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## Introduction and Problem Formulation

Social Networking Sites have become relatively important and a source of communication between family and friends across the globe as face to face interactions seem to be less and less. With more than 1,8 billion users monthly as of January 2018, with Facebook as the most popular Social Media platform worldwide (eMarketer & Squarespace 2018). Findings suggest that as Social Media becomes increasingly integrated in our social and professional lives, differences between our “real” and online identities can shape not only how others perceive us but our self-perceptions, creating pressure to be more like the often-idealized digital versions of ourselves and our peers.<sup>1</sup> Eakin concedes that is that while the Internet has brought ease and speed to the way we talk about ourselves, and some new forms in which to do it, performing identity work online is really not radically different from doing so offline (2015,12).

Instagram is the fastest growing Social Media platform with one billion monthly users, its popularity is on the rise by a considerably margin, growing 5% every 3 months against Facebook’s 3.4% growth, even though Facebook has more overall users (Southern,2018). Even though such rampant growth deserves attention, Sheldon and Bryan (2015) (A. Karam Eldin, 2016), and Jackson and Luchner (2017) acknowledge that the Instagram lacks academic focus on it. Unlike any other Social Media platform, Instagram is unique because of it being a photo capturing and sharing application only, while the other sites such as Facebook and Twitter are more text-based communication platforms. Instagram provides a different dimension in being a visual only application, it requires a need for a research on it as it provides a different element to the understanding of Social Media.

Success on Instagram requires the need for participants to spend spent editing photos significantly related to motives of both coolness and creativity, with engagements serving as confirmation of that success (Sheldon and Bryant,2015,95). A manipulation of pictures and the careful selection of what to post makes it more likely that Instagram users will be exposed to the best representation of others on Instagram (Hendrickse et al.2017,93). Expectations are key to what to what to post hence an individual must remain relevant and trendy by posting what is valid visually or alter the narrative to gain affirmation with engagements serving as key to maintaining that self-representation or continually alter it to be successful. This paper argues that individuals are reconstructed time and again on Instagram through the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/blog/self-selfie-identity-age-social-media>

visuals that may create or sustain a story about the self and the engagements shape and instruct individual to adopt lifestyles and identities as per the audience expectations.

In this paper, I investigate the relationship between Instagram and its ability to offer constructions of new projected identities, a creation of an online identity which is bound to shape the self's narrative. As a response to the replacement of the traditional way of face to face interaction, the self continues to evolve too to suit needs of the Social Media digitalized age. The basis of this study is on visual narratives offered on Instagram and engagements thereof in constructing self and alter ones' narrative, time and again .The self gradually builds and rebuilds itself visually on Instagram by being aware of what may be trendy so as to be relevant and successful online; the new digital age has both brought to the fore alternatives for the self-representation to be ever evolving.

## **Problem Statement**

*How do visual representations and engagements on Instagram re/construct self-identities?*

## **Methodology**

This chapter will account for the approach used for this study, the criteria used to come up with a sample, how and why I chose the interviewees and the reason for choosing the interviews as the data collection method. This chapter will justify methods and tools implored for this study including explaining the general functions of Instagram which the source for the primary data is.

### *Instagram*

Instagram, a mobile photo (and video) capturing and sharing service. It provides users an instantaneous way to capture and share their life moments with friends through a series of (filter manipulated) pictures and videos (Hu et al,2014). Filters have been the most differentiating feature of Instagram to many other Social Media platforms as they can be used to increase brightness, contrast colors and make pictures flawlessly clear (See Figure 1 below). Manipulations of pictures and the careful selection of what to post makes it more likely that Instagram users will be exposed to the best representation of others on Instagram (Hendrickse et al.2017,93). Just like Facebook, one can follow people on Instagram and be followed, with likes and comments on a visual confirming one's success on the platform (See Figure 2 below).

### *Hashtag (#) Aalborg*

Like Twitter, Instagram makes use of hashtags (#) on photos posted. By using a hashtag (#) on Instagram, visibility of a photo posted increases and other users can find the photographs easily (Sheldon and Bryant,2017,89). Social movements such as #Metoo and #BlackLivesMatter have used the hashtag (#) tool successfully to increase reach and awareness of their concerns via Social media. Instagram’s algorithm considers the hashtags (#) on ones’ post to show them up first as (top posts) on the Instagram hashtag search, Instagram’s Explore tab or on ones’ follower’s main Instagram feed (for reference, see figure 3 below). Individual prominent account and brands use hashtags to win more likes, comments, and new followers, as they are more visible, posts with hashtags (#) have more engagements than posts without #hashtags<sup>2</sup>. Prominent accounts will be shown first in the search. It is from these top posts within #Aalborg that the study obtained its primary data. Some individuals are more influential than other at spreading information, trends, and behavioral practices and from these individuals that the true impact of Instagram may be detected and analyzed (Schmidt & Olson, 2008,199).

