LinkedIn users' self-brand congruence, attitudes and social media use integration

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Abstract

This paper describes a sample of LinkedIn users in South Africa. The main purpose of the study was to compile a consumer profile of LinkedIn users based on several measures (such as usage behaviour, self- and brand-personality traits and attitudes towards the LinkedIn brand). The study contributes to literature by including users' personality traits, perceived brand-personality traits, self-brand congruence (SBC) and social media use integration in the investigation. Self-congruity theory is used as a basis to examine SBC in the LinkedIn context. The study entailed a cross-sectional quantitative design using a survey of LinkedIn users in Gauteng, the economic hub of South Africa. Primary results indicate that despite low usage patterns, self-brand congruence is high and attitudes towards the LinkedIn brand are positive. Social media use integration is not prevalent, yet it correlates positively with brand attitude.

Keywords: social networking sites, brand personality, self-brand congruence, attitudes, LinkedIn

Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have grown to play a significant role in people's lives. A wide variety of SNSs exists today, with each one offering different functions or features for their users. Facebook, for example, was originally planned for personal social networking whereas LinkedIn was aimed at professionals. LinkedIn is the global leader in terms of online professional networks (Bastian et al. 2014, 1).

As social networking has developed and more SNSs have been created, research on SNSs has also grown, particularly over the last decade. In particular, research on the world's largest SNS, Facebook, has abounded and a plethora of studies on its usage and users are available across various disciplines (Wilson, Gosling and Graham 2012, 204). Research specifically focused on LinkedIn is less prolific and focal topics include examining its usability (Al-Badi Okam, Al Roobaea and Mayhew 2013), network distance in LinkedIn people search (Huang, Tunkelang and Karahalios 2014), using LinkedIn as a teaching tool (McCorkle and McCorkle 2012), and the effect of self-endorsement in advertising on LinkedIn (Ahn and Phua 2013). Some comparative studies examined self-expression on LinkedIn and Facebook (Van Dijck 2013), virtual geographies of LinkedIn, Facebook and ASMallWorld (Papacharissi 2009), workplace use of Facebook and LinkedIn (Skeels and Grudin 2009), and one longitudinal study examined the use of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter with a focus on organizational communication (Archambault and Grudin 2012). Recently, Ewing (2016) investigated the utility of LinkedIn as an instrument for professional networking.

None of these studies examined personality traits of LinkedIn users, nor social media use integration of members. Social media use integration refers to the manner in which social media form an integral part of users' lives, as well as the emotional connection users hold towards social media. It builds on the concept of social media use intensity. Additionally, congruence between individual personality and perceived SNS platform personality (self-brand congruence) has also not been assessed on LinkedIn. Studies that assess self-brand congruence on social media are generally scarce. Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang and Mallin (2013) examined perceived SNS-self personality match on Facebook and Twitter in the context of brand relationships and Pentina, Zhang and Basmanova (2013) reported on this phenomenon with reference to trust in Twitter as a social media brand.

The research objectives set to fulfil the purpose of composing a consumer profile of LinkedIn users, aimed to investigate: the personality traits of LinkedIn users and the LinkedIn brand; the attitudes of users towards LinkedIn; social media use integration; and self-brand congruence (SBC).

Literature review

Theoretical background

In this research, self-congruity theory is used as a basis to examine SBC in the context of an online social network, LinkedIn. The theory postulates that consumers match their perceptions of themselves with their perception of the brand's image (Sirgy 1982, 289; Sirgy et al. 1997, 230). If the match is seen as high, the consumer will likely engage in favourable behaviours associated with the brand, such as developing a positive brand attitude and the intention to use the brand. Self-congruity can therefore be characterized as the match (or mismatch) between the self-image of the consumer and the image conveyed by the brand. According to Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy (2012, 1179), the success of value-expressive brands is determined by self-congruity. Parker (2009, 175), citing several authors, elaborates that image congruence, a "mental comparison that consumers make in regards to the similarity or dissimilarity of a brand's image and their own self-image' is instrumental in creating positive brand attitudes.

