem can assist in preventing the media's negative effects, while a low self-esteem can be a causal factor of an individual's increase to a susceptibility to media images (Rusello, 2009). High self-esteem among individuals often generates innumerable positive social behaviours. This can, however, be contended because enhanced self-esteems resulting from social networking site use can have detrimental effects on one's behaviour (Wilcox and Stephen, 2012). The authors advocated this notion on the documentation of research analysing the relationship between an enhanced self-concept which was activated by situational factors and self-control. An increase in feelings of pride commonly associated with heightened self-esteem lead to indulgent choices in subsequent tasks that are not in relation to the source of pride (Wilcox, Kramer and Sen, 2012). Although the studies mentioned did not investigate the existence of a direct relationship between consumer's situational self-esteem and self-control, Wilcox and Stephen (2012) therefore proposed that an enhanced self-esteem obtained from browsing social media momentarily decreases self-control.

The use of Facebook has been commonly associated with psychological well-being, where findings suggest it may be particularly beneficial to users with low self-esteem (Barker, 2009). The authors therefore proposed the following: **Study 2:** "Using social network enhances self-esteem for people focused on strong ties due to concerns about the image they present to others in their social network".

Barker (2009) hypothesised a positive relationship between self-esteem and social comparison, literature regarding the assimilation and dissimilarity effects are responsible support the proposed hypotheses. Empirical findings of the study concluded that individuals who had positive relationships with their Facebook friends exhibited higher self-esteems as opposed to

those who had weaker ties with their Facebook friends (Barker, 2009). This bears similarities to the study's objective of identifying the significance of the relationship that may potentially exist between self-esteem and social comparison.

Table 3.1 below represents the hypotheses and major findings from authors whose assumptions were highlighted in conceptualising the concept of self-esteem.

Table 3.1. The identification of major findings relevant to prior literature

Researcher	Hypotheses	Major Findings
Gonzales and Hancock (2011)	Exposure to one's Facebook site will have a more negative effect on self-esteem than traditional objective self-awareness.	The findings suggested an insignificance in the hypothesised relationship. Instead, exposure to Facebook posited a positive effect on a user's self-esteem.
Russello (2009)	There are no gender differences in the effects that the media has on self-esteem, the internalization of sociocultural ideals and social comparison.	Relative to the effects media have on self-esteem and social comparison, the relationships suggested no significant differences between the two (2) genders

Relevance of Self-Esteem to this Study

Pertinent to the study, the theoretical and empirical literature retrieved from prior studies has formed a basis upon which this study's empirical evidence will be supported. Theoretically, the study seeks to comprehensively review literature on the research construct of self-esteem. In an empirical context, the relevance of the construct lies in the objective to examine the existence of a positive relationship between self-esteem and an individual's aspiration to their ideal. As a result, the researcher seeks to expand the body of literature while identifying the effects idealised images may have on one's self-esteem.

Having mentioned the complex relationship that exists between self-esteem and social comparisons, the next subsection will discuss the concept of social comparison.

3.3.3 Social Comparison

Defining Social Comparison

Fitzsimmons-Caft et al. (2012) posits that Social Comparison theory was initially developed by Leon Festinger (1954), wherein he identified that social comparison among humans is engaged upon as a means of comprehending where and how they fit into society when there is a lack of objective standards. Due to the paucity of the objective standards individuals set as a rationale for evaluations; comparisons may as a result be hard to achieve, and often lead to social comparisons with others (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler, 2011).

The Importance of Social Comparison

In accordance to the social comparison theory, comparisons will not occur when comparative standards are different or perceived as different on relevant dimensions (Frisby, 2004). Studies extending the work of Festinger further postulate that the concept of Social Comparison forms part of a natural and expected fragment of human experiences (Zuo, 2014). Social Comparison has been commonly known as forming an integral part of competitive behaviour, as it is an individual's propensity to self-evaluate, by comparing themselves to others (Garcia, Tor & Schiff, 2013).

There are numerous reasons why people engage in social comparisons, and authors have come to the conclusion that the motive for comparing themselves with others is dependent on motivational considerations. Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler (2011) cited that Festinger identified one of the motives of social comparison as an individual's intrinsic desire to maintain their self-view as grounded and as accurate as possible, while researchers who place particular emphasis on studies pertaining to consumers deduced the motive to be inclusive of materialistic possessions, whereby individuals use the possessions of material goods as a determination of the relative social standing (Chan & Prendergast, 2008).

Previous Literature Relating to Social Comparison

Smeesters and Mandel (2006) argue that assimilation or disparity in the evaluation of self is determinant of social comparison, which depends on the accessibility of self-knowledge. Therefore, assimilation would occur during moderate comparison standards (i.e. moderately

thin models), rendering standard consistent self-knowledge accessible, while disparities would occur when standard-inconsistent self-knowledge is accessible (Smeesters and Mandel, 2006). Contextually relevant to male subjects and the ideals encompassing masculinity ideals, Brown (2014) studied the effects that media self-assimilation and para-social relationships had on the masculinity ideals. A study conducted by Frisby, (2004), analysing the effects of social comparisons with idealised images and its effects on African women hypothesized that: **H1:** Women of colour will engage in social comparisons with models in advertising, and that **H3:** Women of colour will be more likely to engage in social comparisons with African American models than White models. Although the hypotheses suggested above limited their analyses to women of a particular race, the author however studied the engagement of social comparisons among subjects.

The conceptualisation of Social Comparison

In accordance to the Social Comparison theory, authors such as Zuo (2014) have conducted extensive research pertaining to the direction of Social Comparison. In defining the two forms of social comparison, authors such as Frisby (2004) indicated that although minimal studies have deduced that upward comparisons encourage the engagement of positive self-evaluations, studies have however illustrated that comparisons with superior others can either be self-enhancing or self-deflating (Frisby, 2004). Smeesters et al, (2010) stated that the complexities associated with social comparison consequences, such as self-evaluations, can either assimilate or contrast away from the comparison standard, while other authors identify the comparison evaluations as downward or upward (Zuo, 2014). Comparisons with superior others are referred to as upward comparisons, whereby individuals may either learn from others, be inspired or aspire to achieve a similar goal (Frisby, 2004).

In advertising contexts, there lies a possibility that advertisements utilising idealised images as a motivator factor to engage consumers in spontaneous social comparisons with idealised images evoke desire and motivation to simulate or become like the image portrayed in the advertisement (Frisby, 2004). Nichols and Schumann (2012) identified two (2) theoretical frameworks that support the direct assimilation and aspirational preferences as the social judgement theory and self-evaluation maintenance model. The former, a theory developed by Sherif (1960) states that judgements are guided by previous experiences which anchor future judgements, while the latter model developed by Tesser (1980) postulated that incongruent comparisons take place when the comparison target is personally irrelevant. Furthermore,

assimilation will occur when a lack of relevance exists. Nichols and Schumann (2012) suggest that the social judgement theory ascertains that the constant exposure to stereotypical and idealised images (models portrayed luxury watch advertisements) can influence the manner in which an individual judges the models at a later time.

In concluding the major findings of prior literature hypothesised relationships, the major findings were indicated in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. The identification of major findings relating to prior literature

Researcher	Hypotheses	Major Findings
Zuo (2014)	"Individuals who made more social comparisons would have lower self-esteem and more negative mental health outcomes."	Supported: Indicative that increased levels of social comparisons held associations with decreased levels of self-esteem, therefore affecting factors such as anxiety and depression.

Relevance to Social Comparison to the study

Pertinent to this study, the concept of social comparison has comprehensively reviewed literature on the research construct, while the empirical objectives are yet to be achieved. As highlighted in the discussion of the importance of this construct, the reason behind comparisons is driven by motivational considerations. The relevance of this construct was therefore driven by the researcher's desire to empirically test the possibility of a positive relationship between exposure to idealised images and social comparison, while further examining the existence of a positive relationship between social comparison and aspirations to the ideal self. Previous literature and the conceptualisation of the concept from numerous authors have therefore provided a framework upon which the results can be measured as a comparative examination of the obtained results.

3.3.4 Self-Congruence

Defining Self-Congruence

Jennifer Aaker (1997) defined the concept of self-congruity as a classification of human characteristics attributed with a brand. In brand marketing contexts, self-congruity defines a customer's personification of a brand, which gives marketers the opportunity to position the perceptions by creating or reinforcing the brand's personality (Mahjoub et al. 2015). Kressman et al. (2006) further added that the brand-user image is constructed through the symbolic attributes consumers attach to brands. Therefore the concept of self-image congruence emerges when consumers identify with a brand and attempt to match their perceived images with that of the brand they like (Albert & Merunka, 2013). As Sirgy stated, this concept enabled consumers to select, purchase and utilise good and services where a level of consistency existed between a user-image and a consumer's self-image (Lenferink, 2014).

Salecki, Saki and Neekooei (2014) proposed that self-congruity can be categorised into four sub-topics:

1. Actual self-congruity;
2. Ideal self-congruity;
3. Social self-congruity; and
4. Ideal social self-congruity.

Whereby, each of the four sub-topics is defined as:

1. **Actual congruity:** The correlation between a millennial's self-views relative to a set of attributes. The concepts further extends to the manner in which they view a stereotypical brand user during the use of a similar set of descriptors;
2. **Ideal self-congruity:** Particularly referenced how millennials would ideally like to be viewed comparative to a typical brand user. The probability of incongruities arising often occur when a lack of consistency exists between their ideal self and an actuality in their life experiences. This result often initiates disparities between the constructs of ideal self and actual are experienced (McLeod, 2008).
3. **Social self-congruity:** Denotes a millennial's beliefs of how they would like to viewed by others, giving rise to the concept of ideal social self-congruity, commonly referred to as the manner in which a millennial would like significant others to view them (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008).

4. **Ideal social self-congruity:** The extent to which a match or congruity exists between ideal social self-image alongside the patron images portrayed by stores. This particular subtopic like the social self-image is encompassed by the public self. The behaviour of a millennial's ideal social self-image is motivated by the societal approvals (Saleki, Saki and Neekooei, 2014).

The discussion pertaining to the sub-types of self-congruency concept sought to highlight the existential differences between how a millennial would like or desire to be seen by themselves and socially. Therefore, working on the premise of the discussion the four (4) sub-types of self-congruity, the empirical evidence from the measurement instrument deduced empirical evidence that measured a millennial's actual and ideal self-congruity. This is based on the researchers desire to comprehend the congruities millennials resonate with comparative to their social media peers.

Previous Literature Pertaining to Self-Congruency

Previous literature and research from authors such as Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosjnak and Sirgy (2012) have argued that ideal self-congruity is more influential than the actual self-congruity (Brannen, 2015). However, contrary to this statement, the relationship between actual congruity and brand love (and in this case, social media figures or ideals) suggests that individuals tend to associate themselves with brands representative of their actual selves, this is evident in the attractions and emotional attachments demonstrated in brands they feel are capable of embodying their aspirations and dreams (Malar et al., 2011). To substantiate this statement, a study by Oude Lenferink (2014) hypothesised the following: *"**H3:*** The actual focus of self-congruity facets leads to higher brand love than the ideal focus of self-congruity facets". Contextual to social media, Lenferink's (2014) perspective can therefore be interpreted to highlight that social media platforms that provided content that bears congruities with millennials' actual self-congruities lead to heightened affiliations or connections with the exposed content, relative to their ideal congruities.

The Conceptualisation of Self-Congruency

In answering the research question of comprehending why brand love increases when brands are reflective of the actual self as opposed to the ideal self, the findings suggested that individuals are more concerned with the satisfactions of their need for self-consistency as opposed to their needs for self-esteem, social approval and even social constancy (Oude Lenferink, 2014), This indicates the importance of a brand's identity values and goals being

consistent with individual representations as opposed to who they would like to be or how they are or would want to be seen by others. As previously stated, congruencies often occurred through the recognition of parities with others (Brown, 2014). Evidence adopted from a study conducted by Brown (2014) deduced that exposure to idealised images has the potentiality of leading to media self-assimilations, as it enables to create congruencies between personal ideals and the concept of self (Brown, 2014).

Table 3.3. **The identification of major findings relating to prior literature**

Researcher	Hypotheses	Major Findings
Lenferink (2014)	The actual focus of self-congruity facets leads to higher brand love than the ideal focus of self-congruity facets.	
Brown (2014)	”Media self-assimilation and para-social relationships with a drive for muscularity and body-esteem.	The internalisation of western masculine ideals lead to the formation congruent ideals in men, therefore encouraging higher self-esteems.

Relevance to Self-Congruence to the Study

The relevance of self-congruence to the current paper lies in the desire to comprehend the effects idealised images have on an individual's self-congruency, or the manner in which they resonate to images that hold similarities or disparities with their current identities. Theoretically, the researcher has identified varying motives that drive resonance with social media advertisements and the subsequent effects such images have on millennials behaviour. However, the empirical objective of the study is yet to be achieved. Therefore, based on a hypothetical stance, self-congruence may be positively influenced by the exposure to idealised images. Should this relationship prove true, self-congruency can lead to the positive formation of their aspirations to their ideal selves.

The final construct to be discussed within this chapter is the concept of aspirations to the ideal self.

3.3.5 Aspirations to the ideal self

Defining Aspirations

The concept of aspirations implicitly suggests an individual is required to exert a certain amount of effort in order for the desired target or aim to be acquired (Bernard and Taffesse, 2014). Aspirations are the goals an individual believes they have the potential of being realistically achieved (Kosec and Mo, 2015). Aspirations, synonymously referenced with goals, are indicative of an individual's future orientation and significance of life (Brdar et al.,

2009). Contrary to mid-level life goals which constitute shorter timeframes, major life goals are the configuration of concrete social contexts that comprise the desire for large families, successful careers and the acquisition of affluent lifestyles (Roberts and Robins, 2000 as cited by Bernard and Taffesse, 2014).

In simpler terms, aspirations integrate the preferences millennials hold, their formed beliefs, expectations, as well as the limitations conceded by the generational cohort pertaining to their future (Bernard, Dercon and Taffesse, 2012).

In further expanding the definition, aspirations can be defined by the categorisation of three (3) distinct aspects:

- ***Future Oriented****:* Aspirations are not associated with immediate gratification, and can therefore be identified as goals that may be satisfied in the future;
- ***Motivators:*** Goals individuals are in principle willing to invest their time, money and effort to attain; and,
- ***Multi-dimensional:*** Although aspirations refer to a particular dimension of well-being (i.e. wealth or social recognition), they are commonly perceived as multi-dimensional life outcomes influenced by ambitions (Bernard & Taffesse, 2014).

The Importance of Aspirations to the Ideal Self

Aspirations have been linked to individual personalities, where previous literature and Socio-analytic links between self-reported identity traits and major life goals have suggested that aspirations are based on several domains of the Big 5 personality model (Roberts and Robins, 2016). Therefore the following associations were suggested:

Table 3.4: Big 5 Personality traits and their aspiration types.

Personality Trait	Aspiration Type
Extraversion and Conscientiousness	"Getting ahead goals" (achievement driven goals)
Agreeableness	"Getting along goals" (Individuals with the desire to reflecting identities of warmth and kindness often pursue social goals aimed at helping the less fortunate).
Openness to experiences	Aesthetic goals (i.e. desire to achieve creative activities).

(Source: Roberts and Robins, 2016).

The authors further analysed the significance between narcissists and life goals, where narcissists' aspirations are centric to power, success and pleasure as opposed to pro-social concerns (Roberts and Robins, 2016). Relative to social media, a narcissistic millennial's goals are encompassed in the desire to increase their followings, which advertently acts as a measure of their defined success and pleasure. According to the Socio-analytical theory, narcissists' aspirations are evident in their focus of getting ahead in opposition to getting along with others.

Social psychology studies have extensively conducted research on life aspirations, and have subsequently resulted in the consistent relation to the self-determination theory tenets (Chatzisarantis and Hagger, 2007). As previously mentioned, the construct of aspiration comprises two (2) goals: intrinsic and extrinsic goals. The self-determination theory therefore suggests that the rewards inherently received from intrinsic goals are as a result of their direct innate satisfaction, primary psychological needs as opposed to autonomy, competence and relatedness, while the extrinsic counterpart entails the acquisition of rewards and positive evaluations from other individuals with indirect satisfaction of fundamental human needs (Romero, Gomez-Fraguela and Villar, 2012).

Ingrid, Majda and Dubravka (2009) cited Kasser and Ryan (2001) work through the identification of two (2) forms of life goals, namely the intrinsic and extrinsic life goals. The former are goals pertinent to a person's personal growth and emotional intimacy, assuming natural consistency with human nature and needs. In contrast to intrinsic goals, the latter goals assume less consistency with positive human nature, and are rather inclusive of financial success, physical attractiveness and social fame and/or popularity (Truong et al. 2010). Intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations satisfy psychological needs (Truong et al. 2010).

The concept of ideal self is a motivational core with one's self that emphasises desires, hopes, aspirations and dreams (Boyatzis, 2006). Additionally, the ideal self assists in the organisation of a millennial's will to change and direct their self-regulation, and in order for an individual to attain a healthy and robust ideal self, the following processes illustrated in Table 3.5 need to meet the said requirements:

Table 3.5: Three paths leading to a healthy ideal self

	Phase change criteria	When it is low
Is the "ideal self" articulated, explicit?	Mindfulness and consciousness.	The person experiences catastrophic jumps, surprises, or emergence. The person is mindless or in denial of a desired future
Is the "ideal self" important?	Salience or intensity of desire for the components of the ideal self	Like New Year's Eve resolutions, the person makes superficial commitments to change.
Is it integrated with the rest?	Coherence or a holistic inclusion of all components of the person's desired life and future.	The person experiences surprises and unintended consequences in other parts of their life even when making progress or changes in other parts of their life or work

(Source: Boyatzis, 2006).

Previous Literature Pertaining to Aspirations to the Ideal Self

A plethora of studies argue that the capacity to aspire and achieve aspirations is unequally distributed within society and is affected by an individual's own experiences and actors within the individual's immediate social environment (Laube, 2015). Considering the author's study focussed on aspirations in rural environments, it can therefore be identified that the capacity to aspire for affluent society members acts as an enablement to easier navigation to future pathways, with a heightened frequency pertaining to the exchange of knowledge upon which their aspirations are based. The lack of experience and resources for a good life unfortunately inhibit the capacity to aspire for their poorer counterparts (Laube, 2015).

Previous studies have illustrated that consumers' self-constructs are enhanced by the brands and products, and as a result express their self-concepts the way they prefer others to perceive them (Grewal et al., 2016; Berger and Heath, 2007). A growing amount of pressure is placed on millennials to conform to reference groups, in addition to being perceived as individuals and their aspirational group norms (Yarrow and Donnell, 2009). Individuals may attempt transferring themselves into the positive associations of a brand's qualities, on condition that an aspirational group uses the particular brand (Grewal et al., 2016).

Fashion imagery is defined as the illustration of models with physical attributes which consumers desire to emulate (Borland and Akram, 2007). Kozar and Damhorst (2008) postulated that although fashion imagery has the capacity to influence individual consumption decisions (i.e. behaviour and perceptions), individuals are able to recognise the influences aspirations have on consumer's responses to fashion media. However, their recognition is overlooked by their failure to examine the assessments people draw in identifying whether fashion photographs are aspirational or not (Barry, 2014). Bearing the distinct synonymies between fashion and social media, Barry emphasises the necessity to uncover the comprehension of aspiration in fashion photographs can be deduced as a classified wallpaper of our popular culture among millennials.

The portrayal of aspirational products on social media, and the relation to one's ideal concept, enables social others to portray influencers in the most socially appealing way (Dreze and Nunes, 2009). In addition to fashion media, aspirations have widely been studied with luxury goods, and influencers who portray the consumption of luxury goods to millennials are influential in portraying luxury goods as desirable and unique, to evoke them to want to imitate and aspire to consume such goods (Ressel, 2009). Research relating to ideal selves and luxury consumptions indicates that individual's selection of aspirational brands is based on the expectations of deriving multiple psychological and social benefits (Dreze and Nunes, 2009). Reference groups therefore play pivotal roles in creating preferences, due to millennials' desire to aspire to belong to such groups (Grewal et al., 2016). Aspirational ideals can therefore be achieved through the public affiliations individuals have on social media and aspirational products, which are associated with their ideal selves (Grewal et al., 2016).

In studying the significance of aspirations, parallel to the social cognitive theory, Ray (2006) attempts to characterise aspirations processes, and formation was pivotal to three (3) conceptual frameworks: aspiration gaps, aspiration windows and aspiration failures.

- *Aspiration window* is determined by the observations an individual makes when comparing themselves among their peers, inclusive of the information and economic opportunities of their local environments;
- *Aspiration gap* is the disparity between an individual's actual level and the level they wish to attain, where a low aspiration gaps may coincide with resignation, while high may contrarily relate to frustration: and

- *Aspiration failures* are a result of a deficit of pro-active behaviours in economic contexts towards the fulfilment of the aspiration gap. The deliberate action necessary for the fulfilment of the gap would be costly, deeming it reasonable for the expectation of small and large aspiration gaps in inducing little or no effort to fulfil them (Ray, 2006).