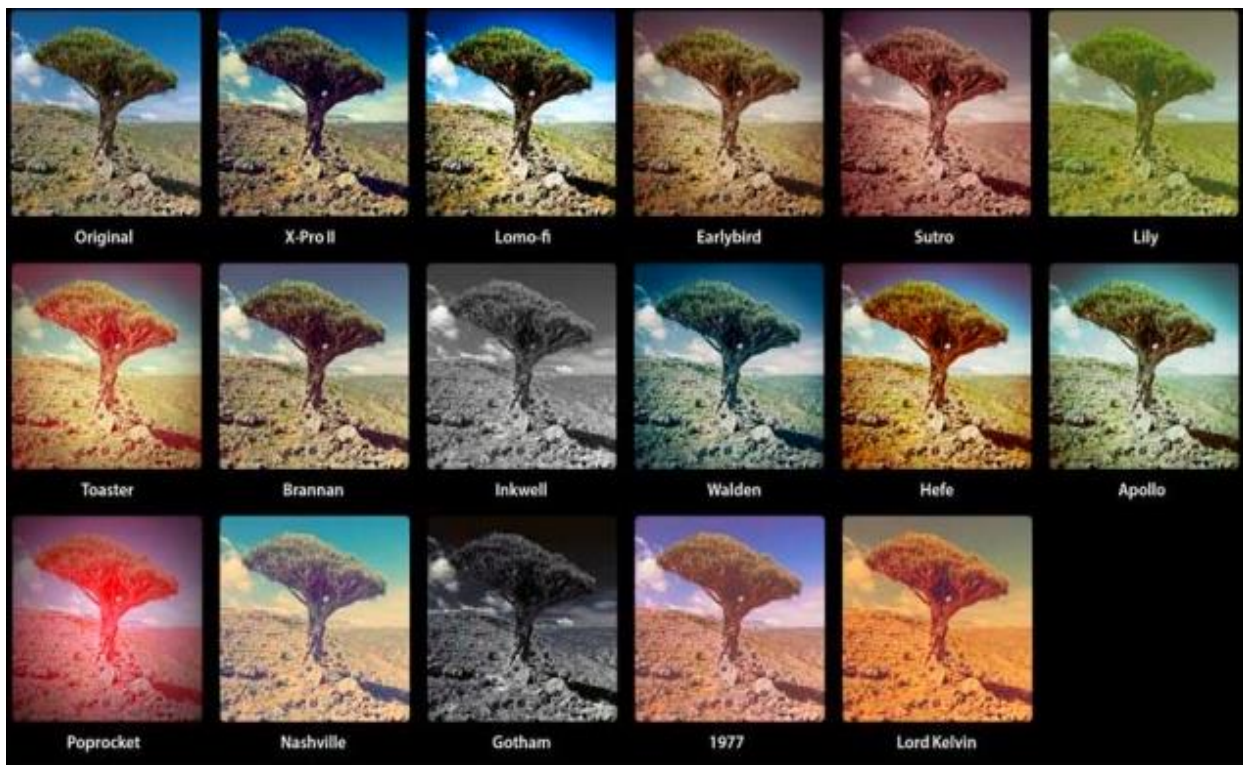


Figure 1

<sup>2</sup> riotlysocialmedia.com/blog/instagram-hashtags-guide/

On this basis, this researcher searched for #Aalborg to come up with a sample of interviewees. By selecting this hashtag (#), I found it natural that I would access Instagram profiles frequent Instagram in Aalborg. So, within the hashtag (#) I found my three (3) interviewees based also on their availability and keenness to be part of the study. #Aalborg represented a feasible sample to find primary data from within it, that would be representational of the community and because of the homogenous nature of Instagram, visuals, comments and likes are universal in that their functionality and experience is the same, the sample size is justified. Interviewees were chosen from among top #Aalborg posts between 1 November 2018 and 1 December 2018, a period relatively close to the due date of this paper, top posts in this period would provide the study with the most recent and relevant top trending post at the earliest.



Figure 2

### ***Sample Size Justification***

The sameness in characteristics of Instagram allowed the sample to be small but representative. The functionality of the Social Media application is equally the same in that the more one posts popular visuals, the more the followers, the more likes and comments make the individual prominent, self-promotion is the motive hence individuals post the best depiction of themselves. Therefore, in choosing a small sample i.e. the three people making use of #Aalborg on their posts, I argue that they adequately reflected and exhibited characteristics of Instagram in general. The individuals therefore by being

participants on Instagram will have firsthand primary knowledge which can be found to be generalizable to the larger population of Instagram users thus the time the researcher spends in the field is minimal. A small sample may also prove to be beneficial as it will be easy to manage the data gathered as well as key in improved accuracy in its capturing and its analysis.

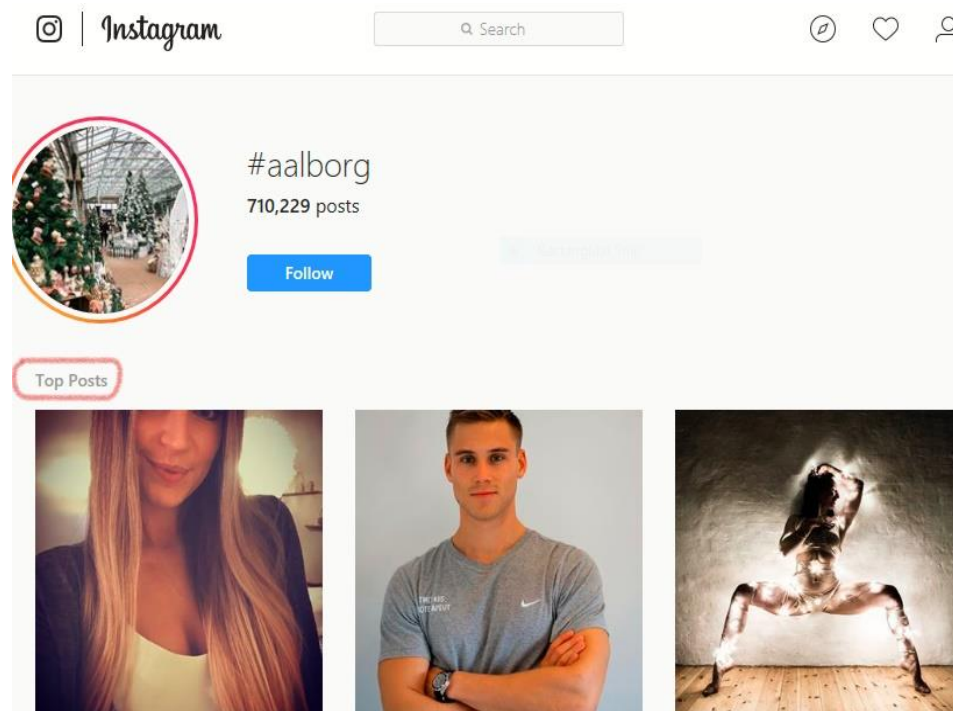


Figure 3

### *Delimitations*

The need to pursue a study that is Instagram focused is because not so much attention has been given to it as compared to other Social Networking Sites as cited above. Its growing numbers i.e. with Instagram being the number one growing Social Networking Site this study more relevant, study does not intend to focus on Twitter and Facebook as they have received enough scholarly attention already but also their growth numbers are not as good as Instagram's. The study made use of the #Aalborg in its selection of interviewees out of possible many criteria to generate primary data. This criterion however, represented a feasible data collection method in the time allocated for this study. Focus on the #Aalborg would exclude other prominent users of the site, who maybe would prefer using other hashtags (#) on offer. The intention was to find prominent accounts in Aalborg for investigation, the hashtag (#) made it easy to find these, looking at every account to see if the person was from Aalborg would be very time consuming. Smaller accounts that do not make it to the top posts section but are from Aalborg are not the focus of this

study. This is justified as prominent accounts would naturally have more traffic, with engagements on Instagram being a key factor in this study, the prominent larger accounts may have a lot to say in regard to the traffic on their Instagram accounts as opposed to smaller accounts.

#### *Theoretical position: Social Constructionism*

This discussion will make use of a social constructivism approach. It implies that social phenomena are not only produced through social interaction but are in a constant state of revision (Bryman 2016, p. 29). According to Bryman, constructionism is social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (2016, 29). The study argues that construction of the self on Instagram is continuous, that the self through visual narratives and representations is not only posting on Instagram but the assumption is that community perspectives and social voices are central to what the individuals will post, in the process the self rebuilds, alters itself in relation to community expectations hence the constant state of revision Bryman alludes to is realized. The approach is justified as Social Media has replaced the traditional ways of interaction as highlighted above, but in doing so have created new identities that can be adhered to for relevance and social belonging making the current study a social concern. This construction of identities is what the paper investigates in relation to Instagram.

#### *Qualitative approach*

The paper is of an explorative kind, investigating how the re/construction of the self can be done through visuals on Instagram, reasons, motives of uploading pictures and the nature of Instagram environment. A qualitative approach gives the researcher license to gain insights important in meaning making. Since, as alluded above not enough scholarly attention has been paid to Instagram, this investigative study seeks to find new raw information, or add to the limited information about Instagram available and aims at explaining why and how things are happening the way they are.

