

# Love Me or Hate Me! This is Who I am: The Use of Instagram to Create Shared Ethnic Identity Practices: An Abstract



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**Abstract** Western media depictions of South Asians (SAs) are tinged with stereotypes (Madhawi 2017; Hirji 2019). Given their underrepresentation and misrepresentation, using Web 2.0 technologies, young SAs are circumventing traditional media gatekeepers to create and share content (Madhawi 2019; Shah 2019). This exploratory research uses a thick data approach to examine how young western women of SA heritage use Instagram, specifically the account @browngirlgang, to promote their collective wellbeing by expressing their ethnic identity in face of societal and intra-community pressures. We liken this setting to an online counter-space (Mwangi et al. 2018), a communal venue where those experiencing discrimination (e.g., racist, sexist, ableist narratives) can find reprieve by promoting positive self-concepts that enhance their well-being (Case and Hunter 2012). Ethnic identity, in turn, is a part of an individual's self-concept that stems from "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1984, 255). Based on interpretive qualitative research tenets (Geertz 1973), the thick data approach comprises three-stage layering process of contextualization, description, and signification (Latzko-Toth et al. 2016). Preliminary findings consist of four emergent themes. *Sharing the challenges of mainstream narratives of beauty and glamour* pertains to celebrating varied skin tones, and body shapes that counter lived experiences of feeling not beautiful enough while growing up in western societies. *Celebrating entrepreneurial and*

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*business efforts of South Asian women* highlight SA celebrities and non-celebrity artists, writers, business owners/ executives, entrepreneurs, and activists for empowerment purposes. *Laughing together in shared “fusion” culture* consist of content, including pop-culture based memes, utilizing SA languages and cultural elements for humor and community building purposes. *Seeking comfort when challenged by socio-cultural norms* comprises images that counter both western mainstream prejudices (e.g., stereotypes of being meek and compliant), and intra-ethnic community gender and sexual orientation-based discrimination. The @browngirlgang situates SA culture within the context of mainstream western culture and thereby bridge two (or more) cultures. Moreover, the research highlights the diversity of SAs, their accomplishments, and provides support for those traditionally marginalized within SA communities all of which serves to influence others and their own self-perceptions.

**Keywords** Brown Girl Movement · Ethnic identities · South Asian women · Instagram · Social Media Self-branding

References Available Upon Request