Consistent with organisational behaviour literature, Consumer Brand Identification (CBI), an individual's perceived state of "oneness" or belongingness with a brand, is defined as the incorporation of a brand into one's self-concept (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). Consumer Brand Identification (CBI) is defined as the psychological state of perception, feelings and value relating to an individual's belongingness to a particular brand (Lam et al., 2010). The authors therefore suggested that the Consumer Behaviour Identity has the three following dimensions:

- *Cognitive:* The cognitive self-categorisation reflecting an individual's self-awareness pertaining to the membership with an organisation;
- *Emotional:* The consequences associated with the usage of the brand; and
- *Evaluative:* The degree to which an individual thinks their psychological oneness with a brand adds value to them in either an individual or social context (Stockburger-Sauer et al., 2016).

The conceptualisation of Aspirations to the ideal self

A study analysing the extent to which consumer behaviour identifications affects the success of social media entrepreneurs suggested that aspiration is similar to the ideal self-image of a brand's social media entrepreneur (Saino, 2016). Consumer Brand Identification is narrowed in its definition due to its exclusions of the potential motivations responsible for driving self-brand connections, which comprised the communication of an individual's identity to others and the attainment of the desired self (Stockburger-Sauer, 2012).

A follower's motivational state is pivotal in determining their identification with a brand; Saino (2016) suggested that followers who feel a relationship between themselves and the social media entrepreneurs will score neutral on aspirations. While aspirational followers will score higher on aspirations, non-supporters will score lower on aspirations despite the incongruence between their actual and ideal self-images. Therefore hypothesising that *H4a:* The relatable follower (*Fr*) scores neutral on aspiration, *H4b:* The aspirational follower (*Fa)* scores higher

on aspiration and that *H4c:* The train wreck follower scores (*Ft*) lower on aspiration. The findings of the study identified that there was no statistical significance between either of the two proposed hypotheses.

As previously stated, the study hypothesised that the social comparison construct will positively influence aspiration. This hypothesis was tested by Dame and Kofi, (2015) whereby the findings from the study concluded that although images depicted in media can be regarded as realistic or unrealistic, a millennial has to convey confidence in their media portrayals as it will result in the belief of those depictions and audience aspirations based on the assumption that once it's deemed realistic, it is attainable. Empirical evidence therefore suggests that 88.4% of the study's respondents stated that although the portrayal of images of beauty are idealised and unattainable, the ideals are however attainable making media representations susceptible to belief (Dame and Kofi, 2015).

Table 3.6 below summarizes the major findings obtained from the aforementioned studies. The evidence is suggestive of opposing results obtained from their hypothesized relationships.

Table 3.6. The identification of major finding relative to prior findings

Researcher	Hypotheses	Major Findings
Saino (2016)	*H4a:* The relatable follower (*Fr*) scores neutral on aspiration; *H4b:* The aspirational follower (*Fa)* scores higher on aspiration. *H4c:* The train wreck follower scores (*Ft*) lower on aspiration.	The type of follower is not determinant of the outcome of aspiring to the portrayed idealised image.
Dame and Kofi (2015)	Social Comparison positively influences aspiration.	A majority of the respondents highlighted that although the portrayed images may be idealised, they still remain attainable.

Relevance of Aspiration (to the Ideal) to the Study

According to the current papers, theoretical objective seeks to provide a comprehensive literature review on the research construct of aspirations to ideal self. The empirical objectives and research question sought to examine the existence of relationships between self-esteem, social comparison and self-congruency, relative to a millennial's aspirations to their ideal self. The discussion surrounding these relationships has highlighted the manner in which authors such as Stockburger-Sauer (2012) have provided empirical evidence which has assisted in providing a substantive body of empirical evidence to indicate how millennials' responses to aspirations differed from one another on the bases of numerous factors such as their geographic distributions.

3.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE:

The chapter discussed the theoretical framework and the empirical constructs upon which the study was based. As previously mentioned, the exposure to idealised images affects millennials' level of self-esteem, the relation between themselves and the images they are being exposed to, inclusive of the comparisons they engage in upon exposure of such images. The literature further placed particular emphasis on each of the concepts in isolation and findings from various authors wherein varying views were prevalent within the proposed effects and relationships that exist between each of the concepts. Although a substantive amount of literature has comprehensively explained relationships that do and do not exist, the next chapter of the dissertation develops measurement instruments that are liable for testing the proposed relationships that exist between the empirical concepts. The literature used therefore served as a basis of comparison for the said outcomes of the constructs.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four (4) emphasised the conceptual model and the development of hypothetical statements thereof. The structure of the chapter commences with a brief identification of the research constructs the researcher tests, followed by an illustration of the conceptual model. The conceptual model is illustrative of the proposed hypothetical relationships that exist between the research constructs. Inferences from empirical evidence obtained previously have been used as comparative measures relative to the proposed relations that exist between research constructs.

4.2 TESTED VARIABLES

The predictor and/or independent variable of the study comprised the *exposure to idealised images.* The moderating variables comprise *self-esteem, social comparison* and *self-congruency*. The dependent outcome variable has been identified as the construct of *aspiration to ideal self.*

The subsequent section of the paper discusses the formulation of the conceptual model and the hypotheses development.

4.3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual model proposed that relationships exist between the predictor and moderating variables, predictor and outcome variables, and moderating and outcome variables respectively. In other words, the researcher suggested that a millennial's exposure to idealised images influences their self-esteem *(H1),* in addition to the manner in which the exposure to idealised images influences the relationships between social comparison (*H2*) and self-congruency (*H3*). *H4* proposed that upon exposure to idealised images, individuals will seek to aspire to their ideal self. The relationships between the moderating and outcome variables suggest *H5*, *H6* and *H7* will also affect the final construct where: Self-esteem, social comparison and self-congruency evoke exposed individuals to aspire to their ideal self as opposed to their actual self's.

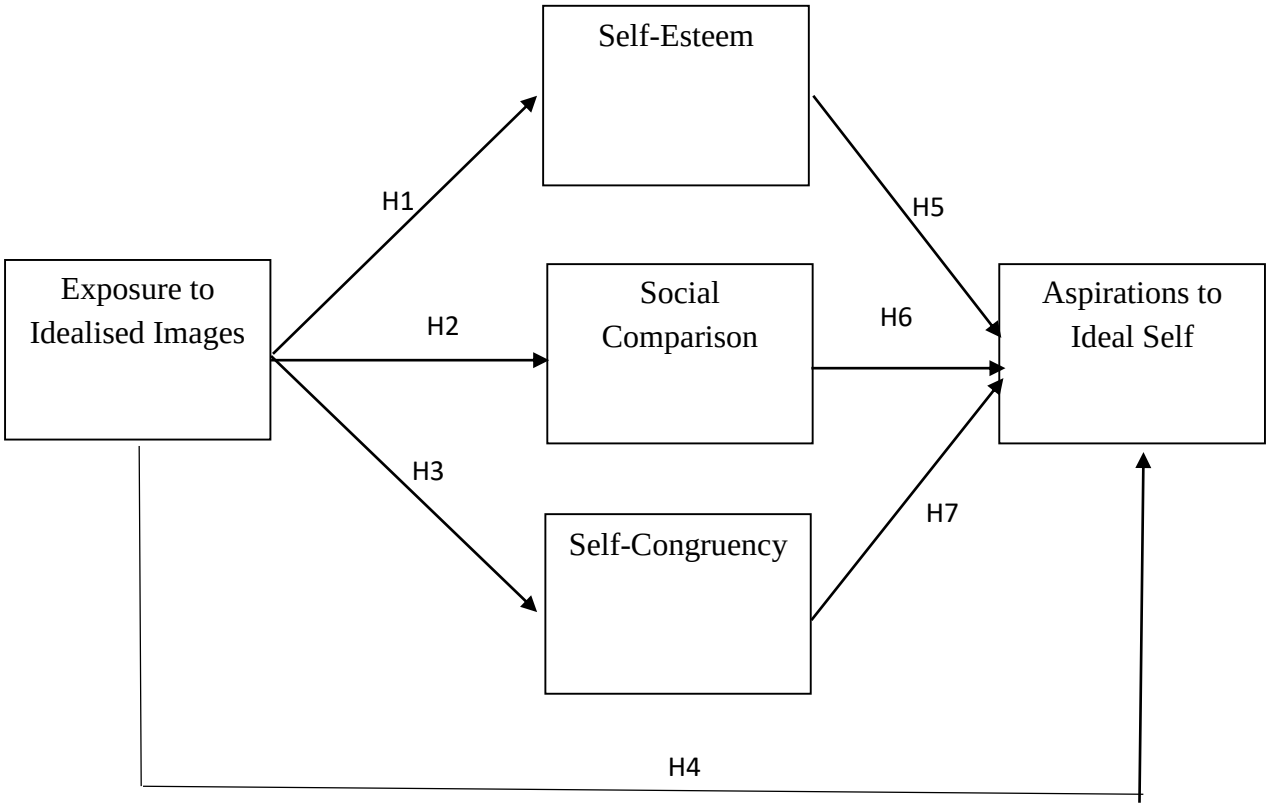


Figure 4.1: Proposed Conceptual Model (Source: Compiled by Researcher 2017)

4.4 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The hypotheses to be discussed are based on the conceptual model presented in Figure 4.1. The first hypothesis pertains to the relationships that exist between the predictor and mediating variables illustrated in the conceptual model, particularly H1, H2 and H3.

The subsequent section of this study discusses how exposure to idealised images affects self-esteem, social comparison with equal or unequal others and the concept of self-congruency.

4.4.1 Exposure to Idealised Images and Self-esteem (H1)

The first hypothesis tests the relationship that may exist between *exposure to idealised images* and *self-esteem.*

According to Hollander (2007), "exposure" is interchangeably used with the term *use*, because the majority of media use studies rely on it as a measure of identifying respondent's frequency of use pertaining to specific mediums. The media has been known to be one of the most influential mediums of spreading ideals of beauty and attractiveness. As a result, the pressure to adhere to media ideals heightens as media influences increase accordingly (Russello, 2009). Mediums such as Social Networking Sites afford millennials social exposure opportunities, which enables them to enhance their self-images, which is often expected of self-presentations through the construction and refinement of flaws (Walther, 2007 cited by Ong et al., 2011).

It has been identified that socio-cultural ideals are highly influential upon internalisation; as a result, the internalisation of societal ideals commonly affects how millennials view their bodies and comparisons are therefore constructed between their body and society's standards (Russello, 2009). The harm caused by idealised images has been argued by marketers where they've stated that one's comparison with such images/models prompts the formation of unrealistic physical ideals, diminished self-esteem and heightened dissatisfaction of self (Nichols and Schumann, 2012).

Literature from Gonzales and Hancock (2011:80) proposed that "exposure to one's Facebook site will have a more negative effect on self-esteem than traditional objective self-awareness (e.g. mirror)". Therefore pertinent to this study, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H1: Exposure to idealised images positively influences self-esteem.

4.4.2 Exposure to Idealised Images and Social Comparison (*H2*)

Proceeding from *H1*, *H2* suggests that the *exposure to idealised images* influences the manner in which individuals will socially compare themselves, through upward and/or downward comparisons. Tiggerman et al., (2009) anticipated that the processing of appearance comparisons would culminate negative outcomes, while the processing of fantasies would lead to the culmination of positive outcomes on one's moods and satisfactions towards their bodies.

A study by Sun and Guo (2014) highlighted that prior studies relating to social research deduced that exposure to media illustrating concepts of the thin ideal elicits the comparison process, therefore leading to negative effects. In their own study, the authors' conceptual framework illustrated that social comparison would act as a mediator between the relationship of media exposure and fashion clothing involvement variables.

A plethora of literature has addressed the perceptions forged by subjects who have been exposed to advertisements containing attractive or rather idealized images, and the subsequent effects on their behaviours (Bibi & Grydeland, 2014). This is prevalent in findings from Adomaitis & Johnson's (2008) study, where subjects who have been exposed to fashion advertisements often compare themselves to models and either work towards emulating the portrayed look or deem it unattainable. As a result, the authors deduced the possibility of comparisons against unrealistic ideals of beauty depicted in advertisements, as their study's participants are not comprehensively in favour the depiction of 'real' people, the advertisement should inherently emphasise the concept of unattainable beauty. This would however fall away from the persuasiveness of advertisements (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008).

For the purpose of this research paper, inferring from the studies mentioned, the researcher of this dissertation hypothesised that:

H2: Exposure to idealised images positively influences social comparison.

4.4.3 Exposure to Idealised Images and Self-congruency (H3)

H3 examined the relationship that exists between *exposure to idealised images* and *self-congruency.* Additionally, the supposed relationship between the two (2) variables is said to be positive. Self-congruency is the examination of consumer responses as a means of identifying the congruency or match between the personality of a brand and one of its four (4) facets of the concept of self, comprising the actual, ideal, social and ideal social self (Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012).

Contextually related to endorsement of celebrities, self-congruity is equivocally important in comprehending consumer's reactions to endorsements undertaken by celebrities (Lee, 2015). In comprehending the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on individual's ideal self-congruities, the author hypothesised that individuals with higher levels of ideal self-congruities with the celebrity endorser will have a positive relation to the attitude towards the

advertisement, ultimately influencing their purchase intention. The empirical evidence from the study therefore deduced that participants exhibiting higher levels of ideal self-congruency with celebrity endorsers indicated favourable attitudes towards the advertisement as opposed to those with lower levels of self-congruency (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, ideal self-congruency influenced purchase intention; higher levels of ideal self-congruency with celebrity endorsers had greater purchase intentions relative to those with lower self-congruities. The hypotheses are therefore indicative that congruities between celebrities or influential figures prompt actions (Lee, 2015).

Literature from Nichols and Schumann (2014) highlights that individuals who have been exposed to stimuli relative to aspirational qualities often develop congruent anchoring points. Inference from the literature substantiates the hypothesis for the following research paper, which is as follows:

H3: Exposure to idealised images positively influences self-congruency.

4.4.4 Exposure to Idealised Images and Aspirations to one's ideal self (H4)

As indicated in Figure 4.1, H4 illustrated that a positive relationship exists between *exposure to idealised images* and *aspirations to one's ideal self.*

Literature proposed that the continuous exposure to idealised images on social media and stereotype images of models, such as advertisements pertaining to luxury products, can influence an individual's anchoring points and ultimately prompt the way they judge their models at a later time, and their aspirations thereof (Nichols and Schumann, 2012). They further empirically hypothesised that "for symbolic products, consumers should have stronger preferences (higher anchoring points) for aspirational self-contrasting models, rather than aspirational self-similar models (Nichols and Schumann, 2012: 6).

An earlier study by Dittmar (2008) discerned two (2) noteworthy ideals ubiquitous in advertisements and media alike: *body perfect ideal* and the *materialistic good life*. The body ideal is representative of ultra-thin women while the materialistic good life is descriptive of an affluent lifestyle, money and valuable or costly material goods (Ashikali & Dittmar, 2012). According to contemporary consumer culture, materialistic possessions are increasingly associated as symbols, identity expressers and projectors of desired images, while their practical functionalities have no value (Dittmar, 2008 as cited by Ashikali & Dittmar, 2012).

Based on the depiction of idealised images in Western society's mass media, the authors conducted an experimental study, priming materialism and women's exposure to thin-ideal media. Firstly, it was proposed that materialistic values which differ between individuals are vulnerability influencers, because women who are materialistically inclined to wealth, fame and images are more vulnerable to negative exposure effects associated with thin media ideals. Secondly, the authors therefore hypothesised the following: "State body image will be more negative after exposure to materialistic advertisements when priming materialism is followed by exposure to thin models."

Based on the inferences of prior literature, ***H4*** therefore states that:

H4: Exposure to idealised images positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

In continuation with the study's hypothetical statements, Figure 4.2 below seeks to illustrate the relationships that exist between the following constructs, which form the development of the *H5*, *H6* and *H7*. The outcome variable will first be discussed, which will be preceded by the hypothetical discussions pertaining to the constructs of self-esteem, social comparison and self-congruity.

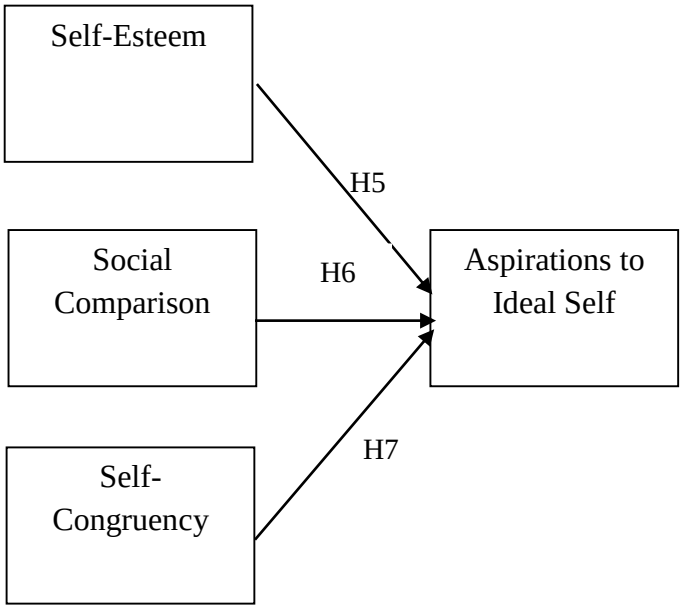


FIGURE 4.2: Conceptual Model Framework (Source: Author, 2017)

4.4.5 Self-Esteem and Aspiration to Ideal Self (H5)

Self-esteem measures the way an individual feels about themselves. Furthermore, individuals and in this case millennials portraying higher levels of self-esteem can be a preventative measure of the negative effects of the media's influences (Russello, 2009). Millennial motivations are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, where the intrinsic motivators prompt personal interests, curiosity, or life values, where intrinsically oriented individual's exhibit creativity, higher self-esteem and are more satisfied with their lives (Steffen, Clayton and Swinyard, 2014). The latter motivators are however prompted by evaluations, external reward systems and opinions of others (Russello, 2009). Truong et al., (2010) investigated the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations on luxury brands. The authors empirically used self-esteem as a component of aspiration as it was responsible for explaining human behaviours and motivations in social psychology. On the basis of social psychology, researchers predicted that self-esteem would deviate more to intrinsic aspirations as opposed to extrinsic (Truong et al., 2010). Empirical literature provided by Truong et al., (2010), the researchers hypothesised that "Self-esteem will load as an intrinsic aspiration".

Extrinsic aspirations are often measured against the Richins and Dawson (1992) scale, where the scale deduces materialism as the values pivotal to an individual's life, with a heightened emphasis over the possession of materialistic goods in the hope of obtaining admiration through their materialistic possessions (Steffen, Clayton and Swinyard, 2014).

Studies pertaining to celebrity endorsements identified a relational factor, where the success of a celebrity endorsement will determine the congruity between a consumer's ideal self and the celebrity's image portrayed in the advertisement (Koo et al., 2014). Consumers who therefore discern escalated ideal self-congruities are more likely to respond positively towards the advertisements (Choi and Rifon, 2012 as cited by Koo et al., 2014).

Steffen, Clayton and Swinyard (2014) examined the relationships between intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, intrinsic life aspirations (i.e. relationship importance and self-respect) and extrinsic life aspirations (mutual respect and materialism) and how these relationships mediate their affective well-being and satisfaction (with life, religion etc.). Empirical evidence therefore suggests that a positive relation exists between higher levels of intrinsic religiosity and positive effect, life satisfaction and intrinsic life aspirations, while a negative relation negatively influence and affect extrinsic life aspirations.

The hypothesis therefore suggests that:

H5: Self-esteem positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

4.4.6 Social Comparison and Aspiration to Ideal Self (H6)

In relation to mass communication perspectives, the social comparison theory's usefulness would have assisted in the formation of theory pertinent to the processing of information and mass media's uses and effects (Frisby, 2004). *H6* indicated that a relationship existed between *social comparison* and *aspiration to ideal self.* As previously mentioned, comparisons that occur with millennials who are deemed to be superior or better off are referred to as upward comparisons, driven by motivations to improve their *self* (Zuo, 2014; Barry, 2014). Literature suggested that the engagement of upwards comparisons between millennials may result in the individuals learning from one another, or even inspiration, leading to the motivation of achieving a similar goal (Frisby, 2004). Numerable researchers such as Borland & Akram (2007) and Phillip and McQuarrie (2009) have focussed on the aspirations in fashion and its reliance on the operationalisation of thin models and their body sizes (Barry (2014). Copious studies have evaluated social comparison in context to body surveillance and/or body images, where Tylka and Sabik (2010) postulated that women who continuously engage in upward body comparisons and possess high body surveillance are constantly reminded of their deficits in the set goals. As a result, they tend to base comparisons on unrealistic media images and other women who bear similarities to social ideals (Tylka and Sabik, 2010).

Barry (2014) used the aspiration taxonomy to examine the extent to which women aspire to fashion imageries, which comprised the aspirational criteria and aspirational targets. Taxonomies are developed by researchers as a means of organising the manner in which consumers perceive specific constructs portrayed in advertising imagery.