Denzin and Lincoln (200,3) identify qualitative research as, ‘the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, introspection, life-story, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts and production, ...and visual elements –that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals. The need for this approach arises from the fact that to get an appreciation of why individuals post the way they do on Instagram calls for an account from the individual themselves. Furthermore, the study’s position regarding visuals posted on Instagram is that it is a form of narrative about the self, however every narrative, no matter how seemingly ‘full’ it may be, is constructed based on a set of events that might have been included but were left out (White1987:10).

A qualitative approach allows one to go beyond what has been presented to uncover some facts and reasoning behind actions, gather data that could have been left out but may prove to be crucial in

understanding the subject under investigation and fill the gap of knowledge or confirm a hypothesis. Flick (2002:2) further explains that qualitative approach is of specific relevance to the study of social relations, an understanding which is important especially when looking at social media related researches. Stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman,2012,380). The view from participants is particularly important in understanding personal Instagram actions and motives such that the findings may be transferable to a larger population of users. The nature of this discussion calls for an exploratory and in-depth approach in a bid to uncover explicit findings and if possible, improve the initial knowledge the researcher has of the subject under study.

### *Interviews with Instagram users*

#### *Semi Structured Interview*

Three qualitative semi structured interviews were used to gather data for this study. Using #Aalborg on Instagram, three prominent Instagram profiles (See Figure 4 below) were selected as the source for the primary data for this project. The main reason for using semi structured interviews was to gain further knowledge when the respondent has not been clear enough or if the question has not been wholesomely responded to. This interview criteria suited this study as I, the researcher does not know the functionality of Instagram, semi structured questions allowed the respondent to reveal more information that the study had no idea on, with the researcher also being able to seek clarity if vague responses were given. Such interviews tend to be flexible, responding to the direction in which interviewees take during the interview, and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews (Bryman,2016,470). Semi structured research interviews allow access to a better understanding of the interviewee's points of view as it is done in a relaxed manner, there is clarity, the respondent will tend to open up a bit more. The interviews were guided by the following questions: (1) would an individual consider posting non filtered images, (2) what is the criteria for posting images, (3) if engagements on posts matter so much and if that's the main motive and (4) whether they considered Instagram to be a factual representation of themselves.

#### *Individual Interviews*

The researcher managed to have a face to face interview with two of chosen interviewees separately with each interview lasting between 30 to 40 minutes. The interview was exhaustive as I was able to explain and clarify on the questions posed or probe for information. The personal contact with the respondent ensured all questions were answered and that I, the interviewee was certain that the respondent had understood the questions (Harboe,2013,80). Thus, individual interviews allowed for the exploration of



knowledge that may not be public about the Instagram, by interviewee expressing individual attitudes and beliefs, it gives the research more in-depth knowledge on the research than information obtained from a focus group for example, which tends to be more generalized and since focus is on a group, it would be difficult to get into detail with individual participants who might have a different line of thinking (Harboe,2013,80).

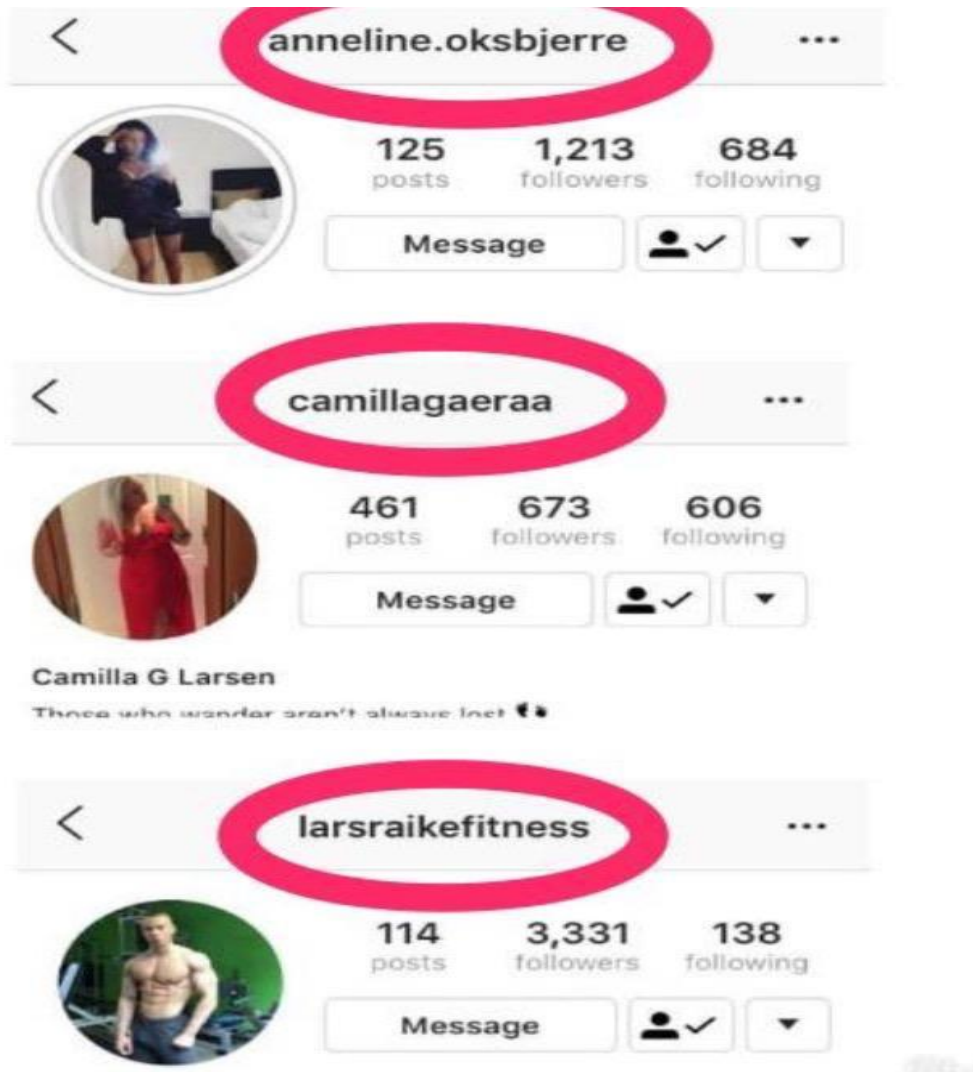


Figure 4

#### Telephone Interview

One of the interviews was done over the phone with a participant from Aarhus. As the criteria was contacting Instagram users making use of the hashtag (#) *Aalborg*, one of the respondents hailed from Aarhus but had used the hashtag when she came to Aalborg. It was of interest as to why she would use such a hashtag, yet she was not from the local community, giving the research variations in understanding

the use of hashtags, the purpose and motives of Instagram. A telephone interview sufficed as it was less time consuming and cheaper to do so. Bryman (2016,488) sees some advantages in telephone interviews as he argues that sensitive questions by telephone will be more effective, since interviewees may be less distressed about answering when the interviewer is not physically present. Instagram information cannot be considered sensitive, however the respondent in a telephone conversation tended to be less shy as she discussed her use of the Social Networking Site. The telephone call was also recorded minimizing risk of transcription errors (Harboe,2013,84).