Overview of social networking sites (SNS)

Online SNSs communities provide a platform for people to communicate, interact and share ideas and values with other members. According to Kim, Sohn and Choi (2011, 365), SNSs allow users from around the world to connect to others. Various SNSs term member contacts in different ways – Facebook, for example, features 'friends', Twitter users have 'followers', and LinkedIn refers to 'connections'.

SNS use is prolific worldwide – Doğan and Tosun (2016, 124) report that users spend 2.4 hours on SNSs daily. According to Duffet and Wakeman (2016, 28), a comprehensive survey

of millennials in South Africa indicated that the majority use social media for up to two hours per session. As for LinkedIn, Archambault and Grudin (2012, 2743) reported that LinkedIn daily use had increased from 2008 to 2011.

LinkedIn, which originated in 2003, is an SNS aimed specifically at business professionals. It is designed for the purpose of users being able to share work-related information with other business professionals such as their current colleagues, past colleagues, as well as exploring new job opportunities. LinkedIn is the world's largest professional online network and in South Africa it has been growing exponentially and it has 3.8 million users (Goldstuck 2015, 73). The most recent development in LinkedIn's history is its acquisition by Microsoft, which will be completed by the end of 2017 (Ho 2016).

The platform consists of different features that are consistently being developed (Bastian et al. 2014, 1). According to Olsen (2008, 6) these features can be divided into four main categories: profile, network, interaction, and jobs and hiring. The profile is used to define the user by providing all the necessary information such as name and place of employment.

Networking, the primary focus of LinkedIn, allows users to find information about companies and other users, and search for new job opportunities (Olsen 2008, 7). According to Vickey (2011, 43) interaction includes four features, namely inbox, questions, answers, and groups. Jobs and hiring includes: search, jobs insider and the post features.

Personality

According to Wehrli (2008, 4) personality can be conceptualized as 'the entire mental organization of a person's traits'. Traits refer to a set of attributes unique to the individual, which are consistent over time. The Big Five (or Five-Factor) model of personality has grown in popularity over the years and has been used extensively in research. John and Srivastava (1999, 105) outline the dimensions referred to in the Big Five as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (neuroticism), and openness to experience (intellect).

Extraversion indicates a person's degree of sociality: a very sociable person would be characterized as high in extraversion whereas a shy, quiet person would exhibit low

extraversion. Highly agreeable individuals are typically friendly and sympathetic, whereas distant, reserved people are considered low in agreeableness. People who are disorganized and easily distracted would be classified as low in conscientiousness, while those who are dependable, organized and thorough would reflect high levels of conscientiousness (Wehrli 2008, 5). Neurotic individuals tend to be sensitive and nervous as opposed to people with high emotional stability. Openness to experience indicates people's degree of innovativeness and need for novelty; low levels would thus signify resistance to change and a traditional outlook (Clark and Çalli 2014, 328).

Marketers have been using personality as a way to humanize brands for many years. The concept of brand personality was defined by Aaker (1997, 347) as the human characteristics which can be associated with a particular brand. Self-congruity theory postulates that brands that are similar (congruent) to the self-image of the consumer will be preferred as they convey symbolic cues valuable to the consumer's self-image (Kuenzel and Halliday 2010, 174).

Only a few researchers have examined the congruence between social media brands and members' personalities, notably Pentina, Gammoh, et al. (2013) and Pentina, Zhang, et al. (2013) in the context of Facebook and Twitter. This has not been studied on LinkedIn yet.

According to Pentina, Gammoh, et al. (2013, 68), the personality of an SNS should reflect the traits common to its users. In this study, LinkedIn is considered as a social media brand with a specific personality, and the congruence between the user's self-personality and the personality of the LinkedIn brand (self-brand congruence) is investigated.

Social media use integration

The integration of social media into the lives of users is said to benefit them socially and emotionally. Merely considering the frequency of social media use is not an adequate indication of the importance thereof; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright and Johnson (2013, 48) assert that measuring how users integrate social media into their social routines, as well as their emotional connection to social media, is much more useful. To this end, they developed the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS), which is a 10-item scale that measures two dimensions of social media use integration. The dimensions are Social Integration and

Emotional Connection (SIEC) and Integration into Social Routines (ISR). SIEC is measured by items relating to using an SNS to communicate, feeling connected to others and being emotionally connected to the SNS. ISR examines how the SNS forms part of the user's habits and how enjoyable it is to use the platform.