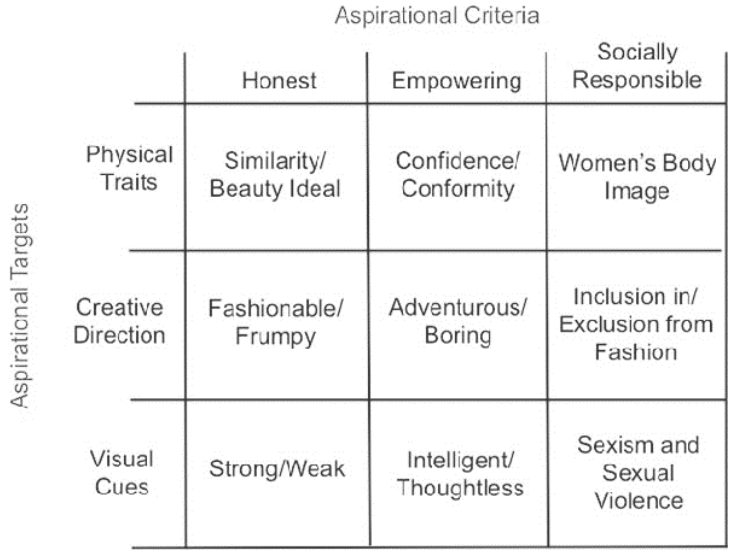


Figure 4.3: Aspiration Taxonomy (Source: Barry, 2014)

The aspirational criteria entail the cognitive rubric respondents utilised to measure if fashion images were reflective of their aspirations. As illustrated in the image above, the criterion is inclusive of their respondents' perception of the image being honest, empowering and socially responsible. The aspirational targets are image elements which trigger their aspirational criterion (Barry, 2014). For the purpose of this study, findings from two (2) components of the aspiration taxonomy were used, which study deduced that:

Aspirational criteria: Honest & Empowerment

- *Aspirational Target (Physical Trait):* Fashion images were aspirational when the models' physical attributes are perceived to be authentically representative of their appearance. Additionally, digital manipulations on models' faces and bodies were critical in influencing participant's perceptions of honesty (Barry, 2014).
- Fashion images were aspirational when participants felt beautiful and confident by embracing and celebrating their unique features. This would require the models' physical attributes to be contrary to beauty ideals, while avoiding conformity to idealised beauty (Barry, 2014).

Consumer researcher's highlighted that materialistic possessions are used as a basis of comparison among individuals to determine their relative social standing (Chan and Prendergast, 2008). As a result, the empirical evidence suggests that a positive relationship existed between individuals who socially compare themselves and their desire to achieve materialistic possessions (Chan and Prendergast, 2008).

The statement therefore leads to the dissertation's current hypothesis which states:

H6: Social comparison positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

4.4.7 Self-Congruency and Aspiration to Ideal Self (H7)

Self-congruity entails an individual's evaluation of brands, which directed their inclination to select brands that are similar or congruent with their self (Koo et al., 2014). According to Parker (2009) the theory was derived from the image congruence hypothesis which related to the parity between a millennial's self-image and a brand's image in relation to the attitudes held towards that specific brand. Pertinent to a millennial's level of self-congruity and their ideal aspirations, findings deduced that associations with others who epitomized their desired images (as opposed to those who are congruent with their current selves) aimed to achieve higher standards (Lee, 2015). Relative to the evidence obtained from prior research, H7 of the study suggested that:

H7: Self-congruency positively influences aspirations to ideal self.

4.4.8 Aspiration to Ideal self

Aspirations also referred to as goals are indicative of a millennial's future orientations and meaning of life, therefore knowledge of this cohort's goals facilitate a better comprehension of their current and future behaviours (Brdar, Rijavec and Miljković, 2009). Aspirational advertising is among the marketing contexts that involve consumers' social identities; furthermore, marketers use aspirational marketing as a marketing communication tool that often featured products that associated social out-groups that consumers desire to join (Dimofte et al., 2015).

In advertising contexts, luxury goods are commonly associated with aspirations and therefore portrayed an aspirational quality for average consumers who do not belong to wealthy social classes but naturally aspire to belong. Note has to be taken that non-luxury products and services have the ability to display aspirational dimensions (Dimofte et al., 2015).

There are two types of models, namely similar and aspirational models, however, research postulated a prevalent deficiency existed in comprehending the types of models consumers perceive as being similar or aspirationally different to them (Nichols and Schumann, 2012).

Having produced literature relating to the relationships that exist between the mediating variables and outcome variable of aspiration to ideal self, it can therefore be deduced that evaluations are drawn against individuals who have a degree of parity or disparity between themselves and their models (Nichols and Schumann, 2012).

Table 4.1 below briefly summarises the seven (7) hypotheses mentioned in this particular chapter. The table further indicates the hypotheses statements and the subsequent relationships that exists thereof.

Table 4.1: Summary of the study's hypothetical statements

Summary of Hypotheses		
H/No.	**Hypotheses Statements**	**Hypothesized Relationship**
H1	***H1:*** Exposure to idealised images negatively influences self-esteem.	**EX → SE (-)**
H2	***H2:*** Exposure to idealised images positively influences social comparison.	**EX → S (+)**
H3	***H3:*** Exposure to idealised images positively influences self-congruency.	**EX → SC (+)**
H4	***H4:*** Exposure to idealised images positively influences aspirations to ideal self.	**EX → AS (+)**
H5	***H5:*** Self-esteem positively influences aspirations to ideal self.	**SE → AS (+)**
H6	***H6:*** Social comparison positively influences aspirations to ideal self.	**S → AS (+)**
H7	***H7:*** Self-congruency positively influences aspirations to ideal self.	**SC → AS (+)**

KEY:

- **EX = Exposure to idealised images**
- **SE = Self-esteem**
- **S = Social Comparison**
- **SC = Self-congruency**
- **AS = Aspiration to ideal self**

4.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter four (4) of the paper comprehensively discussed the development of the conceptual model, which subsequently assisted in the formation of the hypothetical statements. The chapter of this study illustrated the framework and theories upon which the development of the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses statements were based. The literature substantiating the formed relationships indicated studies that tested similar constructs in a bid to understand the inferences upon which the current studies had been formulated. Additionally, the researcher provided a table summarizing the proposed hypothetical statements and the significance of the relationships that exist thereof.

Considering that Chapter four (4) presented the hypotheses statements the researcher wants to test, the proceeding chapter (Chapter five (5)) will discuss the research methodology techniques the researcher has employed to test the relationships that exist between the aforementioned research constructs.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The dissertation is centred around comprehending the manner in which exposure to idealised images has consequently affected individual's level of self-esteem, the social comparisons they engage in, the congruities that exist and the aspirations to one's ideal self that transpire thereof. As a result, hypothetical statements have been formulated as a means of providing empirical evidence to support the identified relationships. Prior chapters relating to the study have provided a comprehensive theoretical background with reference to the use of social media by millennials, in addition to the formation of theoretical and empirical research constructs. The sole purpose of the fifth chapter of the study was to highlight the research methodology the researcher employed in order to ensure the empirical research variables are tested in a reliable and valid manner.

5.2 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy comprises sections that will comprehensively discuss the research philosophy, research design and the research approach techniques the study will adopt.

5.2.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is the formation of thoughts concerned with the development of knowledge (Bornmark, Göransson and Svensson, 2006). Paradigms are characterised as difficult to recognize, because they are assumed, implicit and often taken for granted; the recognition of such paradigms are essential because sense and reconciliation of people's differing perceptions can be made, should the perceptions be of a similar social phenomenon (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The discussion pertaining to philosophical assumptions is considered a crucial step as the stance a researcher would take in conducting their study is defined (Cresswell et al, 2007). A seminal book developed by Burrel and Murrel (1979) discussing the *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* suggesting the manner in which researchers viewed and studied the social science phenomena was structured around two sets of fundamental philosophical assumptions: ontology and epistemology (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This therefore directed the discussion of ontological and epistemological approaches. The ontological approach can be defined as a metaphysics branch that is concerned with the nature of reality whereby it specified the assumptions of how we view the world (Kent, 2007; Bhattacherjee, 2012). Simply put, the ontological approach was employed when a researcher's

view of the world was perceived as mainly consisting of social order, which then drove the desire to study patterns of ordered events or behaviours (Bhattercherjee, 2012). Table 5.1 briefly defines the ontological and epistemological concepts.

	Objectivism	**Subjectivism**
Ontology	Real • External • One true reality (universalism) • Granular (things) • Order	Nominal/decided by convention • Socially constructed • Multiple realities (relativism) • Flowing (processes) • Chaos
Epistemology	Facts Numbers Observable phenomena Law-like generalisations	Opinions Narratives Attributed meanings Individuals and contexts, specifics
Axiology	Value-free Detachment	Value-bound Integral and reflexive
Methods	Quantitative	Qualitative

Table 5.1: Ontological and Epistemological Research Approach Concepts. ***Source: Saunders et al., (2015)***

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, the ontological and epistemological approaches can further be categorized into two positions that constitute objectivism and constructivism. The former is independent of consciousness or experience and often remains unchanged, meaning that there is one reality that is ubiquitous for everyone (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The best way to study the world is through the adoption of an epistemological approach that is independent of the person conducting the observation or interpretation by collecting data through the use of standardised data (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Kent (2007) ascertains that researchers often made assumptions about the nature of the reality in relation to the manner in which the knowledge was produced as well as the angle or perspective from which the research is approached. Perceptions can therefore be analysed

through the use of a Positivist or an Interpretivist philosophical approach. The Positivist approach is a highly structured method that states that the creation of science or knowledge should be restricted to what can be observed and measured. This type of social paradigm relies exclusively on theories that can be tested directly (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Contrary to the Positivist approach, the Interpretivism philosophical approach was utilised on the basis of the complexities associated with the corporate (business) world to define by the use of theories and laws in the same way physical sciences would define it (Bornmark, Göransson and Svensson, 2005). Interpretivism sought not to generalize findings nor was there an objective reality. It however adopted a subjective reality where the importance lay in comprehending participant's purposes, behaviours and goals (Saunders et al., 2003).

5.2.2.1 Research approach selected

For the purpose of the present study, an Objectivist approach was employed as the ontological approach presents real, structured phenomena, which are indicative of the prevalence in societal events or trends. The epistemology facilitated the use of facts, numbers, with the ability to observe the occurrences the research has been exposed to, leading the generalisation of the deduced findings. Finally, the components of an Objectivist approach concluded the use of Qualitative methods which articulated the researcher's identification of standardised data as a means of data collection.

5.2.2 Research Design

Research design is defined as the comprehensive data collection blueprint for empirical research (Malhotra, 2010). The numerous aims associated with research design include answering specific research questions and testing specific hypotheses (Bhattarcherjee, 2012). Bhattarcherjee (2012) further elaborated that there are at least three processes that research design needs to adhere to:

1. The data collection process;
2. The instrument development process; and
3. The sampling process.

The research design process further specified the incumbent procedures for the collection of information and the analysis of data (Malhotra, 2010; Churchill, 2005).

Research design can present itself in three (3) varying ways:

1. Exploratory;
2. Descriptive; and
3. Causal research (Malhotra, 2010).

Table 5.2 below seeks to illustrate the three (3) different types of research design.

Table 5.2: Research Design Approaches (Source: Malhotra, 2010)

Research Design	Uses	Types
Exploratory Research	• Formulating problem more precisely. • Establish priorities for research. • Clarifies concepts.	• Literature search • Experience survey • Interviews
Descriptive Research	• Describe segment characteristics. • Estimate proportion of people. • Make specific predictions.	• Longitudinal study • Sample survey • True panel
Causal Research	• Provide evidence regarding causal relationships.	• Experiments

- *Exploratory:* Exploratory research is aimed at gaining both insights and ideas that are helpful in deciphering a specific problem. This ultimately increased the researcher's familiarity with a problem that often establishes priorities for further researchers (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). Researchers often have minimal prior knowledge, therefore, the unstructured nature and high flexibility of this research ensured that the researcher had no preconceptions on the information to be obtained. Hypotheses to exploratory research are often vague or ill-defined or non-existent, however, they are not tested (Aaker et al., 2011; Darabi, 2007). Darabi (2007) established that exploratory research is tasked with the goal of precisely formulating problems, clarifying concepts, gaining explanations and insights, eliminating impractical ideas and the formation of hypotheses. It is further established that these goals can be achieved through the development of literature reviews, surveying specific sample experiences, focus groups and case studies (Darabi, 2007).

- *Descriptive:* This form of research comprises of surveys, fact-finding enquiries of different forms. A common characteristic of this descriptive research is associated with the lack of control a researcher has over measurement variables, as reports can only be made on what has happened or what is currently happening (Anonymous).

In comparison to exploratory research, descriptive research is highlighted by the development of a clear problem statement, specific hypotheses and detailed information needs (Malhotra, 2010).

- *Causal:* Causal research is defined as a form of conclusive research where the main objective is to obtain evidence that relates to the cause-and-effect of relationships (Malhotra, 2010). Causal research as a research purpose comprises two (2) purposes that entail gaining an understanding of the causal or independent variables and the effect or dependent variables. Additionally, its purpose is also associated with determining the nature of the predicted relationship that may exist between the causal and effect variables. Researchers should note that causal research should be planned and structured (Malhotra, 2010).

5.2.2.1 Research design selected

The present study utilises exploratory data as a research design method due to the presence of comprehensive literature reviews, collection of data through the use of surveys and a comprehensive analysis of the collected data. This form of research is suitable for this study as it assists in gaining an in-depth understanding, insights and ideas relating to the nature of an identified research problem (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

5.2.3 Research Approach

A research approach is a determinant of the manner in which information will be obtained (Aaker et al., 2011). The selection of a research approach can vary between a deductive approach and an inductive approach (Bornmark, Göransson and Svensson, 2005). The two aforementioned approaches are dependent on the manner in which a study relates theory to reality (Saunders et al., 2007). Saunders et al., (2007) defines the two approaches as follows:

- An *inductive approach* is often applied when data is collected prior to the formation of theory resulting in data analysis; while
- A *deductive approach* is the formation of theories and hypotheses (by the researcher), prior to designing a research strategy as a means of testing the developed hypotheses.

Bhattacherjee (2012) notes that the Inductive and Deductive approaches are two halves of a research cycle that constantly iterates between theory and observations. A researcher cannot use the two research approaches if they have no familiarity with theory and data components of research, as they are critical for the advancement of science.

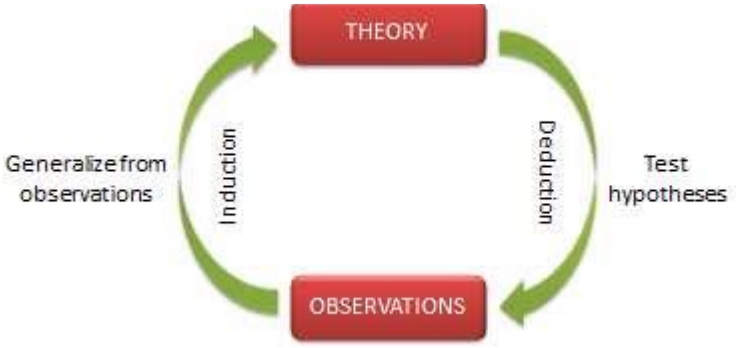


Figure 5.1: The Cycle of Research (Source: Bhattacherjee, 2012)

Figure 5.1 is therefore illustrative of the iteration of both theory and data as a helix, due to its contribution in effectively explicating the phenomenon of interest and better theories (Bhattacherjee, 2012). As a result, the Inductive approach is associated with theory building because research is more valuable when prior theories and explanations are minimal. Contrarily, the Deductive approach is associated with theory testing because research will be more productive when more theories of similar phenomena are being investigated (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Research approaches further comprise two types of approaches, namely *Qualitative* and *Quantitative approaches (*Denscombe, 2007). The former can be defined as research that is typically utilized when answers are required for questions that are complex in nature; its purpose is to describe and gain an understanding towards a phenomenon from a participant's viewpoint (Wang & Yang, 2010). The disadvantage of qualitative research is that the sample is small and non-representative of the population (Malhotra, 2010). In contrast to the qualitative approach, the latter can be defined as a structured data collection approach that allows for data to be quantified applying some degree of statistical analysis; furthermore, the results can be generalized from the sample to the population (Malhotra, 2010).

5.2.4 Rationale for Quantitative Research

The dissertation seeks to tests the relationships that exist between exposure to idealised images, self-esteem, social comparison and self-congruity and the subsequent effects these constructs will have on an individual's aspirations. The employment of a quantitative approach is befitting as the data obtained from testing the hypothetical statements requires statistical analyses, which enables the researcher to generalise the findings to the total population.

The use of this approach facilitates for the investigation of a larger proportion of the population, as the qualitative approach would have been restrictive with the use of a smaller sample. Difficulty in generalising the findings from the smaller sample proves to be restrictive in comparison to the quantitative approach (Malhotra, 2010).

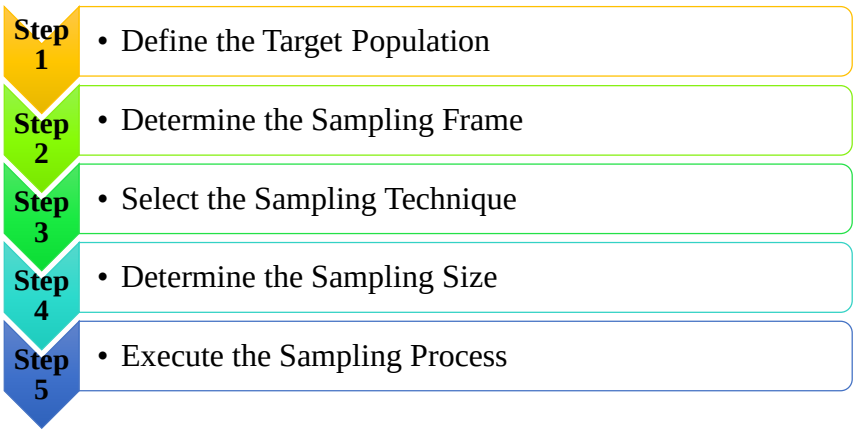
Having rationalised the choice of the quantitative approach, the following step within the research process is to specify the sampling design process. This component discusses the sampling design process and the subsequent steps involved in specifying the design of the study.

5.3 SAMPLING DESIGN

According to Chuck Chakrapani, a feasible approach to collecting marketing research data in the majority of situations is through the employment of a sample. Malhotra (2010) suggested five (5) steps to the sampling design process.

Figure 5.2 is an illustration of the 5 steps of the sampling design process.

Figure 5.2: Sampling Design Process



Source: Malhotra, (2010)

<u>Step 1: Define the target population</u>

Target population

A population must include the entire group from which conclusions can be extrapolated due to cost and time constraints, the inability to remunerate the population and destructive testing. Sampling units are therefore more appropriate in concluding a study's findings (Krommenhoek, 2012). Explorable (2015) postulated that a population can be defined as a precise group of people or objects that possess a similar characteristic. The intention of sampling was to gain information about a population (Aaker, Kumar, Day and Leone, 2011). It is thus critical from the outset to identify the population properly and accurately (Aaker, Kumar, Day and Leone, 2011). The determination of a target population entails the collection of elements or objects that possess information that is sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made (Malhotra, 2010).

With particular relevance to the study, the target population comprises millennials (students) between the ages of 18 to 36, from The University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus. The motive behind employing the following target population is based on the notion that millennials are not only deemed to be more active on social networking platforms, but possess an additionally higher propensity of being easily influenced (Keeton, 2010).

The elements comprise registered students studying at The University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus, with University students primed as the sampling units. The extent to which the data collection process took place was limited to the jurisdiction of The University of Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus. Finally, data was carried out during the month of August 2017.

Upon the completion of defining the target population, the preceding step of the sampling design process entails the determination of the sampling frame.

Step 2: Determine the sampling frame

Sampling Frame

Sampling frames are determined when a target population has been decided upon. A sampling frame comprises a list of population members that are used to obtain a sample. Sampling frame descriptions do not have to itemise all the population members (Aaker, Kumar, Day & Leone, 2011), however it does need to be a representation of the elements of the target population (Malhotra, 2010).

The present study however had no access to a university list containing members of the population; samples were therefore obtained from three faculties found within the East and

West campuses through the use of pseudo-random method. This method entailed taking a random sample of the target population found within their lecture halls (on the basis of set appointments with lecturers (Krommenhoek, 2012). Consideration was however taken in using the following techniques as the sample was required to be representative.

Step 3: Select the sampling technique

Sampling Technique(s)/ Method(s)

The consideration of sampling techniques involved several decisions of a broader nature (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore while defining the techniques which would possibly be used, a researcher should first choose between using a Bayesian approach or a traditional sampling procedure (Aaker, Kumar, Day and Leone, 2007). The successive decision requires the researcher to select between sampling with or without replacement, and whether or not to use one of two sampling techniques: non-probability or probability sampling (Malhotra, 2010).

Non-probability techniques

Non-probability sampling technique states that the chance of selecting units within the population either have a zero chance of being chosen or the probability of selecting a sample cannot be accurately determined (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The first and most commonly used form of non-probability technique to be discussed is convenience sampling (Malhotra, 2010).

Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling can also be referred to as accidental or opportunity sampling (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Convenience sampling entails drawing a sample that is close at hand, readily available, convenient and from participants who are willing to participate in the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Teddlie and Yu, 2009). Although convenience sampling is not entirely poor nor non-representative, great thought has to be expended before selecting such a method because basing a good experiment on a non-representative sample will be less likely to produce useful conclusions regarding a population (Krommenhoek, 2012).

Quota Sampling

The use of this sampling technique is often associated with opinion surveys, whereby each interviewer would be required to collect respondent's opinions based on a specific topic (Krommenhoek, 2012). This technique involves segmenting the population into mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive subgroups; this will be followed by the selection of a non-

random set of observations from each subgroup while meeting a pre-specified quota (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Bhattacherjee (2012) further stipulates that quota sampling can be divided into two categories:

- *Non-proportional quota sampling:* The lack of restriction within the following sampling technique does not require a representational proportion; however, a minimum size in each subgroup needs to be met.
- *Proportional quota sampling:* In contrast to the former technique, the latter stipulates that each subgroup of a proportion needs to match that of the population.

Although differences exist to a certain extent, there are however significant relations that are prevalent between convenience and quota sampling; the relations are briefly discussed below.

Relation between Convenience and Quota

The relation between convenience and quota are prevalent in their ability to yield reliable results. Despite this ability, significant dangers exist in comparison to differing sampling methods (Krommenhoek, 2012).

Judgemental Sampling

The judgemental sampling technique (also known as expert sampling) entails selecting respondents in a non-random manner on the basis of their expertise with regards to a phenomenon being studied (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Although this technique does not permit for findings to be generalized to the entire population, an advantage associated with the following sampling method states that an expert's familiarity with the subject matter makes the opinions obtained from samples more credible than opinions obtained from samples that are both experts and non-experts (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Snowballing Sampling

Snowball sampling often referred to as chain sampling is occasionally useful when there is either no list at a researcher's disposal or when there is difficulty in finding a population (Krommenhoek, 2012). The process is defined by the identification of a few respondents that match a criterion relevant to one's study. This sampling technique has been identified to hold several issues because there is a high likelihood of interviewing friends and acquaintances that may hold similarities to one another rather than with people among the general population (Krommenhoek, 2012).

Upon discussing the numerous non-probability techniques, techniques which permit each individual an equal chance of being selected in the sample can simply be defined as probability sampling techniques (Krommenhoek, 2012).

5.3.1 Probability sampling techniques

Probability is defined as a sampling technique that ensures that every sampling unit within the population has an equal or non-zero probability of being chosen in the sample (Bhattacherjee, 2012). It is further highlighted that the majority of probabilistic sampling techniques have two attributes:

i. Every unit chosen within the population has discernible non-zero probability of being sampled; and
ii. The sampling procedure will at some point be randomly selected (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

The numerous probability-sampling techniques therefore comprise:

Simple Random Sampling (SRS)

The following random probabilistic sampling technique is often used with the presence of a list pertaining to the sampling units (Krommenhoek, 2012). In simple random sampling, all the possible population subsets of a sampling frame have an equal chance of being selected (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The process can comprise of several methods of selecting a sample; names or numbers being randomly drawn from a box or from computer program. A sample will then generate a sample through the use of random numbers that often commence with a "seeded" number that is based on the program's start time (Teddlie and Yu, 2009). Simple random sampling is considered to be the simplest technique in contrast to the other methods. This is mainly due to the sampling frame not being partitioned, conclusions can be generalized and the sample is free from bias (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Systematic Sampling

Systematic sampling is defined as ordering a sampling frame in accordance to a specific criterion whereby elements are chosen at regular intervals through the use of an ordered list (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The commencement of the following sampling technique involves a random start, followed by sampling every n'th unit thereafter (Krommenhoek, 2012). In contrast to the sampling of the n'th unit, Bhattacherjee (2012) makes reference to the use of the k'th element, where *k* equates to N/n and where *k* is deemed as the ratio of N (sampling frame size) and n (the desired sample size).

It is essential to ensure that the point of commencement is not automatically the first in the list but rather chosen from within the *k* elements within the list (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This will ensure that samples are uniformly represented as opposed to being overrepresented (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Stratified

A researcher's interest in drawing a random sample often means that they want a sample that is representative of the population based on some characteristic of interest (Teddlie and Yu, 2009). Stratified sampling can be presented in two forms: non-proportional stratified sampling and proportional sampling. The former is used when the proportion of the samples found within each stratum does not represent the population of interest. Whereas the latter can be used when the proportional distribution is retained in the sample, it has to be however noted that the non-proportional approach is more effective in reflecting smaller strata as opposed to the proportional approach. However, this approach would only be effective if it were weighted in accordance to the strata subgroups in the entire population (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Cluster

A population that is dispersed over a wide geographical region is often not a feasible foundation for conducting a simple random sampling procedure over the entire population (Bhattacherjee, 2012). A more feasible approach would however be the use of cluster sampling; it entails dividing the population into units or groups called strata's that usually comprise of units or areas wherein the population has been divided (Malhotra, 2010). Clusters often have to be as representative of the population as possible. Malhotra (2010) further elaborated that the sample had to represent the heterogeneous population being studied and should also be homogeneous among the population.

Despite several conflicting definitions of the abovementioned techniques, the use and application of the probability and non-probability techniques are similar.

Table 5.3: Probability and non-probability sampling techniques

Probability sampling techniques	Non-probability sampling techniques

Simple Random Sampling	Convenience Sampling
Systematic Simple Random Sampling	Judgment Sampling
Stratified Sampling	Quota Sampling
Cluster Sampling	Snowball Sampling

Sampling technique adopted for the present study

Having briefly discussed the innumerable probability and non-probability techniques, the researcher used a probabilistic sampling technique, with particular reference to a stratified sampling method. The justification of a probability sampling technique was based on its ability to ensure that the population has an equal or non-zero probability of being chosen in the sample (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Stratified sampling was the most relevant sampling method the researcher of the study could have employed for the dissertation. The stratification of the sample required the sampling frame to be divided into homogeneous and non-overlapping subgroups named strata (Teddlie and Yu, 2009). The sample was further stratified on the bases of three (3) faculties (Commerce, Law and Management, Humanities and Engineering and Built Environment) found on the University's respective campuses, which mainly comprised the East and West campus.

Step 4: Determine the sampling size

Malhotra (2010) suggested the use of the following formula in determining the sampling size of each stratum: $n_h = (N_h / N) * n$. In addition to Malhotra's formula, DiGaetano and Waksberg (2002) postulated that the determination of a sample size presumes numerous "trade-offs" with factors comprising cost of time and finance, sample estimates, potentiality of sampling biases and analytical objectives. For the purpose of the present study, the sample size was determined using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \rho(1-p)}{M^2} \text{ x } 100$$

Where: M^2- Margin of error

$$N = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.438)^2} \text{ X } 100$$

$$= 500$$

The dissertation therefore distributed 500 questionnaires, where the samples were stratified into approximately 165 respondents from three (3) faculties (Commerce, Law and Management, Humanities and Engineering and Built Environment) found in the East campus and West campuses respectively. Despite the abovementioned formula, the determination of a sampling size does not often represent the population as a whole, but the choice does however lie with the researcher and their requirements pertaining to the study (Suroviskikh, 2007). The following study's sample size ultimately consists of 500 respondents.

Step 5: Execute the sampling frame

The fifth and final step specified the requirement of a detailed specification of the decisions relating to the implementation of the population, sampling frame, sampling unit, sampling technique and the sample size (Malhotra, 2010). It was highly important that this step was adequately controlled, as this ensured data collectors adhered to the stipulated procedures (McDaniel & Gates, 2004).

In relation to the following study, obtaining a representative sample of millennials within the Campus was achieved through random selection from within the University's Campus. The steps of the sampling design process were as follows:

The extent to which the data collection process occurred was limited to the jurisdiction of the University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus.

The target population consisted of millennial students aged between 18 and 36 from the University of the Witwatersrand, during the month of August 2017. The sampling frame was selected through the use of a simple random sampling technique. The selection of the sample was based on set appointments with lecturers, in a lecture hall setting. The sample size comprised 500 registered students, while the execution entailed stratifying the samples on the bases of the respected faculties. Considering the University's three (3) faculties (Commerce, Law and Management, Humanities and Engineering and Built Environment) found the on the University's Braamfontein Campus, the samples were therefore stratified into an approximate number of 165 respondents per faculty.

5.3.2 Selected Sampling Technique

The present study therefore seeks to make use of probability sampling, without replacement as this sampling method allows each sample the same probability of being chosen, it also assures the sample is representative and we can estimate the errors of sampling (Barreiro & Albandoz,

2009). Although there was no presence of a sampling frame or list, the choice of stratified sampling as a technique is based on the fact that the samples will be obtained on both University Campuses (East and West) from numerous faculties (Commerce, Law and Management, Humanities and Engineering and Built Environment), and as a result samples were required to be stratified on the basis of the three (3) mentioned faculties. Sampling first required the sample to be chosen through SRS, followed by selecting the stratification variables(s) and the number of strata (*H).* The following formula was therefore employed in determining the sample size of each stratum (DiGaetano & Waksberg (2002) :

$$n = \frac{z^2 \rho(1-p)}{M^2} \times 100$$

Where: M^2- Margin of error

$$N = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.438)^2} \times 100$$

$$= 500$$

The previous sections of the study sought to emphasize and fulfill the sampling design process, the next point to be discussed in section 5.4 aims to further elaborate the data collection methods the dissertation will employ.

5.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data collection is defined as the numerous ways in which data can be collected, depending on whether data is primary or secondary in nature (Wang & Yang, 2010).

Primary data

Primary data can be defined as the collection of data by a researcher using interviews, observations and questionnaires as research tools rather than solely relying on existing data sources (Wilson, 2010).

Secondary data

Secondary data on the other hand is defined as data that has previously been collected by other researchers for research that was of another purpose (Wilson, 2010). In order to gain a deeper

understanding of a research problem and research background, data will be obtained from secondary sources. The sources may constitute academic journals, articles, published theses, textbooks and Internet websites (Aaker et al., 2011). Considering that research is often constrained by finances, time and resources, the advantages associated with secondary data include savings in resources on a large scale as well as savings in the time and money a researcher has to expend (Wang & Yang, 2010). However, the disadvantages that accompany secondary research comprise of data that may not perfectly fit the problem and the difficulties encountered by researcher when verifying the accuracy of secondary data in comparison to primary data (Saunder et al. 2007).

The study employed the use of both primary and secondary data as a means of data collection. Primary data tests the hypotheses mentioned earlier in the study and was subsequently obtained through the dissemination of self-administered questionnaires, while the information relating to the development of background overviews and empirical and theoretical literature reviews were obtained through the use of academic journals, articles, published theses, textbooks and internet websites (Aaker et al., 2011).

The following section to be discussed pertains to ethical considerations that need to be adhered to within the research process.

5.4.1 Ethical Considerations

An overview of the ethical behaviour tenets that should be expected with every research and widely accepted within the scientific community comprise (Bhattacherjee, 2012):

1. ***Informed consent***: Should an interviewer request a respondent to fill in a questionnaire, an informed consent form will be required wherein it clearly describes a respondent's right to not participate and a right to withdraw at any given point before responses are recorded in the study.
2. ***Anonymity and confidentiality:*** Protection of a subject's interest and well-being is dependent on the protection of their identity within a scientific study.
3. ***Analysis and reporting***: Ethical obligations to the scientific community state that researchers need to disclose the manner in which data will be analysed and reported. Discoveries of unexpected or negative findings need to be fully disclosed despite the possibility of doubt being cast on the research design or findings.

5.4.2 Measurement Instrument

The measurement instruments used in this study include filter questions, and a seven-point Likert scale.

These instruments are briefly defined as:

- ***Filter Questions:*** The following approach can also be referred to as a funnelling approach and are used when a researcher does not want to miss a potential respondent but some of the questions included may be irrelevant to certain respondents (Malhotra, 2010). The funnelling approach filters out respondents who are not eligible to partake in the study and as a result have the ability to minimize the time and frustration a respondent may expend in answering a questionnaire that has no relevance to them (Malhotra, 2010; Gattion & Jone, 2005).
- ***Likert Scale***: These scales are commonly used when attitudes are to be tested, they are however not limited to testing attitudes as they can also be used to measure a participant's level of disagreement or agreement with reference to a particular statement (Grattion & Jones, 2005). Likert scales are useful where there are no clear responses, and respondents would match their appropriate feelings and emotions on a scale that can be presented in five, seven, nine and eleven-point scales (Malhotra, 2010).

5.4.3 Questionnaire Design

It has to be noted that questionnaires fall within the broad category of survey research (Malhotra, 2010). Surveys as data collection techniques are defined as a research method that involve standardised questionnaires or interviews as well as the systematic collection of data relating to people's preferences, thoughts and behaviours (Bhattacherjee, 2012). (Bhattacherjee, 2012) further emphasises that survey research can further be divided into two distinctive categories:

1. *Interview surveys*: Telephone, personal or focus group interviews.
2. *Questionnaire surveys:* Include mail-in, self or group administered and online surveys.

A clear distinction has to be made between interviews and questionnaires, that is; interviews require the interviewer's completion based on respondent's verbal responses while questionnaires are defined as research instruments that are solely completed by respondents

(Bhattacherjee, 2012). As previously discussed in the research design process, survey methods can often be used for research that are descriptive, exploratory or explanatory in nature (Bhattacherjee, 2012). There are several methods that can be applied in collecting data and the selection of such a method will largely determine the manner in which the data are collected. The devices responsible for recording raw data are often dependent on the manner in which data will be collected; the method can range from standardized tests, observational forms, laboratory notes, instrument calibration logs and questionnaires (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

According to Malhotra (2010), a questionnaire is a formalised set of questions for obtaining information from respondents, whether it is called a schedule, interview form, or measuring instrument. The use of a questionnaire is often determined by a researcher's budget; should a researcher then encounter a budget constraint, then questionnaires would be a feasible option as they are cheap and easy data collection devices (Sengupta, 2014).

The design of questionnaires often lacks theory, and due to the lack of scientific principles that guarantee an optimal or ideal questionnaire, questionnaire design is a skill that is acquired through experience (Malhotra, 2010). Poor judgement and a lack of thought may mean the results are not relevant to the research purpose, and ultimately diminish the value of the study (Aaker et al., 2011). The process of designing a questionnaire is split into three elements:

1. Determine the question to be asked;
2. Select the question type for each question and specify the wording; and
3. Design the sequence and overall questionnaire layout (Burgess, 2001).

In order for a questionnaire to be deemed acceptable, it has to accomplish the research's objectives (Aaker et al., 2011). There are three (3) main objectives that any questionnaire has to adhere to: The information required should be translated into a specific set of questions that the respondents can and will answer. Secondly, a questionnaire has to uplift, motivate and encourage the respondent to engage involvement, cooperation and completion of the interview. Thirdly, a questionnaire must minimise respondent error (Malhotra, 2010).

The desire to achieve data that is of a higher quality within an accepted time frame lies in a researcher's choice of a survey method. During the selection of such approaches, a researcher needs to consider the numerous advantages and disadvantages that accompany data collection techniques. As accompanied with every approach, inherent strengths and weaknesses are often synonymous with the utilization of any technique. Comparatively (to other research methods),

the strengths attributed to self-administered questionnaires include (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Cooper & Schindler, 2003):

- In comparison to alternative survey methods, self-administered questionnaires are perceived to have a high degree of anonymity, as respondent's credentials are not required to complete the study.
- Facilitates contact with unobservable data on factors such as people's preferences, traits (e.g., self-esteem), factual information (e.g., income) and attitudes.
- Attributed with low costs without compromising the methodology's quality.
- Suitable for collecting data on inaccessible respondents.
- High response rates.
- The presence of an interviewer does not influence respondents but it does however allow for further clarification of certain concepts.
- Respondents prefer questionnaire surveys because they are not only unobtrusive but respondents can also respond at their own convenience.

Questionnaires are attributed with low costs and ease, however, this form of data collection technique is associated with unique disadvantages that can often affect the quality of data to be obtained, and they comprise:

- Questionnaires are subject to numerous biases that range from non-response bias, sampling bias, social desirability and recall bias (Bhattacherjee, 2012).
- Should a fieldworker fail to motivate respondents to answer questions, the high response advantage can result in a disadvantage. Low response rates can occur in instances where respondents have no desire to participate in the study.
- Self-administered questionnaires cannot be excessively long or complex as respondents can lose interest and ultimately decrease their willingness to participate.
- Prone to response errors and missing responses and this may constitute problems should a respondent's focus be influenced.
- Failure to reassure respondent's anonymity and desire to be correct will lead to anxious respondents (Bhattacherjee, 2012; & Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

5.4.4 Chosen questionnaire design

After careful consideration of the numerous strengths and weakness associated with survey methods, the dissertation employed the use of a structured self-administered questionnaire as a data collection technique. In the following questionnaire technique, structured questions were formed beforehand and respondents were therefore required to select an answer from a pre-specified set of choices (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

The questionnaire will comprise of six (6) sections, where Section A introduced the filter questions which were necessary to identify a respondent's eligibility to partake in the study. Sections B, C, D, E and F, employed measurement instruments comprising Exposure to Idealised Images, Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, Self-Congruency and Aspiration to the Ideal Self. Additionally, the measurement items were measured through the employment of 7-point Likert scales, where 1- Strongly Disagree, 2-Somewhat Disagree, 3- Disagree, 4- Neither Disagree/Agree, 5- Somewhat Agree, 6- Agree and 7- Strongly Agree.

The presence of a fieldworker ensured that respondents were constantly motivated and willing to complete the questionnaire. The fieldworker additionally elaborated and/or clarified concepts respondents may have found difficult or perplexing (Malhotra, 2010).

5.5 STATISTICAL MODELLING

5.5.1 Measurement Model

5.5.1.1 Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha also known as Coefficient Alpha defined the average of all possible split-half coefficients that ultimately result from various ways of splitting the scale items (Malhotra, 2007). Cronbach's Alpha is a complicated test that commonly measured reliability and further compared numerous pairs of questions (Shuttleworth, 2009). The main purpose of this test was aimed at generally measuring internal consistency or reliability of psychometric instruments, using items that measure single or one dimensional latent aspects of individuals (Explorable.com, 2010). Cronbrach's Alpha is expressed as a number between 0 and 1. Although the value of alpha is increased, a high Coefficient Alpha does not always constitute a high degree of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The logic behind Coefficient Alpha highlighted that the higher the average correlation, the lower the error or unique components of items. Therefore in order for a greater likelihood of errors cancelling out, there needs to be more items present (Hanneman, 2007). Therefore a value of 0.6 or less has to be obtained because this will serve as an indication of an unsatisfactory internal consistency

(Malhotra, 2007). The use of Alpha assumed that all variables were normally distributed, and the relationships among the variables were deemed linear.

5.5.1.2 Reliability Tests

Reliability refers to the consistency and accuracy of a measure/instrument in a quantitative study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). It is therefore defined as the quality of measurement (William, 2006). This test of reliability is aimed at describing the repeatability and consistency of a test (Shuttleworth, 2009). Reliability posited that the measures that have been employed are free from random error, whereby the following formula is employed:

X_R. If $X_R = 0$

The presence of random error produces inconsistency, which subsequently leads to lower reliability of results. The reliability of scales is therefore influenced by numerous factors of research design (Bertea, 2010).

Testing of the reliability of the dissertations research constructs was based on the use of internal consistency.

5.5.1.3 Validity Tests

Validity is defined as the differences in observed scale scores that reflect true differences among objects pertaining to the characteristic being measured (Malhotra, 2007). Validity seeks to test whether or not the test in question measures what it claims to measure and the extent to which the measure is indicative of the specific traits (Cooper & Schindloer, 2011). Validity tests can be estimated through the use of several indicators: Convergent, discriminant, content, face and predictive indicators (Malhotra, 2007; Anonymous, 2006). Validity's importance lies in its ability to apply other methods in order to be sure that the instruments present validity (Bertea, 2010). However, for the purpose of this study, the research validity tests to be discussed comprised discriminant validity tests.

Construct Validity

Construct validity is the extent to which inferences can be legitimately made from measurement of scales in a study to the theoretical constructs on which the measurements were made (William, 2006). Heale and Twycross (2015), also state that construct validity measures the extent to which research instruments accurately measure all aspects of a construct. Construct validity has consists of two subcategories: Convergent and Divergent validity.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assists in establishing construct validity when two different measurement procedures and research methods are used during the data collection process (Anonymous, 2012). The positive correlation of scales with other measures of the same construct can be defined as a scale (Malhotra, 2007).

Discriminant Validity

William (2006) states that discriminant validity illustrates that measures should not be related and are in reality not related. Malhotra (2007) further elaborates that discriminant validity involves the demonstration of a lack of correlation among differing constructs. This form of validity testing is based on the assumption that items should have a higher correlation among other items from other constructs that are supposedly not meant to theoretically correlate (Bertea & Zait, 2011). In order to prove the validity of the measures, the relationship between the measures should be low (William, 2006). The use of Chi-square and Q-sort scaling techniques are often employed within this form of validity test, whereby the former statistic entails testing the statistical significance of the observed association, while the null hypothesis seeks to illustrate that there is no relationship between the dependent and independent factors (Malhotra, 2007; Aaker, Kumar, Day & Leone, 2011). The former (Q-sort) scaling technique is a comparative scaling technique that ranks procedures to sort objects on the basis of similarity with respect to a criterion (Malhotra, 2007).