### **Theories and Concepts**

The following paragraphs will discuss theories and concepts the study adopted in a bid to respond to the thesis research question. Giddens's theory of *Late Modern Society* (reflexive self and lifestyle concepts), Goffman's *Dramaturgical theory* (front stage and backstage concepts), are the central theoretical foundations for this paper and the ones considered most appropriate in analyzing and responding to the problem formulation. It is crucial to validate the theories and concepts used as they argue and clarify that theoretical explanations developed from a research study fits the data and to consider their appropriateness in response to the problem statement (Johnson, 1997, p. 286).

#### ***Goffman's Self-Presentation***

According to sociologist Goffman, the self is not seen as an organic thing that has specific location: “. . . [the individual and his body] merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg” (1958,252-253). Through the dramaturgical theory, Goffman suggest that the individual is a product of the performance he or she puts forward, that the participants define the situations they are in, assess the particular frame of the interaction, and present themselves accordingly (McGee & Warms,2013,2).

Since this research suggests that the individual goes through some form of construction in presenting the self visually, so to form a specific narrative of the Self, the study finds it necessary to explore Goffman's concepts of backstage and frontstage self-narrative concepts as offering possible explanation and enlightenment. I use the concepts of front stage and back stage as presented in Goffman's book “*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*” (1959). The Dramaturgical theory is broad, but this study opted for use of the two concepts from the whole theory as they best fit and directly address the initial problem statement. In the section below, I account for the appropriateness of Goffman's concepts validity for use, its contribution in this field as well how it helps in responding to the research question and analysis of this thesis.

### ***Front Stage Concept***

Goffman puts forward the idea of self-representation in the form of a play, with onstage and offstage behavior as metaphors accounting for real human interaction. He characterizes how the individual behaves in front of others so to control impressions (Goffman,1959.26). Goffman defines his *front stage* concept as part of the act towards the individual's initial projection of what he or she is proposing to be (ibid,22), The front stage is what confronts the audience, this is what the audience see. He also defines 'performance' as all the activity of an occurring during a marked period before an audience at a setting which has some influence on the observers (ibid,32). Hence the front stage becomes what can be seen by the audience, in other words it is the performance. He portrays the self-presentation interaction as a theatrical performance (play), occurring in a particular setting in front an audience, with the aim of giving impressions that are aligned with the individual's idealized image (ibid,17).

His argument with the front stage concept is concerned with how people manage what they imagine to be the impressions others have of them, how individuals act when they are in the company of other or when aware that someone might be looking (McGee and Warms,2013,2). Goffman regards his front stage theory as the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during a 'performance' (Goffman,1959,32). The individual will function or perform the front in a general or fixed fashion as that of any character in a play such that there is consistency and cohesion in the performance (1959,35).

According to McGee and Warms (2013,3), Goffman undertook extensive observations of how people manage the damage done to their self-image and demonstrated how people manage breaches through remedial interchanges that can acknowledge the departure from expectations, offer a remedy to an offense, or shift the frame. Control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation by one expressing self in a certain way as to lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with their own plan (Goffman 1959,15). Such self-disclosure is a way to open up their own identities of how they want others to perceive them (Pempek et al., 2009).

Here Goffman cites that the expected routines, consistency between appearance and manner, are key to a role being successful and authentic. Control and influence of the audience may be achieved if the act is socialized, molded, modified and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society (1959, 44 & 45). These consistent expressive performances come to be accepted as reality (ibid,45). The performer is

relied upon by the audience to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every appointed time (Goffman 1959,64). An individual must stick to a given 'script' which the audience know too well to pass as successful and as characters must not alter their storylines.

He further argues that when an individual is in the presence of others, routines may develop as expectations tend to take on a meaning and stability thus a front, becomes a collective representation and a fact in its own right (Goffman 1959,37). Goffman here acknowledges that social front may become institutionalized and become part of self when the performance becomes a normal routine (ibid). A performer maybe taken in by his own act, convinced at the moment that the impression of reality which he fosters is the one and only reality, the performer becomes so habituated to the act, suppressing ones' true character that may disrupt an impression being fostered (1959,86 &114). Goffman cites a continuation of a performance and that the front may be reality and the individual rather stays in character even when the audience cannot follow the act, one may still the routines as part of the self. Goffman expects a distinction there to be made, when performing in front of an audience that being the 'in character self' and the 'out of character self', a concept which he terms the backstage concept.

### ***Backstage Concept***

Goffman defines the backstage as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted (1959,114). Cole characterizes the backstage region as when an individual is often more relaxed and comfortable, lets guard down, and one might be in what can be considered uninhibited or true self<sup>3</sup>. The backstage is where the performer behaves out of character because the back region will be closed to members of the audience, a case of impression management (Goffman,1959,116). When offstage or when not performing, the performer must keep his out of character self-hidden away from the audience suggests that authenticity and consistency may be key in maintaining a given impression. Wolfe (1997) asserts that Goffman leaves the impression that the real reality is always offstage and behind closed doors. Indeed, the door may be the most important of all Goffman's images... the area behind the door allows people to let off the steam (Wolfe, 1997, p. 183).

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<sup>3</sup> Cole, Nicki Lisa, Ph.D. "Goffman's Front Stage and Back Stage Behavior." ThoughtCo, Jun. 22, 2018, [thoughtco.com/goffmans-front-stage-and-back-stage-behavior-4087971](https://www.thoughtco.com/goffmans-front-stage-and-back-stage-behavior-4087971).

He refers to this as the defensive practices, when the individual employs these strategies and tactics to protect his own projections (ibid,24) as a tactic used to keep fostered impressions alive, backstage maybe seen as complimenting these protective practices to avoiding discrediting the act. Goffman's argument is without these practices employed, including closing off the backstage to prevent disruptions of the projected self so that a presented narrative may suffice and survive, the out of character self, true not performed impressions are suppressed or kept away from the audience so that a fostered impression is not disrupted (ibid).

Suppressed facts about self-must be managed so as not to disrupt a given position or projection of the individual. Here Goffman highlights how the individual is reliant on others to create an impression and how important an audience is in determining who the individual is; this thesis draws parallels with the position of this paper maintaining that a constant posting of images on Instagram need to be managed so that the impressions created online may not be disrupted. Yang (2017,218) agrees with self-presentation among less mindful emerging adults present themselves positively to impress the audience and to gain validation to consolidate their own identity. Thus, the backstage makes it rather interesting, in the context of this paper to explore the behavior offline as a necessary step to how (some) Instagram users act and construct their selves on it, as Goffman sees backstage being just as important in the success of idealized impressions.

