To swipe or not to swipe? How self-presentation influences online dating app brand experience

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Apologies Hamlet, but 'to swipe or not to swipe' is the real question, especially in today's dating climate. With the advent of online dating applications (ODAs) such as Tinder, Bumble and Hinge the search for a potential partner has become remarkably effortless. With a projected revenue of $23.8 million in 2024 and the expected number of users to reach 9.4 million by 2029, the global online dating market has made it possible for love to make the world go round. The advantage of dating online is that you can update and polish your profile almost to the point where you appear as Mr or Mrs. Perfect - but the question remains: Does how we portray ourselves and how others seem to present themselves influence the experience we have with using the ODA?

Despite extensive research on social networking sites, understanding factors of self-presentation relating to ODA usage, especially from a brand experience perspective in South Africa, remains unexplored. It is important to study the numerous factors associated with self-presentation and its influence on the overall ODA brand experience of the application user, as it can produce insight for app developers regarding how to improve the user experience with the ODA. Therefore, the purpose of this study conducted by Sharlé Smit, a [Master's] student in the [Department of]

[Marketing Management](#) in 2024, was to close the gap in research by examining how self-presentation factors (subjective norms, fear of negative evaluation, misrepresentation, and user congruence) influence the ODA brand experience of South African users.

Data was collected employing a self-administered online survey hosted on Qualtrics, and a total of 208 valid responses from South African ODA users were captured. The results of the analysis revealed that subjective norms and user congruence significantly influence ODA brand experience, therefore suggesting that the behaviour and preferences of other ODA users influence how a user chooses to present themselves and, ultimately, their experience with using the ODA. Surprisingly, misrepresentation and fear of negative evaluation showed no significant influence, suggesting that users might be more confident in their self-presentation and expect some form of exaggeration or level of deceit from other users on their profile.

Theoretically, this study makes a unique contribution to the growing body of literature on ODA usage in South Africa, as it views self-presentation factors through the lens of brand experience. From a practical perspective, the findings offer insight to ODA marketers and developers on which factors to focus on to create inclusive, user-friendly platforms that meet the diverse needs of South African ODA users. These insights will also help managers and guide developers on how to improve certain ODA features or adjust certain marketing objectives to foster engagement, enhance overall user brand experience, and create long-lasting positive relationships with users.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2024 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Sharlé Smit under the supervision of [Prof Yolanda Jordaan](#).