5.5.1.4 Validity Test Adopted

The determination of the study's research constructs has been based on the adoption of Convergent and Discriminant validity. The dissertation empirically tested the relationships that existed between the research constructs of exposure to idealised images, self-esteem, social comparison and aspirations to the ideal self. Five (5) of the scales are measured with a seven-point Likert scale through the use of a self-administered questionnaire. In order to decipher the convergent validity, a measure proving the degree to which any of the measurement constructs are related, a correlation coefficient were employed. Therefore while looking at the patterns of inter-correlation among the measures, correlation between theoretically similar measures should be high, while correlations with theoretical disparities are required to be low.

The rationale behind using Discriminant validity is based on the postulation that the relationship between the measures should be low (William, 2006). Additionally, the results yielded from the validity test will employ Chi-square difference tests as a means of measuring the validity of the relationships that exist between the measures of interest.

5.5.3 Structural Equation Modelling

5.5.3.1 Factor Analysis

Factors are defined as the set of variables that are often represented by numerically smaller variables; the basic concept behind factor analysis can therefore be defined as a multivariate method that is responsible for denoting a category of procedures that are predominantly utilised in the reduction and summarisation of data (Cornish, 2007; Malhorta, 2010). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) defines its main objective as a predefined factor model's ability to fit an observed data set (Farrel & Rudd, 2009), where estimates are provided for each of the measurement model's parameters. Prior to the use of this analysis, major data considerations need to be addressed; the researcher has to ensure the absence of missing data, examine if outliers are absent, examine the sample sizes adequacy and determine the presence of univariate and multivariate normality (Farrel & Rudd, 2009).

The evaluation of a model may provide parameters such as factor loadings, factor variances, covariances, indicator error variances and error covariances. (Farrel & Rudd, 2009) further postulates that the usefulness of Confirmatory Factor Analysis lies in its abilities to test a particular factor loading's significance, to test the relationships between two or more factor loadings, to test whether correlation or non-correlations in a set of factors and to finally examine the convergent and Discriminant Validity of measure sets. Having previously discussed Convergent and Discriminant analysis, Factor analysis is referred to as a statistical technique that is commonly used in conjunction with multi-item measurement scales, with particular emphasis on the Convergent and Discriminant Validity tests (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

5.5.3.2 Limitations of Factor Analysis

Research is often accompanied by numerous limitations, and in this case problems that can be encountered with the use of this technique can include:

- *Problems in naming factors:* Factor names may in most cases represent an inaccurate reflection of the variables that may be found within the factor.

- *Difficulty in variable interpretation:* Some variables may be difficult to interpret due to the presence of split loadings whereby variables may load numerous times onto more than one factor (Bhattacherjee, 2012 as cited by Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).
- Finally, factor loading often require the use of large samples as a means of ensuring the reliability of other factors (Bhattacherjee, 2012, cited by Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

5.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FIVE:

The chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the research methodology that will be used in the dissertation. Attention was given to the research process itself where a clear outline explicating the sampling techniques was discussed. Probability sampling with particular emphasis to stratified sampling will be employed. Additionally, the questionnaire design has been clearly outlined, inclusive to the ethical considerations, validity and reliability measures the researcher will take into consideration when analysing and interpreting the questionnaire findings. Chapter six (6) of this study will place great emphasis on the analysis and reporting of findings.

CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter six (6) of the dissertation will provide a comprehensive discussion of the statistically analysed data obtained from the data collection process. The researcher retrieved the data through the administration of a questionnaire. A software commonly referred to as SPSS 24 (the Statistical Package for the Social Science) was used to analyse the data. The first analytical procedures to be discussed pertain to the descriptive statistics, followed by the reliability and validity of the measurement constructs necessary in formulating the questionnaires. Tests necessary for identifying the reliability and validity of the constructs comprise tests such Composite Reliability, while Average Shared Variance (AVE), Shared Variance, and Correlation matrices will indicate the prevalence of validity. Results obtained from Confirmatory Factor Analysis will comprehensively detail the model fit tests, while Structural Equation Modelling and Path Modelling results will explicate the significance of the hypotheses.

Prior to the commencement of the aforementioned tests, Chapter six (6) will firstly discuss the data screening process, preceded by the data analysis procedure the study will undertake.

6.2 DATA SCREENING

The completion of the data collection process is accompanied by the implementation of the data screening process, ensuring clean data which is free from errors potentially arising prior to any statistical analysis of the data (Malhotra, 2010). Chuchu (2015) ascertains that the data screening process is the first critical step in gaining (a) comprehension of the data's attributes; additionally; he further postulates that this step is crucial in ensuring the accuracy of the captured data through the identification of outliers.

The most pivotal analytical duties required to screen data requires the examination of questionnaires, in addition to editing, coding and the tabulation of data. The employment of SPSS enables each of the data fields to test for means and standard deviations. Pertinent to this dissertation, the aforementioned measures ensure the detection of typographical errors and potential outliers. Any identified errors found within the data set were cleaned and rectified.

6.3 DATA ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

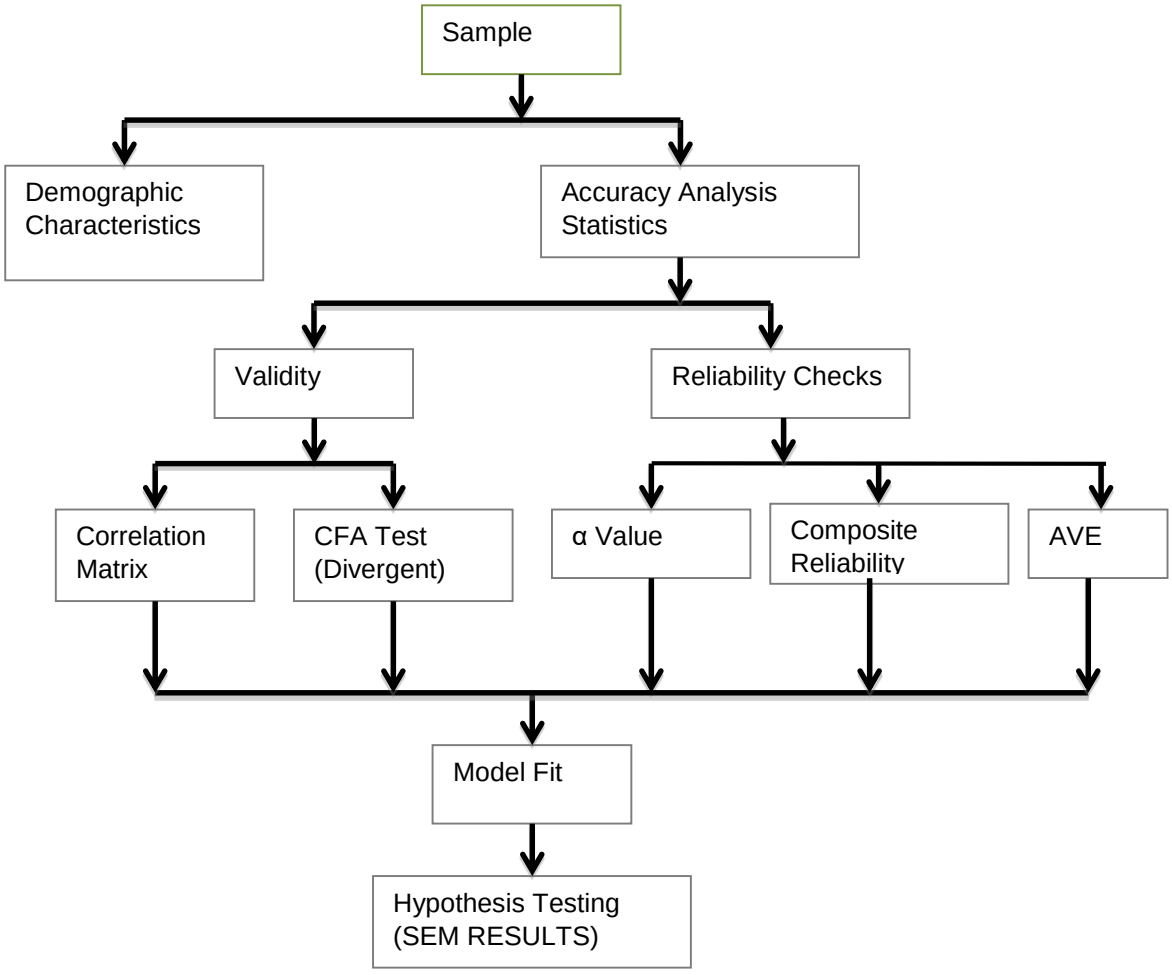
The empirical data of the dissertation requires use of various statistical procedures. SPSS 24 alongside AMOS 24 are the two major softwares necessary for assessing the study's data. The former entails assessing each construct's internal consistency through the use of Coefficient Alpha(s) inclusive of the amended item-to-total correlations, while the use of the latter is necessary in analysing the final measure and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The reliability and validity of the measurement scales is determined through the statistical procedures which involve the assessment of items and scale items, and Discriminant Validity.

Hypothetical tests will be analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Figure 6.1 illustrates the sequential structure the dissertation will adopt in interpreting the results obtained from the data analysis component.

Figure 6.1: Statistical Analysis Procedures

Source: Compiled by researcher (2017)



6.4 DESCRIPTIVES STATISTICS

Bhattacherjee (2012) described the analysis of descriptive statistics as comprising the statistics' descriptions, the presentation of constructs of interest and/or the existing relationships between constructs. The following section broadly illustrates and interprets the descriptive statistics of the analysed data.

6.4.1 Sample Description

Tables 6.1 to 6.6 are representative of numerous profiles of the dissertation's participants. The sample was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein Campus, with the surveyed sample comprising registered students of the University. The University's total population equated to 33 346 (University of the Witwatersrand, 2014). A total of 302 out of 500 students produced completed questionnaires, while the 198 were incomplete due to the limitation of time/time constraints. The description of the sample will commence with the sample's age design profile.

Table 6.1 provides an overview of the age categories of the sample respondents.

Table 6.1. Samples Age Design Profile

AGE					
		Frequency	**Per cent**	**Valid Per cent**	**Cumulative Per cent**
Valid	**18-20**	60	19.9	19.9	19.9
	21-23	150	49.7	49.7	69.5
	24-28	71	23.5	23.5	93.0
	29 and above	21	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that out of a total of 302 respondents, the majority of the participants comprised of 184 Female respondents, while the male counterpart equated to a minority 118 respondents. In other words, 60.9% of the females were representative of the sample while 39.1% of male respondents partook in the questionnaire.

Figure 6.2 presents the age categories of the sample respondents in a pie chart.

Figure 6.2: Pie Chart illustrating the samples Gender

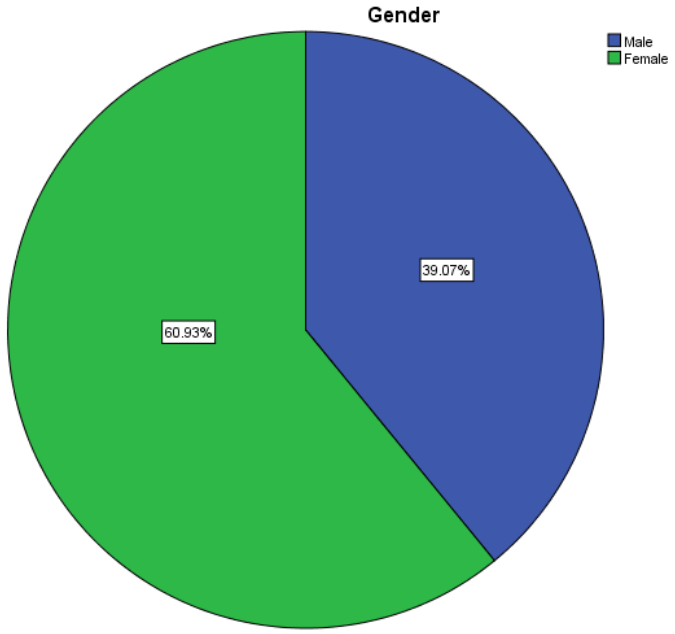


Table 6.2 is illustrative of the Social Media Platforms respondents are most active on.

Table 6.2: Samples use of Social Media Platforms

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS					
		Frequency	**Per cent**	**Valid Per cent**	**Cumulative Per cent**
Valid	**Facebook**	78	25.8	25.8	25.8
	Instagram	133	44.0	44.0	69.9
	Twitter	49	16.2	16.2	86.1
	Pinterest	12	4.0	4.0	90.1
	Other, specify	30	9.9	9.9	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

It is evident from the results in Table 6.2 that 133 respondents (44%) indicated that they are most active on Instagram, with Facebook being the second most highly used social media platform, reporting 78 followers or (26%). Facebook was succeeded by Twitter, with 49 respondents (16%) using the platform. Thirty respondents (9.9%) indicated 'other' which account for platforms such as Whatsapp, Tumblr and Reddit, while Pinterest came in last where 12 respondents (4%) reported to have used the platform.

Table 6.3 presents the results of the samples number of social media followers.

Table 6.3: Samples Number of Social Media Followers

NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS					
		Frequency	**Per cent**	**Valid Per cent**	**Cumulative Per cent**
Valid	**Less than 100**	37	12.3	12.3	12.3
	101-200	55	18.2	18.2	30.5
	201-300	55	18.2	18.2	48.7
	301-400	48	15.9	15.9	64.6
	401-500	26	8.6	8.6	73.2
	More than 500	81	26.8	26.8	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

The results in Table 6.3 indicated the following: Eighty one (26.8%) of the 302 respondents indicated that their Social Media accounts had "more than 500 followers", while 110 respondents (36.4%) collectively had "101-200" and "201-300" followers, accounting for 55 respondents each or 18.2% each respectively. Forty eight respondents indicated that they have "301-400 followers", 37 (12.3%) indicated followers ranging between "less than 100" while the remainder of the 26 respondents (8.6%) had "401-500" followers on their Social Media accounts.

Table 6.4 illustrates the respondents Social Media Frequency.

Table 6.4: Samples Social Media Frequency

SOCIAL MEDIA FREQUENCY					
		Frequency	**Per cent**	**Valid Per cent**	**Cumulative Per cent**
Valid	**Less than 10 minutes**	30	9.9	9.9	9.9
	10 to 30 minutes	75	24.8	24.8	34.8
	More than 30 minutes, up to 1 hour	75	24.8	24.8	59.6
	More than 1 hour, up to 2 hours	61	20.2	20.2	79.8
	More than 2 hours	61	20.2	20.2	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

Derived from the results in Table 6.4, the observations indicated that majority of the surveyed respondents spend between “10 to 30 minutes” and “more than 30 minutes, up to 1 hour” collectively with 75 respondents (24.8%) each. Respondents who spend “more than 1 hour, up to 2 hours” and “more than 2 hours” equated to 61 respondents 20.2% of the sample respectively. Additionally, the minority 30 respondents (9.9%) indicating that they spend “less than 10 minutes” on Social Media.

Table 6.5 presents the results of the samples who have been previously exposure to idealised images.

Table 6.5: Samples who have been Exposed to Idealised Images

Exposed to Idealised Images					
		Frequency	**Per cent**	**Valid Per cent**	**Cumulative Per cent**
Valid	**Yes**	265	87.7	87.7	87.7
	No	37	12.3	12.3	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

From the results presented on Table 6.5, the final descriptive statistic is illustrative of the sample’s Exposure to Idealised Images. The descriptive statistics deduced that 265 respondents or 87.7% of the respondents indicated that they have been exposed to idealised images while a minority of 37 respondents or rather 12.3% have not been exposed.

6.4.2 Questionnaire Results

The current dissertation employed five (5) measurement instruments, comprising 7-point Likert scales. Three hundred and two completed questionnaires were collected for the purpose of the present dissertation.

Upon identification of the measurement instruments, the result obtained from the items are as follows:

a) Exposure to Idealised Images (EX)

The first measurement variable labelled Exposure to Idealised Images consisted of 9 measurement items, which ranged from Exposure to idealised images 1 to Exposure to idealised images 9. The measurement construct measured the extent to which respondents had been exposed to idealised images as well as the extent to which they had interacted with

idealised images portrayed on social media platforms. It is evident that a vast majority of the respondents had previously been exposed to idealised images, however, respondents further indicated their neutrality towards neither following nor commenting on images of this nature. The results are discussed below:

Table 6.6. Respondents level of agreement toward the Exposure to Idealised Images measurement scale

Strongly Agree	
EX1	126 (41.7%)
Neither Disagree/Agree	
EX2	82 (27.2%)
EX3	70 (23.2%)
EX4	77 (25.5%)
Somewhat Agree	
EX5	62 (20.25%)
EX6	52 (17.9%)
Strongly Disagree	
EX7	79 (26.2%)
EX8	112 (37.1%)
EX9	84 (27.6%)

b) Self-Esteem (SE)

The second measurement scale measure the concept of self-esteem with 10 measurement items ranging from Self-Esteem 1 to Self-Esteem 10. The results have been interpreted in Table 6.7 below.

Table 6.7. Respondents level of agreement toward the Self-Esteem measurement scale

Agree	
SE1	96 (31.8%)
SE3	100 (33.1%)
SE4	117 (38.7%)
SE9	91 (30.1%)
Strongly Agree	
SE6	99 (32.8%)
Neither Agree/Disagree	
SE7	56 (18.6%)
Strongly Disagree	
SE2	65 (21.5%)
SE5	68 (22.5%)
SE8	114 (37.7%)
SE10	101 (33.4%)

c) Social comparison (S)

Social comparison is identified as the third measurement variable, measured with 9 items which ranged from Social comparison 1 to Social comparison 9. The social comparison measurement scale measures the extent to which respondents socially compare themselves to the idealised images they are exposed to. The measurement items evaluated the degree to which respondents compared themselves, their families and their lives relative to others. The results for the measurement scale:

A large majority of respondents indicated an "Agreement" to comparing themselves to others and social success.

Table 6.8. Respondent's level of agreement toward the Social Comparison measurement scale

Agree	
S1	73 (24.2%)
S2	77 (22.5%)
S6	84 (27.8%)
S7	96 (31.8%)
Strongly Agree	
S3	57 (18.9%)
S5	61 (20.2%)
Disagree	
S4	60 (19.9%)
Neither Disagree/Agree	
S8	75 (24.8%)
S9	59 (19.5%)

d) Self-Congruency (SC)

The fourth variable referred to as Self-Congruency consisted of 6 measurement items ranging from Self-congruency 1 to Self-congruency 6. Self-congruency measured respondent's similarities (congruities) or disparities (incongruence's) relative to the portrayal of idealised images. The results of the measurement items indicated that majority of the respondents "Neither disagree/agreed" to all six (6) statements, as referenced below.

Table 6.9. Respondent's level of agreement toward the Social Comparison measurement scale

Neither Disagree/Agree	
SC1	92 (30.5%)
SC2	68 (22.5%)
SC3	79 (26.2%)
SC4	84 (27.8%)
SC5	84 (27.8%)
SC6	88 (29.1%)

e) Aspiration to the Ideal Self (AS)

Finally, the fifth measurement identified as Aspiration to the Ideal Self was measured using 10 items which were labelled Aspiration 1 to Aspiration 10. This measurement construct measured whether respondents sought to aspire to the ideals of idealised images portrayed on social media platforms. The results obtained from the measurement items ranged from "Neither agree/agree" and "Somewhat agreed to aspiring to the portrayal of idealised images." The results are discussed in the table below:

Table 6.10. Respondent's level of agreement to the Social Comparison measurement scale

Neither Agreed/Disagreed	
AS1	61 (20.2%)
AS3	79 (26.2%)
AS4	73 (24.2%)
AS8	61 (20.2%
AS10	59 (19.5%)
Somewhat Agree	
AS2	53 (17.5%)
AS5	66 (21.9%)
AS6	65 (21.5%)
Disagree	
AS7	66 (21.9%)
Agree	
AS9	59 (19.5%)

6.5 RELIABILITY TESTS

According to Dusick (2011), reliability is defined as the degree to which an assessment ensures that the measured instruments are consistently reflected in each measured variable. Simply put, reliability seeks to examine the quality of measurement items (Williams, 2006). The assessment of the study's reliability of measurement instruments will be determined through the use of the following tests: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

6.5.1 Cronbach's Alpha

Shuttleworth (2009) postulated that the complexities associated with Cronbach's Alpha are not limited to measuring reliability, but extended to comparing various pairs of questions. Cronbach's Alpha and Coefficient Alpha are interchangeably used, where Malhotra (2007) defined the test as an average of all possible split-half coefficients that sequentially resulted through the separation of scale items.