Goffman admits however that one can become so habituated to one's front region activity and character that it may be necessary to handle one's relaxation from it as a performance (p135). The front and the back become inseparable here, with the backstage providing a platform for a continuous performance even without an audience (ibid). Eakin shares this view and in direct reference to self-expression on the internet argues that, we construct ourselves whenever we engage in self-narration online or offline, the qualities of identity and the properties of its representation are two different faces of a single phenomenon of self-experience (2015,18). Wolfe (1997) asserts that Goffman leaves the impression that the real reality is always offstage and behind closed doors. Indeed, the door may be the most important of all Goffman's images... the area behind the door allows people to let off the steam (Wolfe, 1997, p. 183).

The study finds deliberations by Goffman as key in addressing theoretically the main question this paper poses and aids in understanding data gathered thus providing rationale for adopting these concepts of the dramaturgical theory. The two concepts primarily deal with how impressions maybe fostered and how the audience may be kept engaged to an act, managing impressions is key in understanding how an individual on Instagram maintains a character or adjusts to promote self successfully and how that may reconstruct one's identity.

## **Theory of Late Modern Society**

The reconstruction of self on Instagram maybe understood better by imploring theories which account for how the individual reacts to a change in tradition, and how the diversity nature of modernity impacts on self-identity. What to do? How to act? Who to be in times? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior (Giddens,1991,70). With the Internet being one of key features of late modernity among others, it naturally interests this study as it deals with Instagram, elements of the Internet. This thesis will argue for the appropriateness of Giddens's theory of Late Modernity as presented in the book, *Modernity and Self-Identity (1991)* in which he examines the self in the late modern society with the impression that it may enlighten this thesis and help in the solving of the problem statement.

## **Institutional Reflexivity**

The Late Modernity theory has brought about alterations to our day to day social life and has affected the most personal aspects of our experience (Giddens,1991,1). Self-identity becomes problematic in modernity in a way which contrasts with self vs. society relations in more traditional contexts (ibid,34). Modernity has made society become much more reflexive and aware of its own precariously constructed state (Gauntlett,2008,105). According to Eakon, a product of modernity, the internet has promoted new forms of self-narration, notably brief, collective, and ephemeral (2015,11). With modernity forcing a rethinking of tradition and custom, self-identity becomes an intuitive organized endeavor (ibid,1&5). The self, according to Giddens just like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists in, is responsive (ibid,5). Activity of an individual on Instagram maybe seen in the same light as an active, conscious engagement in the construction of a shared social reality (Day and Thompson, 2004,85). Individuals are not who they are, but what they make of themselves, hence individuals are dependent on the reconstructive endeavors in which they engage in (Giddens,1991,75).

Isajiw further explains that locating oneself in relation to a community is a social phenomenon because the internal psychological states express themselves objectively in external behavior patterns that come to be shared by other (1993,8). Giddens conceptualizes this as the reflective project. In the modernity context, he refers to reflexivity as the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge. He argues that we are not who we are but what we make of ourselves (ibid,75). He cites psychological processes of self-

formation and psychological need as boundaries to which the self will always reorganize itself with in (ibid). The self aims at building/rebuilding a coherent a rewarding sense of identity (ibid). In the context of this paper, this building and rebuilding exercise in a consistent manner is what interests this thesis.

Thus, the reflexive project identifies that reconstruction of the self is continuous, with its psychological and the social acting as triggers to its response (ibid,75&76). A person's identity is shaped by the capacity to keep a consistent narrative (ibid 54). Thus, in the reflexive self is a need to be reactive and aware to what is going on at every moment to keep a particular narrative going; the individual integrates events which occur in the external world into the ongoing story about self (ibid54). Taylor (1989) as cited by Giddens argues that in order to know we are, we must be able to know how we have become and where we are going (ibid,54). The self is not constant but continuous in forming new identities while reacting to a new environment. The self uses every opportunity to ask itself, how can I use this moment to change? (ibid76). Thus, the self is always monitoring its environment to be responsive if the chance to change is there. Thus, the self does not stop reconstructing itself, it is not passive, but rather that it is always looking for change in the environment, ready for revision in light of new information or knowledge (ibid,20).

### *Selecting a Lifestyle*

The building of the self repeatedly towards a rewarding sense of identity can be linked to what Giddens identifies as formation of a trajectory from past into a projected future (1991,75). The self forms a trajectory that 'explains' the past and is oriented towards an anticipated future (Gauntlet 2008,108). Such a choice in which trajectory of self wants to be identified within a community, to project an idealized impression termed as a lifestyle, a ready-made template for a narrative of the self (ibid,111). Lifestyle refers to decisions taken, and courses of action followed under conditions of severe material constraint (Giddens 1991,6). These lifestyles choices can give personal narratives an identifiable shape, linking them to communities of people who are 'like them' - or people who, at least, have made similar choices (Gauntlett,2008,112).

In keeping up a narrative, the individual does not only need to keep up with the standard expected by the audience or followers but does so to fit a description that entails that narrative. Selection of lifestyles is influenced by group pressures or audience's expectations as well as by socioeconomic factors (Giddens,1991,82). Such lifestyle choice concerns are not only about how to act, but also how to be (ibid,81).

Giddens argues that adopting a lifestyle gives material to form a narrative of self-identity and give practical value to a representation (ibid,81). A lifestyle is a rather orderly container for identity, each type coming with certain expectations, so that particular actions would fit a given narrative and projected impressions (Gauntlett,2008,112). Giddens furthers the argument that an individual committed to one character would not want to take up other lifestyle options because that would be out of character for the individual and for the audience or people he or she has been interacting with (1991,82).

This idea has traces of Goffman's performance concept in it, which calls for a consistency and need to stick to given narrative that the audience may recognize and find relevant for a successful act. Lifestyle choices and life planning form institutional settings which help shape and authenticate an individual's actions (ibid,85). Any representation involves a point of view, a selection, a perspective on the represented object, criteria of relevance, and arguably, an implicit theory of reality (Onega and Landa,1996,3).

Sticking to a narrative has power towards inclination, making oneself the ideologist of one's own life, through the selection of a few significant events with a view to elucidate an overall purpose, lifestyle choices bound by a character one has chosen (Bourdieu (2000:300). However, an individual might have more than one 'lifestyle', each one reserved for certain audiences (Gauntlett,2008,112). This is referred to as life sectors, aspects of lifestyle that go with work, or home, or other relationships (Giddens 1991,83 & Gauntlett 2008,112). Segmentation includes the differentiation between public and private domains (Giddens,1991,83). The ability to fit into segments and act within them is what Gusdorf (2001) refers to as the realization or awareness of more difference than of similarities in life, the ability to fix ones' own image aligning it to given segment (,2001.30).

This might be problematic as Giddens echoes Goffman's view in the actor's dilemma in differentiating between the backstage and the frontstage, he views segmentation of lifestyle as difficult as familiarity generated by mediated experience might perhaps produce feelings of reality inversion (Giddens1991,27). Gusdorf also argues that as a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilization in direct reference to the late modernity (2001,3).

## **Analysis**

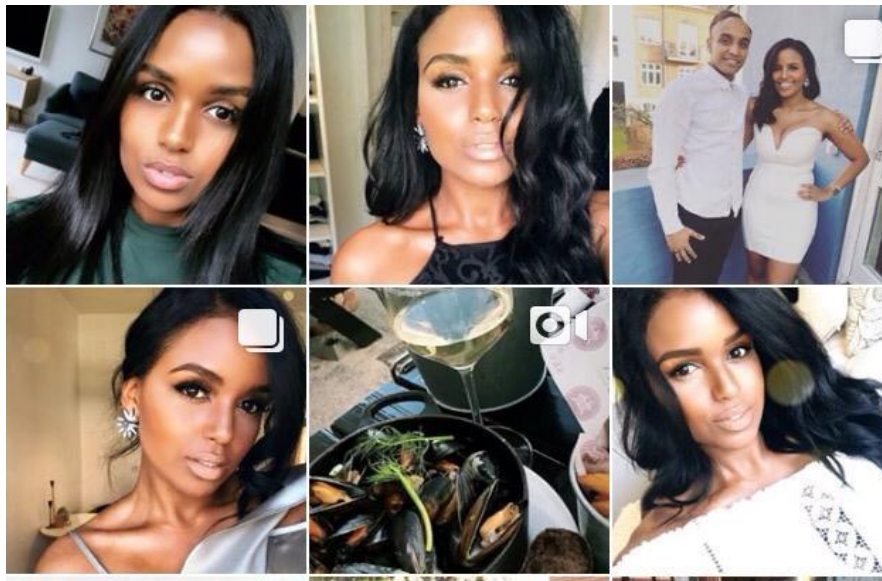
In the analysis section, the presented theories and concepts to will be used to examine and understand the selected empirical data or findings of this project. I will mix both Giddens and Goffman concepts in the



analysis of the data when their ideas mirror and complement each other, contrast them when necessary in the analysis of the data. This will help in underlining the appropriateness of the theories and concepts in meaning making of the data gathered and study as a whole.

### *Instagram filters in fostering impression*

The findings suggest that the use of the Instagram filter tool only underlined the importance of how the individual aims at giving the best pictorial representation of self so that others may view him or her as such. As a response to whether she would consider not posting filter manipulated pictures, Anne responded; *Err No! I need to look my best when I post otherwise what is the point. If I weren't interested in looking good and getting recognition for it (likes and comments), I would be on twitter. So, err yes there is need for me to use filters in all my posts (Anne, telephone conversation recorded on 23/11/18, Aarhus) (for reference see Figure 5 below)*



*Figure 5*

Giddens' view is that individuals give themselves identity through what they engage in, this is what he terms as reconstructive endeavors, what an individual does is core to how an individual construct an identity, thus the narrative everyone else gets to know of, and the individual is guided by the requirement to put a homogenous at every appointed time (Goffman,1959,64) . Thus, the capacity by Anne to keep reproducing filtered images and sending a manipulated depiction of herself is a construction of an identity

that the self and its audience will get to know or relate to. The findings point to the filtered images as tools for building or rebuilding a coherent and rewarding narrative and thus the self is constructed. An individual creates, maintains and revises a biographical for recognition and affirmation, a case of managing a fostered impression (Gauntlett,2008,107). Key to success of this narrative is continuous posting of similar visuals as shown by the image above and by the individuals own admission, the need to look her best is pushed by the social parameters through likes and comments, the self however is not constant, seeking new knowledge to monitor and modify self ensures is a reflexive ongoing project Giddens identifies.

### *Influence of Engagements in Lifestyle Choices*

This explicitly a Giddens idea about creation of lifestyles being a product of group pressures, or the visibility of role model, linking individual to communities like him or her, people with similar interest (Giddens 1991,82 & Gauntlett, 2008,112). The selection of this particular project emanated from individuals using the same hashtag (#Aalborg), although they may all be divided into sub categories, it may be suggested that it's a community which shares a similar interests and goals to be influential and prominent in Aalborg. Modernity presents a variety of options and the individual embraces a particular type of narrative not only because it's ideal but that the individual fits into a community with people who have made similar choices (Gauntlett,2008,112). This Gauntlett sees it as identifiable material that gives shape to a construction of the self. In my findings, Instagram engagements determine ones' choices of what to put out, drawing the individual into that specific lifestyle activity more and more, to generate content. Asked as to what he posts and whether the main reason is for likes and comments he responds: *I rarely post anything different nowadays, it's all about the gym and workout routines... it's not that I will be looking for likes, but I do get them mostly from workout freaks like me (Lars, face to face Interview,15/11/2018) (See Figure 6 below)*

One of the motivations of self-presentation in (pleasing the audience) is to match one's self presentation to the audience's expectations and preferences (Baumeister and Hutton 1987,71). Data gathered suggests that the individual in this case is being forced to maintain a narrative, a lifestyle choice that seems to have been embraced by a people with similar preferences hence the motivation Lars gets (in Instagram likes) to post similar material. Giddens sees lifestyle as a decision taken and courses of action followed (1991,82). The individual continues his lifestyle routine because it is accommodated and in turn gives material to a self-identity narrative (Giddens,1991,81). Instagram provides a setting to which Lars' routine is based on, in constructing an identity the individual projects self to be, the images become valuable material towards successfully projecting an idealized version of self through visuals.



Figure 6

By referring to lifestyles as a container of identity' and cluster of habits' Gauntlett (2008,112) and Giddens (1991,82), respectively, suggest cohesion of actions and behavior within a lifestyle. Lars post below (See Figure 7 below) show consistency in posting what is expected of him peers of a similar lifestyle. The findings suggest that by posting material that is similar and identifiable within the fitness area, the individual is building an identity that one has projected. Through this sustaining of a narrative, an identity of the self is constructed to which the individual and the followers on Instagram may recognize. Hence individual's needs and character will be swayed and modified by social experiences and interaction, on Instagram engagements serve as the interaction one may have influence from in determining the visuals to put out. A closer look at Lars comments section (see Figure 9) shows that fellow people who enjoy working out as the respondent does embrace him through likes and favorable comments, which is core to how the individual constructs an identity that is accepted by the followers on Instagram. Who to be is a key question in constructing identity and the individual chose this lifestyle, construction of the self therefore is realized in what an individual engages in and the response one gets.