Cronbach's Alpha or Coefficient Alpha is a traditionally used method of testing the internal consistency of a study's measurement instruments (Chuchu, 2015). The measurement of internal consistency can be determined by the researcher's ability to correlate the scales reliability, which seeks to examine whether an inter-correlation exists between specified measurement items (Field, 2009). Although Tavakol & Dennick (2011) stated that a high Coefficient Alpha does not constitute a relatively higher extent of internal consistency, Chinomona (2011) countered the statement by arguing that an increased degree of Coefficient Alpha is indicative of a stronger reliability of a measurement scale(s). Coefficient Alpha's are expressed as numbers that range from 0 to 1, and in order for measurement items to be deemed acceptable, scale items are required to adhere to a threshold. Thresholds may vary from author to author, as Dunn et al., (1994) suggested values that are >0.3, while Field (2009) proposed a minimum value of 0.7 and Tavakol & Dennick (2011) suggested thresholds ranging between 0.7 and 0.95.

Relative to the study, the measurement items internal consistency was examined through the employment of Cronbach's Alpha. The Coefficient Alpha's of each construct are identified in Table 6.6, where the "α" values were as follows: EX: 0.746, SE: 0.847, S: 0.827, SC: 0.880 and AS: 0.721; therefore surpassing all three thresholds mentioned by Dunn et al., (1994), Field (2009) and Tavakol & Dennick (2011).

6.5.2 Composite Reliability

Composite Reliability can be alternately used in opposition to Cronbach's Alpha due to its potential underestimation of reflecting the true reliability of the measurement constructs (Peterson & Kim, 2013). Although Composite Reliability (CR) can be used as an alternative to Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability does not necessitate the reliability of all indicators as equal (Hair & Ringle, 2011). Previous literature from Fornell (1992) suggested a threshold of 0.6, while Hair et al., (2006) proposed a cut-off point of 0.7.

As represented in Table 6.11, the Composite Reliability (CR) values pertinent to this study are identified as ranging between 0.82 and 0.95. The values derived can therefore be deemed as satisfactory in accordance to the proposed thresholds suggested by Hair et al., (2006).

Table 6.11 below presents the accuracy analysis statistics.

Table 6.11: Accuracy Analysis Statistics (Source: Author, 2017)

Research Construct		Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. Value	AVE Value	Highest Shared Variance	Factor Loading
		Mean Value		Standard Deviation		Item-total	a value				
EX	EX3	3.96	3.60	1.671	1.85	0.363	0.725	0.820	0.28	-0.126	0.354
	EX4	3.89		1.741		0.190					0.240
	EX5	3.83		1.857		0.580					0.859
	EX6	3.97		1.919		0.500					0.830
	EX7	3.44		1.995		0.455					0.475
	EX8	2.82		1.816		0.496					0.267
	EX9	3.28		1.921		0.472					0.256
SE	SE1	5.44	5.572	1.508	1.392	0.687	0.847	0.950	0.46	0.201	0,695
	SE3	5.78		1.222		0.609					0,569
	SE4	5.53		1.262		0.637					0,564
	SE6	5.66		1.414		0.676					0,728
	SE9	5.45		1.560		0.683					0,815
S	S1	4.74	3.434	1.912	1.856	0.659	0.827	0.930	0.37	0.214	0,745
	S2	4.54		1.877		0.655					0,77
	S3	4.11		1.903		0.542					0,547
	S5	3.97		1.940		0.640					0,637
	S6	4.70		1.761		0.582					0,566
	S7	5.10		1.725		0.364					0,303
	S9	3,88		1.880		0,556					0,575
SC	SC1	3,690	3.558	1,615	1.620	0,563	0.880	0.880	0.56	0.329	0,588
	SC2	3,720		1,709		0,681					0,703
	SC3	3,580		1,522		0,707					0,720
	SC4	3,680		1,616		0,754					0,827
	SC5	3,270		1,620		0,705					0,799
	SC6	3,410		1,639		0,729					0,812
AS	AS1	4,37	4,363	1,884	1,874	0,588	0.721	0.820	0.48	0.268	0.737
	AS2	4,06		1,987		0,625					0.814
	AS5	4,66		1,752		0,426					0.473

- Score: 1- Strongly Disagree; 4- Neither Disagree/Agree; 7- Strongly Agree.
- Score: 1- Strongly Disagree; 4- Neither Disagree/Agree; 7- Strongly Agree.
- Score: 1- Strongly Disagree; 4- Neither Disagree/Agree; 7- Strongly Agree.
- Score: 1- Strongly Disagree; 4- Neither Disagree/Agree; 7- Strongly Agree.
- Score: 1- Strongly Disagree; 4- Neither Disagree/Agree; 7- Strongly Agree.

CR: Composite Reliability

AVE: Average Variance Extracted

S.V: Shared Variance

[1]Significance level P<0.05; [2] Significance level P<0.01; [3] Significance level P< 0.001

Measurement Model Fits: χ^2**/df**: 1.099; **GFI:** 0.893; **CFI:** 0.983; **TLI:** 0.979; **IFI:** 0.984, **RFI:** 0.809; **NFI:** 0.848; **RMSEA:** 0.018.

6.5.3 Average Variance Extracted

According to Jalili (2008), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is an alternative commonly used to examine the reflective reliability measures, and is defined as the average square loading of individual items on a construct. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values that are significantly greater than 0.40 are suggestive of an adequate representation of latent constructs by indicators (Chuchu, 2015). Comprehensively, the majority of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values pertinent to this dissertation fall above the 0.40 threshold; illustrating indicators that are representative of their latent constructs.

The values extracted from the study ranged from 0.280 to 0.561, despite the identification of marginal deficits in the first and third latent constructs, the vast majority of the extracted values surpassed the recommended threshold suggested by Chuchu (2015). Based on the observations illustrated in Table 6.11, the AVE value of Self-Esteem is 0.46 surpasses the square of the shared variance of Self-Esteem (SE) and Social Comparison (S) which is [$(0.521)^2 = 0.271$]. This results is indicative of the presence of Discriminant Validity.

Table 6.12 presents the composite reliability calculations.

Table 6.12: A Diagrammatic Illustration of Composite Reliability Calculations

				Composite reliability (CR)			
					summation of error terms		**CRη=(Σλyi)2/[(Σλyi)2+(Σεi)]**
				$(\sum\lambda Yi)^2$	έi	∑έi	CR
EX3	<---	EX	0.354	10.77	0.199	2.41	0.82
EX4	<---	EX	0.240		0.236		
EX5	<---	EX	0.859		0.180		
EX6	<---	EX	0.830		0.187		
EX7	<---	EX	0.475		0.254		
EX8	<---	EX	0.267		0.253		
EX9	<---	EX	0.256		0.283		
SE1	<---	SE	0,695	11.36	0.123	0.577	0.95
SE3	<---	SE	0,569		0.093		
SE4	<---	SE	0,564		0.099		
SE6	<---	SE	0,728		0.124		
SE9	<---	SE	0,815		0.247		
S1	<---	S	0,745	14.75	0.155	1.31	0.93
S2	<---	S	0,77		0.154		
S3	<---	S	0,547		0.220		
S5	<---	S	0,637		0.200		
S6	<---	S	0,566		0.194		
S7	<---	S	0,303		0.206		
S9	<---	S	0,575		0.203		
SC1	<---	SC	0,588	19.45	0.190	0.48	0.98
SC2	<---	SC	0,703		0.156		
SC3	<---	SC	0,720		0.121		
SC4	<---	SC	0,827		0.093		
SC5	<---	SC	0,799		0.088		
SC6	<---	SC	0,812		0.091		
AS1	<---	AS	0.737	4.097	0.195	0.421	0.82
AS2	<---	AS	0.814		0.221		
AS5	<---	AS	0.473		0.214		

The reliability of an analysis can only be termed as 'reliable' if the prerequisite of the Composite Reliability exceeds the 0.7 threshold (Yang & Lai, 2010). Table 6.12 above assessed the internal reliability of each construct through the employment of the Composite Reliability (CR) index test.

The formula below represents the calculations used in determining the Composite Reliability of each construct.

(CR): CRη= (Σλyi) ^{2}/ [(Σλyi) ^{2}+ (Σεi)]

Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/ {(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (summation of error variances)}.

a) Exposure to Idealised Images

$(\Sigma\lambda yi)^2 = (0.354 + 0.240 + 0.859 + 0.830 + 0.475 + 0.267 + 0.256)^2$

$= 10.77$

$\Sigma\varepsilon i = (1-0.354)^2 + (1-0.240)^2 + (1-0.859)^2 + (1-0.830)^2 + (1-0.475)^2 + (1-0.267)^2 + (1-0.256)^2$

$= 2.41$

$CR_n = 10.77/ (10.77 + 2.41)$

$= 0.82$

b) Self-Esteem

$(\Sigma\lambda yi)^2 = (0.695 + 0.569 + 0.564 + 0.728 + 815)^2$

$= 11.36$

$\Sigma\varepsilon i = (1-0.695)^2 + (1-0.569)^2 + (1-0.564)^2 + (1-0.728)^2 + (1-0.815)^2$

$= 0.577$

$CR_n = 11.36/ (11.36 + 0.577)$

$= 0.95$

c) Social Comparison

$(\Sigma\lambda yi)^2 = (0.745 + 0.770 + 0.547 + 0.637 + 0.566 + 0.303 + 575)^2$

$= 17.16$

$\Sigma\varepsilon i = (1-0.745)^2 + (1-0.770)^2 + (1-0.547)^2 + (1-0.637)^2 + (1-0.566)^2 + (1-0.303)^2 + (1-0.575)^2$

$= 1.31$

$CR_n = 17.16/ (17.16 + 1.31)$

$= 0.93$

d) Self-Congruity

$(\Sigma\lambda yi)^2 = (0.658 + 0.601 + 0.644 + 0.824 + 0.843 + 0.840)^2$

$= 19.45$

$\Sigma\varepsilon i = (1-0.588)^2 + (1-0.703)^2 + (1-0.720)^2 + (1-0.827)^2 + (1-0.799)^2 + (1-0.812)^2$

$= 0.48$

$CR_n = 19.45/ (19.45 + 0.48)$

$= 0.98$

e) Aspiration to the Ideal Self

$(\Sigma\lambda yi)^2 = (0.737 + 0.814 + 0.473)^2$

$= 4.89$

$\Sigma\varepsilon i = (1-0.764)^2 + (1-0.802)^2 + (1-0.494)^2$

$= 1.042$

$CR_n = 4.89/ (4.89 + 1.042)$

$= 0.82$

Table 6.13 represents the average variance extracted (AVE) calculations

Table 6.13: A Diagrammatic Illustration Representing the Average Value Extracted Calculations

			Estimate	λyi²	∑λyi²	ε̇i	∑ε̇i	∑λyi² / (∑λyi² + ∑ε̇i)
EX	<---	EX3	0.354	0.126	1.97	0.199	5.03	0.28
	<---	EX4	0.240	0.058		0.236		
	<---	EX5	0.859	0.739		0.180		
	<---	EX6	0.830	0.690		0.187		
	<---	EX7	0.475	0.225		0.254		
	<---	EX8	0.267	0.071		0.253		
	<---	EX9	0.256	0.066		0.283		
SE	<---	SE1	0,695	0.482	2.32	0.123	2.681	0.46
	<---	SE3	0,569	0.323		0.093		
	<---	SE4	0,564	0.318		0.099		
	<---	SE6	0,728	0.532		0.124		
	<---	SE9	0,815	0.665		0.247		
S	<---	S1	0,745	0.674	2.59	0.155	4.404	0.37
	<---	S2	0,77	0.594		0.154		
	<---	S3	0,547	0.300		0.220		
	<---	S5	0,637	0.406		0.200		
	<---	S6	0,566	0.320		0.194		
	<---	S7	0,303	0.092		0.206		
	<---	S9	0,575	0.337		0.203		
SC	<---	SC1	0,588	0.248	3.34	0.190	2.66	0.56
	<---	SC2	0,703	0.361		0.156		
	<---	SC3	0,720	0.414		0.121		
	<---	SC4	0,827	0.680		0.093		
	<---	SC5	0,799	0.711		0.088		
	<---	SC6	0,812	0.706		0.091		
AS	<---	AS1	0.737	0.548	1.43	0.195	1.57	0.48
	<---	AS2	0.814	0.658		0.221		
	<---	AS5	0.473	0.230		0.214		

Table 6.13 is illustrative of the Average Variance Estimates, which exhibit comprehensive variance values in indicators accounted for by latent constructs. Values above 0.5 deduced that the identified latent variable(s) explicated more than half of the indicator variance and well represented latent variables (Hair et al., 2011; Fraering & Minor, 2006).

Pertinent to this study, the AVE values obtained in Table 6.12 ranged between 0.319 and 0.561 therefore suggesting a moderately acceptable convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted values obtained for each measurement construct identified in Table 6.12 were determined using the following Average Variance Extracted (AVE) formula:

Average Variance Extracted:

(AVE) $V_{\eta} = \Sigma\lambda yi2/ (\Sigma\lambda yi2+\Sigma\varepsilon i)$

> **AVE**= {(summation of the squared of factor loadings) / {(summation of the squared of factor loadings) + (summation of error variances)}

a) Exposure to Idealised Images

$\Sigma\lambda yi^{2} = (0.354^2 + 0.240^2 + 0.859^2 + 0.830^2 + 0.475^2 + 0.267^2 + 0.256^2)$

$= 1.97$

$\sum\dot{\varepsilon}i = (1- 0.354^2) + (1-0.240^2) + (1-0.859^2) + (1-0.830^2) + (1-0.475^2) + (1-0.267^2) + (1-0.256^2)$

$= 5.03$

$V\eta = 1.913/ (1.913+4.087)$

$= 0.28$

b) Self-Esteem

$\Sigma\lambda yi^{2} = (0.695^2 + 0.569^2 + 0.564^2 + 0.728^2 + 0.815^2)$

$= 2.32$

$\sum\dot{\varepsilon}i = (1- 0.695^2) + (1- 0.569^2) + (1- 0.564^2) + (1- 0.728^2) + (1-0.815^2)$

$= 2.681$

$V\eta = 2.32/ (2.32+2.681)$

$= 0.46$

c) Social Comparison

$\Sigma\lambda yi^2 = (0.745^2 + 0.770^2 + 0.547^2 + 0.637^2 + 0.566^2 + 0.303^2 + 0.575^2)$

$= 2.59$

$\sum\dot{\varepsilon}i = (1- 0.745^2) + (1- 0.770^2) + (1-0.547^2) + (1- 0.637^2) + (1-0.566^2) + (1-0.303^2) + (1- 0.575^2)$

$= 4.404$

$V\eta = 2.59/ (2.59+4.404)$

$= 0.37$

d) Self-Congruity

$\Sigma\lambda yi^2 = (0.588^2 + 0.703^2 + 0.720^2 + 0.827^2 + 0.799^2 + 0.812^2)$

$= 3.34$

$\sum\dot{\varepsilon}i = (1- 0.588^2) + (1- 0.703^2) + (1- 0.720^2) + (1- 0.827^2) + (1- 0.799^2) + (1- 0.812^2)$

$= 2.66$

$V\eta = 3.34/ (3.34 +2.66)$

$= 0.561$

e) Aspiration to the Ideal Self

$\Sigma\lambda yi^2 = (0.737^2 + 0.814^2 + 0.473^2)$

$= 1.43$

$\sum\dot{\varepsilon}i = (1- 0.737^2) + (1- 0.814^2) + (1- 0.473^2)$

$= 1.57$

$V\eta = 1.43/ (1.43+1.57)$

$= 0.48$

6.6 VALIDITY TESTS

Validity was tested using convergent validity, discriminant validity and an inter-construct correlation matrix. This section discusses the results of the validity measures for the purpose of the present dissertation.

6.6.1 Convergent Validity

According to Hair et al., (2011), the evaluation of convergent validity is examined through the corroboration of isolated item loadings of each latent variable construct found within the 0.5 threshold. Indicative in Table 6.11, the factor loadings were well above the 0.5 threshold as the loadings ranged from 0.569 to 0.827. Despite the identification of factor loadings falling below 0.5, the majority of the items outweighed the prevalence of the minority loadings. The convergent validity of each of the individual items can therefore be deduced as acceptable based on the notion that 50% of each item variance was distributed amongst its respective constructs. Findings observed from the results therefore supported the convergent validity of all the measurement items.

6.6.2 Discriminant Validity

According to Farrel & Rudd (2009), discriminant validity assessed the discrimination between latent variables. The examination of this validity test is conducted on the basis of the comparison of the shared variance (squared correlation) between each construct pair versus the average variances of the two constructs (Bove, 2009; Hassan et al., 2007 Walsh & Beatty, 2009 as cited by Rudd, 2009).

6.6.2.1 Correlation Matrix

Discriminant Validity was tested through an alternative approach referred to as a correlation matrix. This approach evaluates the correlations among latent variables with values below 1. The correlations can be observed in Table 6.12 where the inter-correlation values of the paired latent variables fall below the parameters. The inter-construct values identified in the matrix are supported by Ping (2005) who posits that correlations between latent constructs and other measures should fall below the 0.7 parameter.

The subsequent test necessary for determining the presence of discriminant validity among constructs employed the use of an Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix.

6.6.2.2 Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix

An inter-construct correlation matrix measures existing correlations found among latent variables (reference).

Table 6.9 present the results of the correlations between the constructs.

Table 6.14: A Diagrammatic Representation of the Correlations between Constructs

Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix					
	EX	SE	S	SC	AS
EX	1				
SE	-.126*	1			
S	.148**	-.201**	1		
SC	.329**	-.123*	.214**	1	
AS	.133*	-.129*	.226**	.268**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As evident from the results in Table 6.14, the parameters represented values ranging between -1 (negative correlation) and/or +1 (positive correlation). According to Field (2009), the strength and relative direction of a correlation is annotated by a value which falls closer to -1 and/or +1, while a value of 0 denotes an absence of a correlation. Individual construct validity values which are below 0.7 are suggestive confirmations of discriminant validity (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Found within the confinements of -1 and +1, values between 0.1 and 0.29 are deemed weak, while thresholds between 0.3 to 0.49 and 0.5 to 0.1 are respectively deemed moderate and substantial (Field, 2009).

The inter-construct results illustrated in Table 6.14 not only represented the existential relationships between measurement constructs but further deduced the validity of the constructs as values ranging between 0.126 and 0.329 were identified. In conjunction to the suggested parameters, the values obtained from Table 6.14 are therefore suggestive of a moderate validity.

6.6.2.3 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Shared Value (SV)

Studies as early as Fornell & Larcker (1981) suggested that Discriminant Validity can be used as an additional confirmatory measure to examining if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeds the highest shared value (SV). The Discriminant Validity test can only be supported when the variance extracted estimates exceed the square correlation of estimates (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 6.14 deduced the presence of Discriminant Validity within the constructs as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are greater than the shared values (SV) alongside the individual measurement constructs (Nusair & Hua, 2010). The empirical evidence was demonstrated by the AVE value represented in Table 6.6 of Self-Congruity which is 0.561, is evidently greater than the shared variance of Self-Congruity and Social Comparison [(0.214^2)] = 0.046.

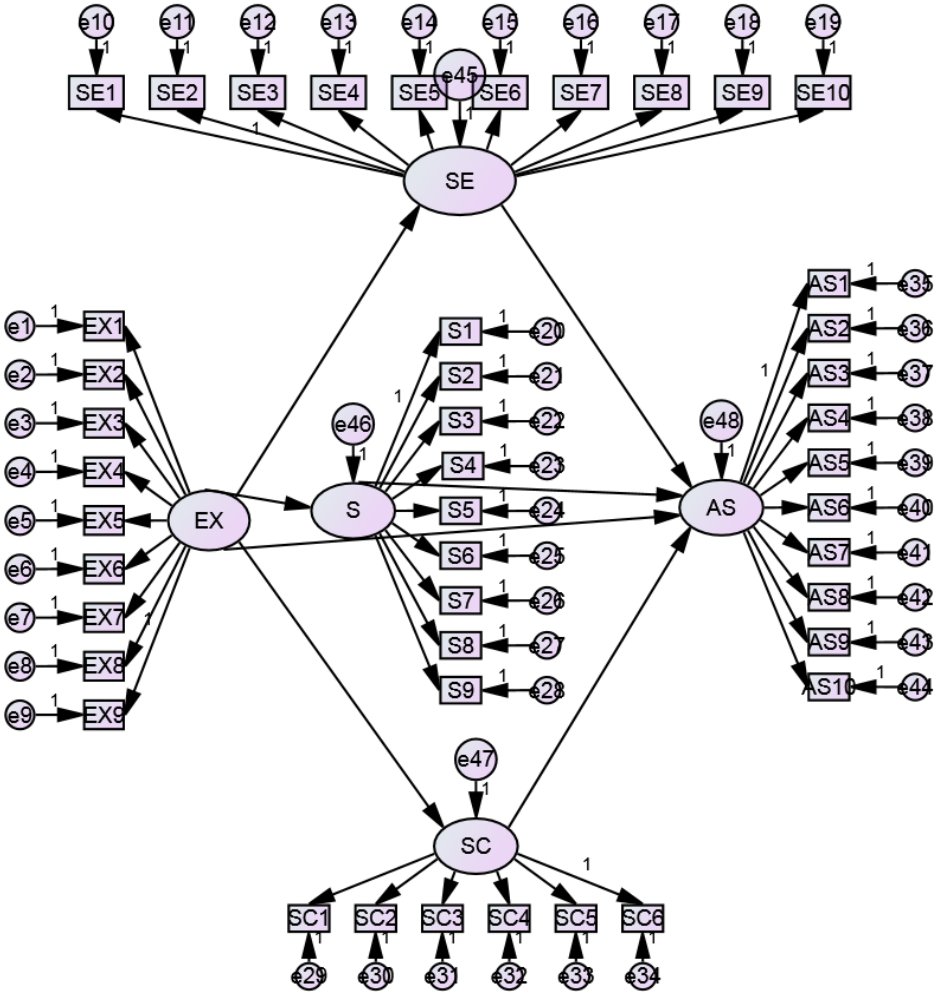
This component of the analysis section has comprehensively discussed the tests necessary in determining the prevalence of Discriminant Validity, through a Correlation matrix, Inter-construct correlation Matrix, Average Shared Variance (AVE) and Shared Variance (SV) tests.