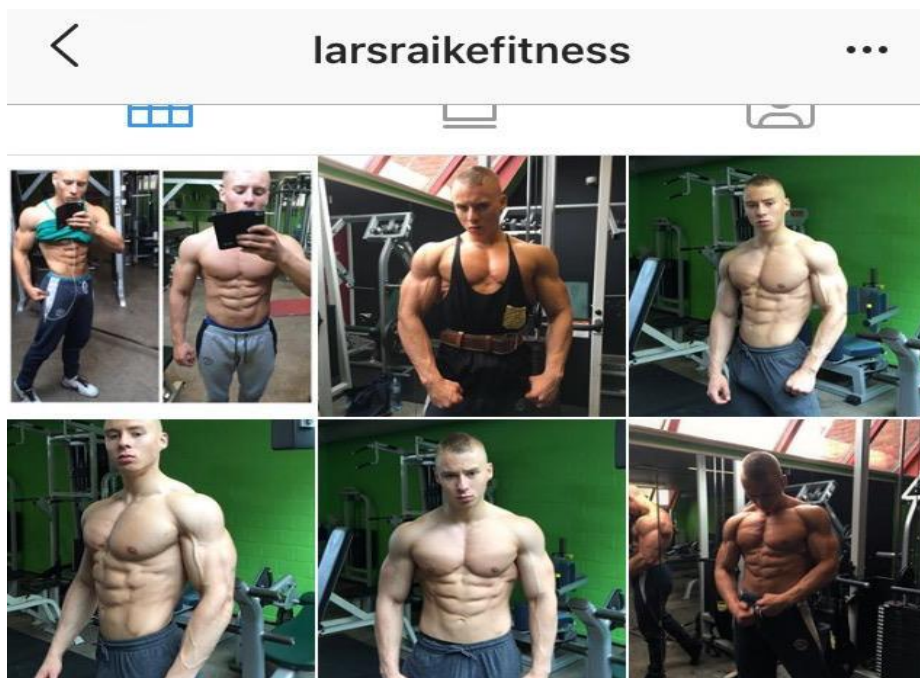


Figure 7

### *Managing Impressions*

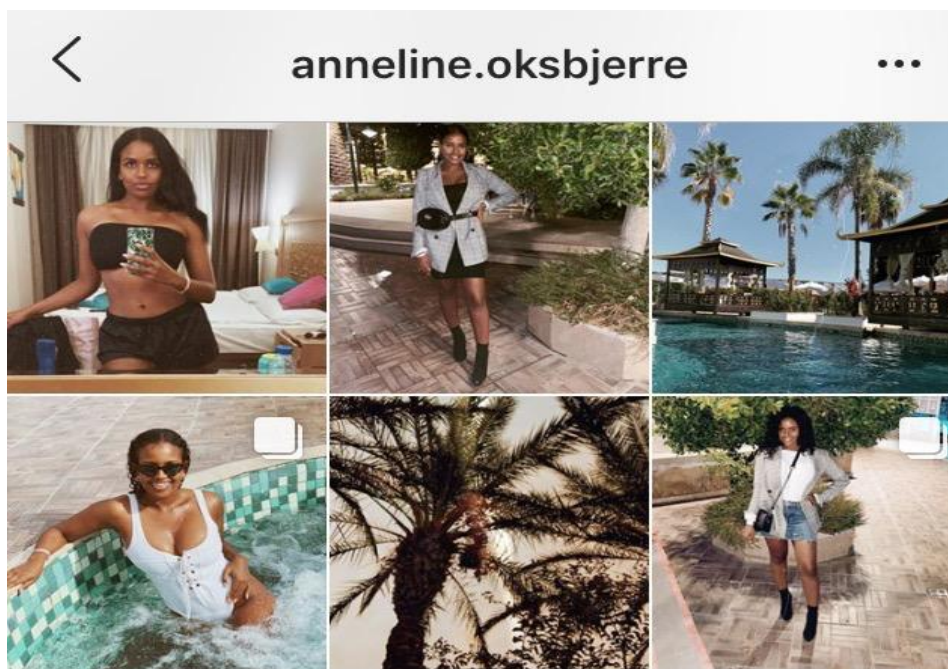
The above findings have one recurring theme in that the individual is acting in a particular manner as a response to either keeping up with a trend in Anne's use of filters for instance while engagements in Lars case prompts him to realize the need to maintain the kind of successful visual content, he is putting out selected posts that keeps that narrative. A third respondent, Camilla in response to the criteria she uses to select pictures she posts stated that: *Well I'm quite selective there, I upload pictures I see to be excellent pictures of me. To be honest, I do not think anyone uploads what they consider bad pictures of themselves (Camilla, face to face interview on 30/11/2018)*

The findings point to the idea respondent clearly feels Instagram needs a particular input to be different. The understanding from this finding however refer to the idea Goffman pointed out of impression management, that impressions that may disrupt a narrative may be suppressed so that the impression being fostered may survive. Camilla is unconsciously imploring impression management tact in being selective of what to post so that whatever impression that is being constructed may survive and not be disrupted. With audience on her Instagram application used to a specific narrative, the individual is aware of the expectations of her virtual community and the need to reflect on what to upload on Instagram.

Thus, it can be suggested that Instagram represents an environment which determines on who the self has to be, with the individual reflexively building an identity to keep a particular biography going. Goffman identifies the back stage as the place that hides away the performer when in need of a relaxation. This idea is appropriate in understanding Instagram and the constructions of the individual identity thereof are realized when distinguishing what the followers must see and what is kept away. That images shown by Camilla to her Instagram followers are how they will identify the her, and the individual too will identify herself through those impressions for an idealized identity individual chose. A performer engenders in his audience the belief he or she is related to an idealized or projected narrative (Goffman 1959,56)

### *Sustaining narratives*

Findings suggest that Instagram presents an opportunity for individuals to continuously shape selves through visuals, with engagements playing a part as motivation for the self to be creative with the content. The idea of creative input Giddens puts forward is realized as the individual conducts self-interrogation into what is happening and reacts to it to keep a narrative going. After being asked what her criteria of posting is and if she gets likes for it, Anne responded: *I used to post more when I travelled abroad, but this year because of work commitments I haven't travelled as much... but I still get likes from pictures here at home, so my page is not dead at least (Anne, telephone conversation recorded on 23/11/18, Aarhus) (See Figure 8 Below),*



### Figure 8

Anne's reasons for posting prior to being busy at work was mainly pictures taken while abroad but has since remolded herself into posting pictures from home. She realized that to keep her Instagram alive she had to alter herself and post content within her reach. These findings may suggest that the visual narrative, just like any other formalized narrative must be worked and calls for creative input as a matter of course (Giddens, 1991,76). The engagements are still crucial in Anne adopting her newly created role on Instagram, she raises acknowledges that she is still getting likes, clearly a factor in sustaining the new role as the self sees the creative input being rewarded in the form of like hence affirmation that one is on the right path. The individual here assesses the particular frame of the interaction, which in this case comes from the engagement from her followers, and present themselves accordingly (McGee and Warms,2013,2). Thus, findings suggestion that self-representation on Instagram is flexible to change to sustain a narrative, construction of the self on Instagram takes many forms constantly revising and rebuilding itself in the process. Anne's engagements are confirmation to the success of her alteration of her visuals, making her posts just as popular and seemingly unhindered from change of a narrative, construction of a new self is realized.

#### *Backstage a rarity*

Goffman's concept of the backstage can be defined as the period or time when an individual is not in character, is relaxed and has stopped putting on a performance. The audience is not allowed to see this part of the individual so that the front continues to foster impressions uninterrupted. Probed as to whether pictures on Instagram are a representation of her, Anne argued... *Of course, I like to be liked on Instagram but that does not make me an Instagram model in anyway, those are my favorite moments in my life in my own clothes, even if you see me in person, I will still dress like that... (Anne, telephone conversation recorded on 23/11/18, Aarhus)*

This finding served as evidence to how the backstage may become problematic in relation to how people represent themselves on Instagram. The individual here does not drop back into the backstage but carries the performance with him, making the backstage nonexistent. Further to the discussion about the backstage and its problematic application to Instagram, asked on whether visuals posted had nothing to do with factual representation, but desirability, the respondent argued, *I do not think that's true, for me it's just a photo album, I post exactly the things I do every day (Lars, face to face interview, 15/11/2018)*

The respondent clearly sees no distinction between real and online impression as to him this all a continuation of a representation of who he is. Findings suggest that the individual may rarely drop off to the backstage, because the behavior associated with a chosen lifestyle will likely have practical value in itself (Gauntlett 2008,112). Goffman's idea is that the character in a play closes stops a performance, drops the onstage persona to let off steam in the backstage which represents the out of character self. The quote above is evidence that individuals on Instagram see no distinction of selves in real life against Instagram visuals. Lars sees his posts as memoir of the self, visually, hence he life does not differ from his character off Instagram but a rather serves as a continuation of it. The backstage does not exist for such an individual as his life outside Instagram does not change forming a pattern to which one is identified with by a community.

The findings do suggest a need for cohesion between the online self and the offline self, meaning the backstage is rarely a possibility. Taking into consideration the manner to which the primary data for this paper was obtained, prominent users of #Aalborg will naturally be well known in the Aalborg community and to sustain the idealized visual, they must resemble these in real life for affirmation hence the backstage becomes a rarity. The reflexive project does not stop only on Instagram but the performance is carried into real life for validity purposes.

## Discussion and Critical Reflections

This section of the paper will aim at providing links between the study any correlations in the data and expanding on any leads found in the analysis that may be critical in response to the initial problem statement raised in this study. Critical reflections will also be part of this section, assessing the reliability of steps taken for this study and how they may prove to be useful or provide uncertainties to this study. I will interpret my findings and argue for their appropriateness or lack thereof to this study. Recurring themes in the selected findings core to understanding reconstruction of the self-include how individuals sustain a narrative on, how people posting similar content may embrace each other on Instagram, the everyday question of who to be, use of filters and how the backstage concept is seen as irrelevant in analyzing Instagram users.

### *Discussion*

This section will aim explaining any leads and correlations apparent in the data and expand on the patterns and concerns raised in the analysis section.

The findings from other scholars such as Hendrickse et. al (2017), on how Instagram is mainly for self-promotional purposes and engagements drive them on in putting particular content to gain affirmation confirmed as valid hypothesis this study found. Social acceptance was key to the taking up of a lifestyle and that is demonstrated through visuals that were identifiable to a certain group e.g. Lars posts were only about fitness visuals that kept him getting affirmation from other gym fanatics. It confirms the initial hypothesis of this study that through likes and comments the individual is urged to posts similarly or alter a narrative. This indicates that individual generates content to sustain a narrative but uses the opportunity to promote a particular narrative about self to be acceptable and relevant. I will argue that in using #Aalborg as all the interviewees did, it was for purposes of reach and spreading awareness for more traffic to ones' account. Findings indicated the need for engagements to act as affirmation of visuals presented, and I argue, this shapes how the individuals may find reason to continue a narrative or alter the visual presentation on Instagram.

A previous research on Instagram by Jackson and Luchner suggested that individuals gain social validation through engagements or being followed, which may reaffirm their sense of self (2015,3). This hypothesis is true and similar to one this study has attained in that identity rests on the confirmation of the society as the basis for one to continue with or alter a narrative. On self-promotional as the main reason behind Instagram use, Sheldon and Bryant argue that one of the main motives of Instagram is for narcissistic purposes, with individuals active on Instagram aiming at appearing cool and be perceived in a positive light (2016). Similar findings in this paper suggest that affirmation is key to how individuals act on Instagram.

In responding to the initial question this paper raises, construction of the self on Instagram is apparent. Individuals do take on a character or storyline and sustain such a story for self-promotional purposes, with engagements acting as motivation and confirmation of success. Evidence suggest that in considering what to post on Instagram, and confirming that the images are actual representation of the self, it confirms the initial hypothesis of this study that Instagram impacts how the self is understood, constructions of identities hereon will consists of idealized versions of the self as the findings show, with the self forced to sustain that a narrative by relating to fostered impression as much as possible in front of an audience. Convincing an audience of an identity is a matter of the individual convincing itself. The study could not however determine whether that would be true when the self is in a non-related Instagram space as to whether one carries this fostered impression and becomes habituated in it.

### *Critical Reflections*



In selecting prominent influential people as the focus for this research, the study may have chosen a population that may actually behave as they do on Instagram hence the prominence. The findings do suggest a need for cohesion between the online self and the offline self, meaning the back stage could not be established in the research. Taking into consideration the manner to which the primary data for this paper was obtained, prominent users of #Aalborg will naturally be well known in the Aalborg community and sustain the idealized visual, they must resemble these in real life for affirmation hence the backstage becomes a rarity. The reflexive project does not stop only on Instagram but the performance is carried into real life for validity purposes. A varying sample for the primary data within the Instagram community of users would have sufficed, top posts, less prominent to non-prominent users may well have provided a variation, thus the chosen respondents may have been one dimensional as the findings indicate.

Methods used to data collection for this study may also prove to be problematic. The findings pointed out to how the interviewees referred to Instagram visuals as more of a memoir of their lives, with one respondent pointing out that it simply is a photo album rather than a fabricated representation. Even though I may argue that by them admitting to filter manipulation of images and that they do carefully select pictures that they deem acceptable for sharing on Instagram, interviews may not have been the best data gathering option for a conclusive true outcome. It can be discussed that the interviewees may have responded in a way that helped them further foster their impressions and promote themselves for authenticity purposes. Since Instagram is for self-promotional purposes, the respondent may never willingly put at risk the validity of their narratives and see this as an opportunity to maintain and sustain the authenticity of their visual presentations. By singling the respondents out from such a huge group, they may have given answers that may incorporate with the reasons why they were chosen as participants in the first place which in this case is prominence.

## Conclusion

Visual representation on Instagram and engagements thereof are key to individuals forming a narrative. The use of manipulated images is made use of by individuals to post what they idealize or project themselves to be. Engagements serve as affirmation an individuals' relevance and prominence on Instagram with those with less engagements seeking to alter a narrative to be influential. Authenticity is key however, for a successful narrative to be realized, one must put coherent pictures, content that is continuous and for the audience, followers on Instagram to find such an individual as relevant. Visuals on Instagram, however, shape the behavior and actions outside Instagram to sustain a fostered impression and thus to one gets to be successful by managing these impressions successfully.

It was argued that such actions may be taken as a performance by the individual. It was argued that in manipulating pictures and being creative about what to put out, the individual is aware of the audience needs and expectations of the individual hence for relevancy purposes, the individual takes on a persona or a character to please the audience. The late modern society was also argued to be an environment that gives individuals concerns about who to be, hence the individual becomes reflexive, ready to alter or change itself to suit its environmental habits. Self-construction on Instagram and the self continues to change because its environment and because the needs and trends continuously change too.

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