The subsequent section of Chapter six (6) comprehensively discusses the model fit results and the hypothetical relationships, through the employment of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling respectively.

6.7 CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (CFA) MODELS

Figure 6.3 illustrates the confirmatory factor analysis model pertinent to the dissertation.

Figure 6.3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Model



NOTE:

- **EX:** Exposure
- **SE:** Self-Esteem
- **S:** Social Comparison
- **SC:** Self-Congruity
- **AS:** Aspiration

Upon formulation of the above model, the following tests were run:

Chi-square (χ^2/df) = 1.099; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.893; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.983; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.979; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.984; Relative Fit Index (RFI) = 0.809; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.848; Random Measure of Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.018

The model fit results are represented in Table 6.10.

Table 6.15: Model Fit Results

Model Fit Criteria	**Chi-square (χ^2/df)**	**GFI**	**CFI**	**TLI**	**IFI**	**RFI**	**NFI**	**RMSEA**
Indicator Value	1.099	0.893	0.983	0.979	0.984	0.809	0.848	0.018

6.8 CONCEPTUAL MODEL ASSESSMENTS

Chuchu (2015) cited Anderson & Gerbing (1998) as suggesting a two-step procedure forming an integral component in the assessment of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and hypotheses testing. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model assessed in this study examined the reliability and validity of scales (e.g. Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity) of multi-item research constructs through the employment of a software referred to as AMOSS 24. The model fit indices illustrated in Table 6.15 adhere to recommended thresholds, and are therefore representative of a good model fit.

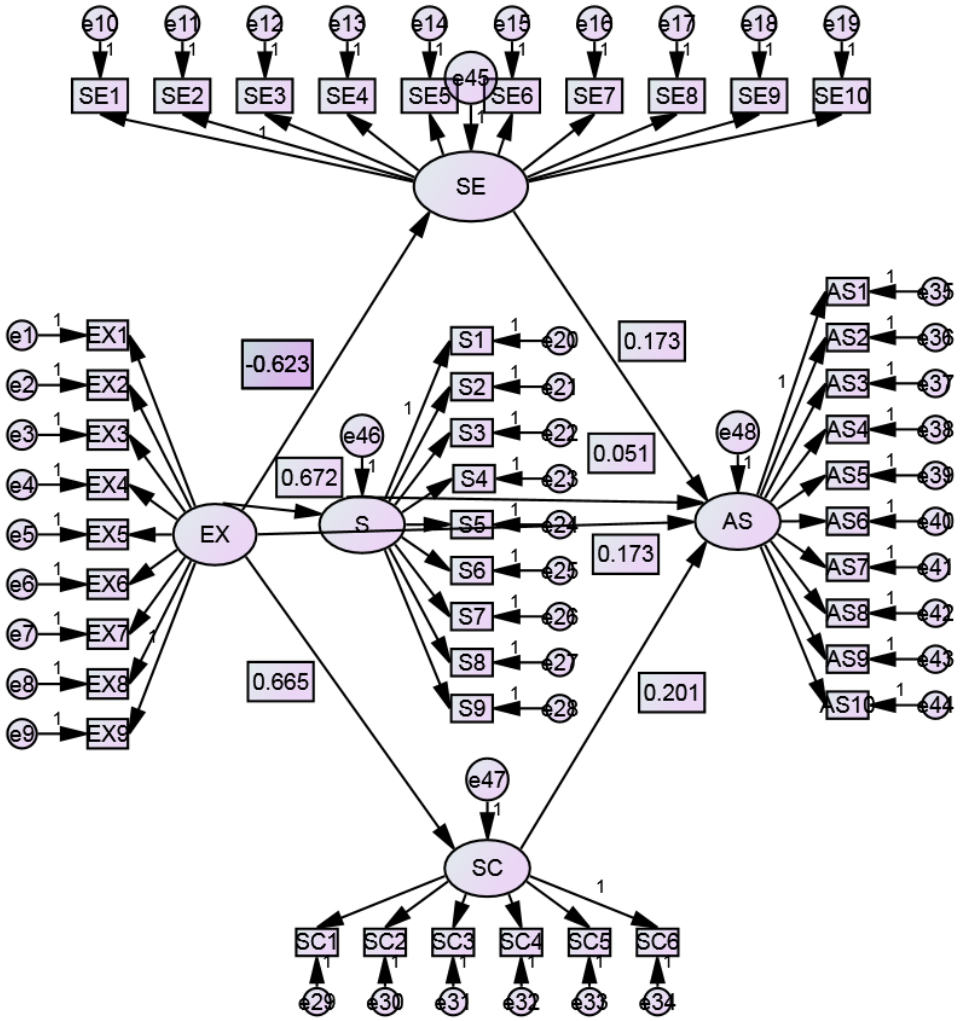
A general consensus has not been met regarding an acceptable Chi-square (χ^2/df) ratio, however, Wheaton et al., (1977) recommends a cut-off point of as high as 5.0, while Tabachnick & Fidell, (2007) suggested a cut-off point of 2.0. The Goodness of Fit (GFI) has traditionally been recommended to fall below 0.90, Normative Fit Indices greater than 0.90 are representative of a good fit while other authors recommend a threshold as low as 0.08, Comparative Fit Index that is ≥ 0.95 is indicative of a good fit (Steiger, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007); Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Over the past few years, RMSEA has been recognised as an informative fit index, where RMSEA's ranging from 0.05 to 0.10 indicate fair fits while ranges above 0.10 are indicative

of poor fits. More recently, authors have suggested that values ranging between 0.08 and 0.10 are indicative of a mediocre fit while values less than 0.08 were indicative of a good fit (McQuitty, 2004; MacCullum, 1996).

Pertinent to the aforementioned, model fit indices relevant to this study are therefore indicative of an acceptable fit of the data's measurement model, as several fit indices were either slightly below or above their recommended thresholds. The results obtained from the measurement model were as follows: Chi-square (χ^2/df) of 1.099, while GFI, CFI, TLI, IFI, RFI, NFI and RMSEA were 0.893, 0.983, 0.979, 0.984, 0.809, 0.848 and 0.018 respectively. Upon the conclusion of an acceptable CFA measurement model fit, the subsequent step to be undertaken in this section will pertain to hypotheses testing which will be facilitated through the employment of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS 24.

Figure 6.4: Structural Equation Model



NOTE:

- **EX:** Exposure to idealised images
- **SE:** Self-Esteem
- **S:** Social Comparison
- **SC:** Self-Congruity
- **AS:** Aspiration to the ideal self
- **e:** measurement error

Table 6.16 presents the results of the structural equation model, followed by a discussion thereof.

Table 6.16: Structural Equation Model Results

Hypothesis				Estimate	P-value	Outcome
EX	<---	SE	***H1***	-0.623	0.003	Supported and significant
EX	<---	S	***H2***	0.672	0.008	Supported and significant
EX	<---	SC	***H3***	0.665	0.004	Supported and significant
EX	<---	AS	***H4***	0.173	0.389	Supported but not significant
SE	<---	AS	***H5***	-0.116	0.251	Supported but not significant
S	<---	AS	***H6***	0.051	0.492	Supported but not significant
SC	<---	AS	***H7***	0.201	0.004	Supported and significant

Structural Model Fits: (χ^2/df) = 1.099; GFI = 0.893; CFI = 0.983; TLI = 0.979; IFI = 0.984; RFI = 0.809; NFI = 0.848; RMSEA = 0.018

[a] significance level p< 0.05; [b] significance level p< 0.01; [c] significance level p< 0.001.

6.9 DISCUSSION OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

As evident from the results in Table 6.11, the following was found in terms of the proposed hypotheses:

6.9.1 Exposure to Idealised Images negatively influences Self-Esteem (H1)

The first hypothesis posited that a millennial's exposure to idealised images negatively influences on a millennial's level self-esteem. The hypothesis was supported and further posited a significant p-value of 0.003 at significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

The outcome indicated that the exposure to idealised images had an influence on a millennial's self-esteem. The evidence therefore bears parities to the empirical evidence provided by Gonzales and Hancock (2011), who proposed that an individual's exposure to their own Facebook profile will negatively affect their degree of self-esteem. Derene & Bresnin (2006) further articulated that unattainable standards portrayed on social media often result in low self-esteems, the empirical results obtained from this dissertation hold parities to those posited by the mentioned authors. Indicative of the possible outcomes exposure to idealised images can have on one's self esteem, literature from Resselo (2009) highlights that the exposure to idealised images can either have a detrimental or positive effect on an individual's self-esteem. However, individuals positing low self-esteem and negativity in their moods (as seen as millennials referenced in this dissertation) are more likely to display improvements in their perception of self post-exposure of downward comparisons.

6.9.2 Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Social Comparison (H2)

The second hypothesis suggests that an individual's exposure to idealised images will have a positive effect on the manner in which they socially compare themselves among other millennials. The results suggest a supported relationship in addition to a significant p-value of 0.008 at a significance level of 0.01.

The outcome therefore suggests that the relationship is both supported, and exposure to idealised images has a significant impact on the social comparisons drawn. Relative to the results drawn from the hypothesis results obtained, authors such as Tiggerman et al., (2009) strongly suggested that the conceptualisation of appearance driven comparisons result in the culmination of negative outcomes. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of fantasies or ideals leads to the culmination of positive outcomes. The literature therefore suggests that an individual's motives are responsible in determining the outcome of comparisons.

Literature from numerous sources further attested the following outcomes, whereby Adomaitis & Johnson (2008) highlighted the prevalence of individuals who drew either comparisons (against models) or worked to emulate them upon the exposure of idealised images. Sun & Guo (2014) further contributed to the literature by postulating that studies have deduced that the exposure to concepts portrayed on Social Networking Sites (i.e. thin ideal) have elicited social comparisons, resulting in formation of negative effects.

6.9.3 Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Self-Congruity (H3)

The third hypothesis suggests that an individual's exposure to idealised images has a positive effect on their level of self-congruity. The results obtained deduce a supported and significant relationship, positing a p-value of 0.004 at significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

This empirical relationship is therefore advocated by Nichols & Schumann (2012) who postulated that the constant exposure idealised images portrayed on social media leads to the development of congruent anchoring points. Therefore sharing sentiments in the outcomes that the exposure to idealised images has a positive relationship with a millennial's parities to their concept of 'self'. Authors such as Lee (2015) further support the hypothesis and result by deducing how individuals exhibiting significant levels of self-congruency relative to celebrity endorsers possess a higher likelihood of identifying congruities with the advertisement, therefore resulting in positive attitudes towards a brand or an advertisement.

6.9.4 Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Aspirations to the ideal self (H4)

Hypothesis four suggests that the exposure to idealised images will positively affect the aspirations a millennial has to their ideal self. Results from hypothesis tests deduce that the relationship is supported but has no significance with a posited p-value of 0.389 at significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

This hypothesis is therefore incongruent to Nichols and Schumann's (2012) empirical evidence which postulated that "for symbolic products, consumers should have stronger preferences (higher anchoring points) for aspirational self-contrasting models, as opposed to the aspirational self-similar model. Literature relative to the proposed relationship (exposure of idealised images and their effects on one's aspirations) further contradicts the results obtained by Dittmar (2008) who outlined that materialistically inclined women are more susceptible to

the negative effects associated with the media's thin ideals. Finally, the suggested hypotheses and results of the current dissertation hold disparities in the empirical evidence from Brown (2014) who clearly highlighted his stance that the exposure to idealised images prompted self-assimilation effects, therefore acting as enablers in the formulation of congruities between their personal ideals. The table 6.17 below outline the possible reasons why the results posited an insignificant outcome.

Table 6.17. A summary detailing the hypothesis, findings and possible reasons of the outcome for H4

Hypothesis	**H4:** Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Aspirations to the ideal self.
Findings	Supported but not significant
Possible reasons for non-support relative to prior findings	The empirical findings attained hold differing stances to the aforementioned authors' evidence. This may be due to South African millennials' attributions to their lack of resonance or anchoring points to models who are incongruent to their defined ideals.

6.9.5 Self-Esteem positively influences Aspiration to the ideal self (H5)

The fifth hypothesis suggested that a millennial's aspirations to their ideal self is positively influenced by their self-esteem. The results deduced that the relationship is supported but holds no significance, positing a p-value of 0.251 at significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

The outcome therefore suggests that an individual's level of self-esteem (whether low or high) does not necessitate the desire to aspire to one's ideal self. The formulized hypothesis and obtained results of this relationship can therefore support studies relating to intrinsic motivations and/or aspirations, authors such as Steven, Clifford and Swinyard (2014). Empirical evidence from the authors suggested that intrinsically motivated individuals exhibit increased levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with their lives. This evidence therefore suggests a lack in desire to aspire to their ideals in the presence of one's satisfaction of their actual self. The concept of self-esteem is commonly known to hold associations with intrinsic

aspirations, however, the relationship is therefore contradictory to empirical evidence provided by Truong et al. (2010) who deduced that self-esteem will load as an intrinsic aspiration.

Table 6.18. A summary detailing the hypothesis, findings and possible reasons of the outcome for H5

Hypothesis	**H5:** Self-Esteem positively influences Aspirations to the ideal self
Findings	Supported but not significant
Possible reasons for non-support relative to prior findings	Lower levels of self-esteem often encourage the aspiration to the ideals. This can therefore be suggestive of South African millennials positing higher levels of self-esteem, which negates the reason to not conform to societal norms of aspiring to their ideals.

6.9.6 Social Comparison positively influences Aspiration to their ideal self (H6)

Hypothesis six (6) postulates that the upward and downward social comparisons a millennial engages will have a positive effect on their aspirations to their ideal self. The results obtained from the hypotheses tests deduce that the relationship is supported but has no significance as the p-value was 0.492, therefore proving insignificant to significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

Although supported, the outcome does not necessitate that a millennial's participation in socially comparing themselves against people of equal or unequal measure has no influence on their aspirations to their ideal self. Additionally, the outcome is therefore not in context with Chan and Prendergast's (2008) empirical evidence which deduced that an existence of a positive relationship between individuals who socially compare themselves forms their desire to achieve materialistic possessions. The empirical evidence directs a different stance from the Dame and Kofi (2015) stance which states that despite an individual's perception of an image being portrayed as realistic or unrealistic, their formations of aspiration will be determined by their level of confidence on the bases of their assumptions and beliefs. Research supporting the lack of significance present in the results is substantiated by Smeesters et al., (2010) who states that the social comparison consequences are often marred by complexities as they may often result in either the assimilation of the model or deviate from the comparative standard.

Table 6.19. A summary detailing the hypothesis, findings and possible reasons of the outcome for H6

Hypothesis	**H6:** Social comparison positively influences Aspirations to the ideal self
Findings	Supported but not significant
Possible reasons for non-support relative to prior findings	South African millennials may possibly choose not to engage in socially comparing themselves to others. Alternatively, although they may engage in social comparisons against their targets, the comparisons formed do not warrant influences on their aspirations to the ideal self.

6.9.7 Self-Congruity positively influences Aspiration to their ideal self (H7)

The final hypothesis of the dissertation postulated that an individual's self-congruency has a positive effect on their aspirations to their ideal self. Empirical evidence suggests that the relationship is supported with a posited p-value of 0.004 at significance levels of 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively.

This relationship therefore suggests that the congruencies a millennial holds against their fellow peers positively affects the aspirations evoked regarding their ideal selves. This relationship further supports empirical findings from prior literature which suggest that an individual's level of self-congruity and their ideal aspirations, is explicated by their associations with others who epitomize their desired images and ultimately aim to achieve higher standards (Lee, 2015). Literature from Grewal et al., (2016) further substantiated this perspective where the authors clearly stated that aspirations relative to one's self can only be achieved when congruencies exist between aspirational products and their ideal selves. Saino (2016) provided additional evidence by stating that followers who aspire to a brand or image are likely to garner higher aspiration scores relative to non-aspirational followers.

6.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER SIX

Chapter six (6) provided a comprehensive discussion of the statistically analysed data obtained from the data collection process. The researcher retrieved the data through the administration of a questionnaire. A software commonly referred to as SPSS 24 (the Statistical Package for the Social Science) was used to analyse the data. The discussion of the data commenced with the interpretation of the descriptive statistics (age, gender, social media platforms and followers alike) which sought to briefly identify the participant's eligibility to partake in the study.

A substantial amount of examinations were responsible for interpreting the accuracy analysis statistics. The discussion of the accuracy of analysis statistics entails a comprehensive interpretation of the reliability and validity of the study's measurement constructs. The determination of the reliability of the measurement scales was based on the Cronbach's Alpha test, in conjunction with the calculations of the Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted tests. Subsequently, the determination of the Validity checks was based upon the results obtained in the correlation matrix and Confirmatory Factor Analysis tests.

Finally, chapter six (6) comprehensively discussed and interpreted the recommended thresholds necessary in concluding the model fit and/or acceptability of the conceptual model. Additionally, hypotheses were tested through the facilitation of SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) which is relevant in identifying the significance of the proposed relationships between constructs.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of the dissertation places significant emphasis on the interpreted findings, implications encountered in the hypotheses results, theoretical contributions, limitations and future recommendations. In addition to the mentioned topics to be discussed, chapter seven (7) will comprehensively conclude the study.

The empirical objectives highlighted in the first chapter of the dissertation sought to investigate the relationships that may potentially exist between the *exposure to idealised images* and *self-esteem, social comparison, self-congruity* and *aspiration to the ideal self.* Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) formed the basis of testing the proposed conceptual model, while further deducing the hypothetical relationships that exist between the aforementioned constructs.

In accordance to the structure of this chapter, the chapter will commence with discussing the managerial implications the researcher encountered through the results obtained in the hypothetical tests.

7.2 IMPLICATIONS

Exposure to Idealised Images influences Self-Esteem (H1)

As clearly outlined, the first hypothesis of the study proposed that an individual's exposure to idealised images will affect their level of self-esteem. According to the interpretation of the findings discussed in the previous chapter, the results deduced an unsupported but significant relationship between the two constructs. These results are clearly evident that despite the prevalence of idealised images, the exposure to idealised images alone will not affect an individual's self-esteem.

Consumers have come to realise the commonality of augmented reality portrayed on social media. In order for images to affect a millennial's self-esteem, the images portrayed have to resonate with the audience being targeted. This serves to indicate that the prevalence of models and luxurious lifestyles no longer holds the power to invoke consumers to question their level of esteem, marketers may therefore have to enhance their marketing efforts and identify new factors that may significantly influence the depletion or increase of one's self-esteem, while

academics will be required to either explore new factors that are currently responsible for their amended stance in the attitudes they hold towards models and luxurious items.

Academics and marketers alike need to comprehend that idealised images intended to influence adolescents or Generations prior to millennials will have advertent effects, due to the disparities found within the generational cohorts.

According to Dragonfly Marketing (2017) 42% of millennials perceive social media as directly impacting their self-esteem. However, companies such as Jet produced an advertising campaign named #LoveYourself, which was disseminated on numerous social media platforms. The advertisement sought to empower women of all body types to embrace and love their figures and flaws. The marketing effort was prompted by the prevalence of body shaming women encountered by women.

Relative to this study, marketers can therefore derive similar strategies to that of Jet, where social issues affecting negative or positive effects on self-esteem can be the foundation upon which strategies are derived.

Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Social Comparison (H2)

The findings obtained from the second hypothesis were supported, and significant. Empirical findings from prior research attested that an individual's exposure to idealised images leads to comparisons being drawn against others who are perceived as being on an equal or unequal plane (Yanshu & Guo, 2014). The researcher further postulated that upward comparisons do often occur against models who are superior to the individual being exposed, leading to the formation of negative effects.

In addition, prior literature has stated that millennials are deemed to be conceited and are commonly classified as the "Me" generation (Paulin et al. 2013). This notion therefore substantiates that marketers need to conceptualise and formulate social media content which is solely centric to millennials and their desires.

Travel agencies are prime examples of organisations that have exposed millennials to idealised images (particularly portrayed on Facebook and Instagram) with the purpose of inciting comparisons. Travel agencies are known to illustrate images portraying picturesque and ideal holiday destinations, such as Contiki (whose targets are millennials or individuals aged from 18-35). Upon exposure to the idealised image(s), individuals are then prompted to socially compare themselves to the images and models featured in the social media feeds. More

realistically, the prevalence of social media friends posting their holiday adventures often encourages comparisons upon their fellow social media peers.

Academically, researchers seeking to further explore relationships that hold similarities to the empirical evidence obtained should further explore and/or extend additional variables that may be responsible for the formation of such a relationship. The extension of the conceptual model or an alteration in the sample may provide future researchers with an alternative perspective of how additional factors or different samples may influence the findings of the hypothesised relationship.

South African marketers should consider these marketing efforts as a basis upon which their strategies will be formulated in a bid to allow consumers to engage in social comparisons with targets that are either superior or inferior relevant to their self-evaluations. However, South African millennials often appreciate models with whom they can resonate with as opposed to models upon which incongruous comparisons will be drawn.

Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Self-Congruity (H3)

Results obtained in chapter six (6) highlighted the significant and supported relationship between exposure to idealised images and self-congruity. The findings have substantiated prior research from (Nichols & Schumann, 2014). With a path coefficient of 0.004, the evidence suggested that South African millennials' self-congruity is subject to influence upon the exposure of idealised images that resonate or are congruent with their identities.

South African marketers and academics can therefore deduce that South African millennials require authentic social media images, as opposed to the exposure of idealistic content. Marketers should therefore devise authentic content, as their behaviours are reliant on the inspirations drawn from people they know (personally or online), figures with whom a common interest is shared. Academically, researchers may consider the following suggestion: Exposing millennials to images which are assumed to hold congruities with the said target in a bid to identify if the generational cohort truly resonates with figures they deem authentic. The results obtained from the evaluation may deduce results that either differ or add to the existing body of literature.

Brands such as Reebok are commonly known for presenting authentic social media feeds where a level of resonance exists between the viewer and the brand. South African marketers are therefore required to devise marketing strategies that hold similarities and relevance to their

segments. The brand's rebranded symbol (referred to as Reebok) shares resemblance with a delta, which seeks to highlight the impact (physical, mental and social fitness) fitness can have on millennials' lives.

Having acknowledged the surge in the South African crime rate, Reebok in partnership with innumerable Fight Club franchises launched the Pretty Lethal campaign. The aim of the campaign sought to empower South African citizens with self-defence skills, necessary in equipping them to defend themselves in the case of being victims of crimes. Social and traditional media users were therefore exposed to the campaign, garnering widespread support, as viewers resonated with the congruencies and parities portrayed on the brand's website, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook pages. Post the launch of the campaign, people of all age cohorts were able to book free self-defence classes in any Fight Club franchise within the Gauteng district.

The campaign was mutually beneficial to the rebranded Reebok and Fight Club as awareness was raised for both brands, while indicating the success of their marketing efforts to gaining potential customers.

Exposure to Idealised Images positively influences Aspirations to the ideal self (H4)

A supported yet insignificant relationship exists between the two research constructs. Nichols & Schumann, (2014) suggested that individuals who have been exposed to stimuli relative to aspirational qualities often develop congruent anchoring points; however, the results obtained in this study conflict the empirical findings of the two authors.

This is suggestive of South African millennials' resistance or lack of attention expended on the portrayal of idealised images presented on social media platforms. Pertinent to marketers and particularly academics, note has to be taken that South African millennials are either oblivious to idealised images or the negative effects such images impose on Western millennials and have no significant impact on the factors inflicting the formation of aspiring to their ideal self. The insignificance of the relationship therefore provides future researchers with the opportunity of re-examining potential factors that have affected the outcome of the evidence. The extensive body of literature the results yielded may provide further recommendations of variables that affect millennials' perceptions of idealised images and the subsequent effects such images will have on their behavioural and attitudinal dimensions.

The automotive industry has been known to construct social media content that encourages their followers to aspire to obtaining ownership of the vehicle being portrayed, although it may be an ideal to less affluent individuals. The brand prides itself in producing content that is original while avoiding repeating or recycling images posted on their social media platforms. Having positioned itself to reach, influence and interact with the younger tech-savvy, less affluent consumer segment, its global Instagram following has garnered 11.1 million followers.

The marketing efforts adopted by automotive industries are centric to portraying lifestyles associated with the car as opposed to the product itself. Luxury car brands such as Mercedes Benz are globally recognised for their German premium craftsmanship, partnerships with the fashion industry and prestigious symbolic associations is commonly prominent in conceptualizing the ideal. The intent to prompt millennials has been achieved through their consistent global strategy of using visually compelling content. The concept of heightening aspirations to millennials' ideals is facilitated by the brands use of high resolution images, photographed in scenic destinations that create an aesthetically appealing brand image.

Considerable note has to be taken that automotive industries portray more of a lifestyle as opposed to the product itself. The lifestyles accompanied by the ownership of luxury vehicles is a marketing effort employed by brands such as Mercedes Benz as the lifestyles indicate one's level of affluence and social standing. Consumers therefore tend to overlook the attributes associated with the product in contention to aspiring to the social symbol that one would achieve.

Self-Esteem positively influences Aspiration to the ideal self (H5)

The outcome of the hypothesis deduced a supported and insignificant relationship. This therefore suggested that self-esteem does not invoke a desire to aspire to one's ideal self. Rusello, (2009) concluded that individuals exhibiting higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to be immune to the media's negative effects. It is therefore prevalent that South African millennials either possess high levels of self-esteems or that idealised images have no consequential effects which heighten their desire to aspire to idealised images portrayed on social media platforms.

Global marketers have noted the surge in millennials' desires and willingness to spend more of their funds on organisations who engage in progressive positive social changes through socially responsible marketing programmes. As a result, millennials often want to instil change within their societies and expect brands to contribute by driving the change. Numerous

organisations have made significant strides in their corporate social responsibility programmes, with a majority of the initiatives being broadcasted on social media platforms. The initiative are aimed at raising awareness about the realities of society (i.e., cyberbullying), whilst standing solidarity with their followers. Considering the effects that societal ills may have on behavioural may have on a millennial's self-esteem, millennials who encounter self-esteem problems would find resonance with these social media pages and therefore prompt a desire to aspire to their ideal self within a supportive community who share common level of understanding.

Given the magnitude of such societal phenomena's, South African marketers aiming to penetrate this particular generational cohort should therefore exploit the use of social media platforms as an opportunity to engage and make significant contributions to the charitable organisations that have personal relevance to societal issues being highlighted, as such an organisation's involvement in social efforts will not only serve as long-term profitable strategies.

Social Comparison positively influences Aspiration to their ideal self (H6)

Chan & Prendergast (2008) empirically deduced that materialistic possessions are used as a base of comparison among individuals as a measure of determining their relative social standing. The relationship between social comparison and aspiration to the ideal self however, is supported yet insignificant. The empirical evidence therefore illustrated that the upward or downward comparisons individuals engaged in had no significant influence on their desire to aspire to their ideal self, providing a contrary result from prior literature.

In an academic and marketing context, it should therefore be noted that relative to millennials in different global placements, South African millennials are not prompted to socially compare (upward or downward) themselves against idealised images in a bid to aspire to their ideals. Simply put, social media's conveyance of idealised images is not used as bases upon which they would socially compare and aspire to their models. Instead, millennials have shied away from the set normative standards of the ideal. This generational cohort have acted as trendsetters by defining their own concepts of ideals. This has been executed by employing the use of social media to expose themselves as comparative measures. Numerous brands, particularly in the fashion, fitness and automobile industry, have adopted the use of social media influencers as a measure of targeting social media users whose followers are prone to socially comparing themselves to the influential figures. The influencers are identified as

ordinary South Africans who are highly active on social media platforms and possess a reasonable social media presence.

Academics seeking to further comprehend the insignificance of the relationship should consider altering the scope of the research. This would entail examining the impact social media influencers have on millennials' behaviours, mainly their purchase intentions. This would enable future researchers to understand the comparison millennials draw against such key figures, and their effectiveness of evoking a desire to either aspire to or purchase the product or service in use.

Relative to the study, marketer's use of influencers would enable their potential and/or current targets to socially evaluate themselves and their desired aspirations against the influencer, while their discretion to engage with the brand would be reliant on the upward or downward comparisons drawn from the influencer(s) and the brands offerings.

Self-Congruity positively influences Aspiration to their ideal self (H7)

The relationship between self-congruity and aspiration has proved to be supported and significant. Empirical evidence from Lee (2015) deduced that an individual's association with others epitomizing their ideal images (or those congruent with their ideal selves) possess a higher likelihood of aiming to aspire to their standards.

Relative to the empirical evidence obtained, it is therefore to discernable academics that South African millennials are likely to aspire to idealised social media images whose properties are congruent with their self-identity. South African marketers should therefore note the significance within this relationship as the relationship between the two concepts provides a blueprint upon which future research can be extended or used as a foundation for existing literature. Theoretically, the empirical evidence will indicate the differences in the congruities and incongruities South African millennials formulate relative to millennials found in differing geographical regions.

The prevalence of social media has encouraged millennials to become advocates of change and empowerment. South African millennials have exploited their use of social media by appointing themselves as advocates of change. Their adaptations to the current political and societal landscapes have prompted the formation of numerous forums that address a plethora of issues millennials and other generational cohorts can engage in. A vast majority of the forums (identified on particularly Twitter and Facebook) address critical issues (race relations,

political occurrences, unemployment, etc.) general South Africans share congruities with, in a bid to express their experiences, encourage and advocate change while also providing solutions to the problems being identified.

7.3 CONTRIBUTIONS

Notable contributions have been made to existing literature pertaining to the idealisation of images portrayed on innumerable media and social media vehicles and their subsequent effects on consumer behavioural patterns. Contributions were achieved in both an academic and marketing/managerial perspectives.

Academically, the literature provided in this study proved relevant to future researchers who aimed to conduct research in fields that held parities to studies of this nature. The establishment of plethoric theoretical and empirical findings are available for future researchers' disposal, as this information may be pertinent in gaining an in-depth comprehension of the developed constructs and the relationships that exist thereof. Future researchers in the academic field can therefore use this study as a blueprint upon which future research will be based. The current conceptual model can be altered, re-devised or extended to identify social or consumer behavioural issues that may arise in future.

In a marketing perspective, the empirical evidence concluded in the study may facilitate integral parts in the formulation of marketing efforts and strategies specified for their target markets, more importantly, millennials. Marketing efforts can be applied to specific hypothetical statements such as the supported and significant relationship between the exposure to idealised images and self-congruity. The direct relationship between the two measurement constructs can form a base of understanding to marketers that millennial consumers often want to engage with images that are congruent to their own self-identity, which would prompt more attention and interactions with brands ultimately leading to an increase in the images they choose to expose themselves to. This evidence could assist in acquiring a comprehensive view of South African millennials' desires and needs, indicating the need for brands which are congruent with their self-concept.

The evidence therefore negates stark differences between global and South African millennials.

7.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The dissertation has established a solid foundation on the effects idealised images have on South African millennials. This foundation will enable future researchers to extend literature and empirical evidence pertinent to the effects of idealised images on millennials' consumer behavioural concepts. The first limitation pertained to the data collection method the researcher had previously intended to use. The declination of online surveys as a survey method highly limited the researcher's abilities to obtain relevant data. Considering the importance of idealisation on social media, the collection of data from such platforms would produce results which are congruent to the study's objectives. The researcher would therefore recommend that future researchers use social media platforms as a technique of obtaining data which is reflective and congruent to the purpose of the research.

The second limitation the study encountered pertained to the sample from which the data was collected. The sample comprised students from the University of the Witwatersrand, which consequentially led to the data obtained being generalised as representative of the South African population. For future reference, the researcher of the study would encourage future researchers to collect data from millennials spanning across the nine (9) geographical provinces of the country. The collection of data from varied samples would not only limit the bias, but further facilitate for diverse and informed results which could foster generalisation of the intended population.

The final limitations pertain to generic limitations encountered in the majority of research studies, generally referred to as time and financial constraints. Ethical approvals and the time at which the data were collected led to a minimum of 302 respondents participating in the questionnaires. The data was collected during an imperative term of the academic year, which led to the subsequent reluctance of student participation. A mechanism to overcoming this constraint would entail the early ethical applications, which would subsequently result in early ethical approvals.

While the financial constraints pertained to the personal costs incurred by the researcher to print 500 questionnaires; future researchers should consider funding schemes to alleviate the financial burdens incurred by past researchers.

Pertinent to the future recommendations, the researcher would further like to extend the scope of recommendations by articulating the need to re-devise or formulate the current conceptual model in order to fully comprehend the motives behind the failed relationships. Through the

identification of the failed relationships proposed by the researcher, it would be noteworthy for researchers interested in conducting research in the following scope to identify new consumer behavioural concepts which will support relationships. For example, future researchers could consider devising new variable that would support the relationship between self-esteem and aspiration to their ideal self, given the failed empirical relationship between the two research constructs. The recommendations mentioned are vital in assisting future researchers in producing maximised, accurate results, which are necessary in enabling the researcher to make informed yet accurate decisions.

7.5 CONCLUSION

The researcher's motivation for pursuing the following dissertation was based on the desire to examine the possible effects "exposure to idealised images may have on millennials' self-esteem, social comparison, self-congruity and aspiration to their ideal selves, in addition to the subsequent influences self-esteem, social comparison, and self-congruity may have the formation of their aspirations to their ideal selves". As a measure of identifying the possible existence or non-existence of the relationships, the first chapter came into fruition. As a result, the chapter formulated research questions which were to be addressed at a later stage, research objectives the researcher sought to achieve, and a research problem which required being deciphered. The milestones set out in the first chapter were achieved through substantial contextual grounding and comprehensive literature reviews, which further bifurcated to the theoretical and empirical reviews evidently presented in the second and third chapters respectively. The discussion pertaining to the theoretical and empirical review (discussed in the third chapter) of the aforementioned constructs formed the foundation upon which the conceptual model was devised. The fourth chapter of the paper outlined the hypothetical statements which would be pivotal in answering the research questions, problems and the possible outcomes of the proposed relationships between constructs. Prior to the relationships being tested, the researcher provided a blueprint of the data collection procedures which would facilitate testing and fulfilling the research objectives, problems and questions.

Upon the collection of the papers data, the sixth chapter established a comprehensive interpretation of the study's findings, which highlighted the outcomes of the proposed relationships between research variable devised in the conceptual model. From the findings, deductions were drawn that out of the seven proposed relationships, the hypotheses ranging

from *H1, H2, H3* and *H7* were supported however, the hypothetical relationships between *H4, H5* and *H6* posited supported but insignificant outcomes.

Chapter seven (7) which comprised the final chapter of the dissertation discussed the notable contributions the study would make in both an academic and managerial perspective, in addition to the limitations encountered. Future recommendations were provided to future researchers who sought to delve deeper in studies of a similar nature. Clear directions have been outlined to future researchers who seek to identify underlying factors that affect consumers behaviours upon exposure to idealised images portrayed on numerable social media platforms. These recommendations will enable the circumvention of limitations encountered in this study, as well as measures to assist in improving the landscape of research relating to the effects of exposure to idealised images amongst South African millennials.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Information Sheet (PROTOCOL NO: H17/06/7)

Title: The Effects of Idealized Images on an Individual's Aspirations to their Ideal Self.

Good day.

My name is Busisiwe Nhlapo and I am a Masters student in the Marketing Business Sciences division at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on the relationships that exist between the exposure of idealised images and their consequential effects on individual's aspirations.

I am therefore inviting you to partake and assist me by completing the questionnaire below. The research is purely for academic purposes in fulfilling my Master's degree in the Marketing/Business Sciences discipline.

Please be assured that the data collected will remain private and treated with the utmost confidentiality. As a means of ensuring your right to anonymity is respected, please refrain from putting your name anywhere on the questionnaire. Participation in the study is voluntary and you are welcome to withdraw from the study at any given point. Please note that the choice to not partake or withdraw from the study will have no adverse consequences.

The questionnaire will comprise 9 pages and six (6) sections; A, B, C, D, E and F and should approximately take 15 minutes of your time, I will therefore require you to set aside 15 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. Kindly complete all questions so as to ensure the use of the questionnaire for data analysis purposes. You will be presented with seven (7) options for each question, which will require you to indicate the response that you find most appropriate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). There are no correct or incorrect answers, however, please indicate only ONE (1) answer per statement.

Thank you in advance, your participation is immensely appreciated.

Researcher: Busisiwe Nhlapo

562139@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Marike Venter de Villiers

marike.venter@wits.ac.za

School of Economic and Business Sciences

Questionnaire

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

This section includes some general and biographical questions. Please indicate your answer by marking with an **(X)** where appropriate.

A1: Please indicate your age group

18-20	1
21-23	2
24-28	3
29 and above	4

A2: Please specify your gender

Male	1
Female	2
Prefer not to say	3

A3: Please indicate the Social Media platforms you are most active on

Facebook	1
Instagram	2
Twitter	3
Pinterest	4
Other, specify:	5

A4: Please indicate the average number of followers on all your Social Media platforms

Less than 100	1
101-200	2
201-300	3
301-400	4
401-500	5
More than 500	6

A5: Please indicate your Social Media Frequency on an average day

No time at all	0
Less than 10 min	1
10 to 30 min	2
More than 30 min, up to 1 hour	3
More than 1 hour up to 2 hours	4
More than 2 hours	5

A6: Have you ever been exposed to idealised images?

Yes	1
No	2

N.B. DEFINITION OF IDEALISED IMAGES: The portrayal of images represented as being exaggerated and unrealistic in comparison to one's views and abilities.

PLEASE TURN OVER.

SECTION B: EXPOSURE TO IDEALISED IMAGES

Below are statements regarding to ***Exposure idealised*** images. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the statement by marking the appropriate number in the 7 point-Likert scale with an (X):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

EXPOSURE TO IDEALISED IMAGES										
EX1	I have been exposed to idealised images on social media platforms.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX2	I often feel positive about the images I see on my social media feeds.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX3	I generally grant full attention to my followers images	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX4	I find idealised images on Twitter and YouTube more engaging than other online sources of information.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX5	I often 'follow' or 'like' an idealised figure on Twitter (clicking 'like' or 'follow')	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX6	I often 'follow' or 'like' an idealised figure on my social media feeds.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX7	I have read a blog about the idealisation of social media on the internet.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

EX8	I have often written texts on my social media platforms about the idealisation of social media images.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
EX9	I have often commented or discussed the idealisation of social media on the Internet.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

SECTION C: SELF-ESTEEM

Below are statements regarding ***Self-Esteem***. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the statement by marking the appropriate number in the 7 point-Likert scale with an **(X):**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Based on the images you post, and images posted by others on social media profiles, kindly state your level of agreement or disagreement by marking each of the following statements with an (X).

SELF-ESTEEM										
SE1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE2	At times I think I am no good at all.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE3	I feel I have numerous good qualities.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE4	I am able to do things as good as well as most other people.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE5	I certainly feel useless at times.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE6	I feel that I am a person of worth, or at least at an equal plane as others.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

SE7	I wish I could have more self-respect for myself.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE8	All in all, I'm inclined to feel that I am a failure	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE9	I have a positive image toward myself.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SE10	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

YOU'RE ALMOST THERE! PLEASE KEEP GOING ☺

SECTION D: SOCIAL COMPARISON

Below are statements regarding ***Social Comparison***. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the statement by marking the appropriate number in the 7 point-Likert scale with an **(X):**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

SOCIAL COMPARISON										
S1	I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S2	I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S3	I often compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S4	I am not the type of person who compares often with others.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

S5	If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S6	I often try to find out what others think who face similar problems as I face.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S7	I often like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S8	I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
S9	I often compare how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

SECTION E: SELF-CONGRUITY

Below are statements regarding ***Self-Congruity***. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the statement by marking the appropriate number in the 7 point-Likert scale with an **(X):**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

ACTUAL CONGRUITY										
SC1	The images posted on social media by my friends are congruent with how I see myself	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SC2	I am quite similar to my social media friends.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SC3	The personality of my social media friends is	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

	congruent with how I see myself.									
IDEAL CONGRUITY										
SC4	My social media friends are consistent with how I would like to see myself.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SC5	I would like to be perceived as similar to my social media friends.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
SC6	The personality of my social media friends is congruent with how I would like to see myself.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

SECTION F: ASPIRATION

Below are statements regarding ***Aspiration*** **in relation to idealised images you see on social media**: Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the statement by marking the appropriate number in the 7 point-Likert scale with an **(X):**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

AS1	I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS2	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS3	I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects that people own as a sign of success.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

AS4	The things I own aren't all that important to me	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS5	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS6	I have the things I really need to enjoy life	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS7	I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS8	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS9	I often spend money on things that I don't really need.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**
AS10	I usually buy only the things I need.	**Strongly disagree**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strongly agree**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX 2: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Nhlapo

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H17/06/7**
PROJECT TITLE	The effects of idealized images on an individual's aspirations to their ideal self
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms B Nhlapo
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Economic and Business Sciences/
DATE CONSIDERED	23 June 2017
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	25 July 2020
DATE 26 July 2017	**CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr M Venter de Villiers

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature _____ Date _____/_____/_____

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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