The SMUIS is partly based on the popular Facebook Intensity Scale (FIS) developed by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). According to Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013, 38) other measures of social media use (including the FIS) was not rigorously tested and therefore they created the SMUIS as a more methodologically sound measure.

Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013) intended the SMUIS to be flexible so as to enable its use in SNS contexts other than Facebook. They recommended that the scale be tested on other social media (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. 2013, 48), which is the case in this research. Studies using the SMUIS focused on Facebook (Akin, Ozbay and Bakut 2015; Asghar 2015), while others did not specify an SNS (Berryman 2014; Doğan and Tosun 2016; Lyon 2015; Savci and Aysan 2016; Weisen 2016; Woods and Scott 2016). To date, no other study has been found that measured social media use integration for LinkedIn.

Attitudes

An attitude is commonly referred to as a learned predisposition towards an object and can be favourable or unfavourable. Attitudes are often measured in research as they are deemed indicators of behavioural intent (and eventually, behaviour). According to Ajzen (2001, 42), attitudes remain important in research due to their ability to '…predict behavioural intentions and overt behaviour'. This has been shown to be true of social networking. Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo (2011, 179) report that attitude towards SNS has a significant positive influence on intention to use SNS. In this study, respondents' attitudes towards LinkedIn were measured in order to examine whether they view the platform favourably or unfavourably, and also to examine how other constructs (for example, social media use integration and self-brand congruence) associate with attitudes.

Hypothesis formulation

Owing to the limited research examining social media use integration (specifically, the SMUIS), and no studies examining the associations between social media use integration and brand attitudes, hypothesis formulation was difficult. However, Hermann (2016) investigated the relationship between Facebook use intensity (as measured by the FIS) and brand attitudes. Hermann (2016, 125) found in his German study that Facebook use intensity influences attitudes towards local brands negatively, but for global brands there was no significant effect. As Facebook use intensity has some common ground with social media use integration, the following exploratory hypothesis was set:

H1: there will be significant correlations between social media use integration and LinkedIn brand attitude.

Self-congruity theory proposes that high self-brand congruence should facilitate the creation of favourable brand attitudes. This theoretical link is supported by empirical studies, for example Sirgy et al. (1997, 239), who found a significant correlation between self-image congruence and brand attitudes. Similarly, Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2012, 1183) indicate, in a meta-analysis of self-congruence studies, that the self-congruity effect explains variance in (among others) consumer attitudes. Parker (2005, 75) indicated that significant relationships existed between congruence and brand attitude in his study that examined high-end brands. Contrarily, other research focused on luxury brands found no significant relationships between brand personality congruence and brand attitudes (Liu, Li, Mizerski and Soh 2012, 930).

A review of literature on self-congruity did not reveal studies that focused on examining self-brand congruence in a social media context. However, Parker (2005, 4) explains that self-brand congruence's effect on attitudes towards brands is stronger when 'social signaling of a brand is high'. Social media platforms may be regarded as conspicuous and thus reflect high social signalling. Therefore, based on self-congruity theory and research in other contexts, the following hypothesis was set:

H2: there will be significant associations between self-brand congruence and LinkedIn brand attitude.

Research methodology

Before data was collected, ethical clearance was received from the University of Pretoria. Data was collected through a structured self-completion questionnaire distributed to 300 conveniently drawn respondents (of which 297 (99%) were fully realized). Respondents' informed consent was requested and no incentives were provided.

Measures

Aside from the main constructs, usage behaviour (usage patterns, network size, and features used), as well as demographic variables (age, gender) were also included for descriptive purposes. Scales were measured on five-point Likert-type scales (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree), apart from attitude, which was measured on a semantic differential scale, and features used on LinkedIn, which was labelled 1 ='Never' to 5 ='Always' for frequency of use features. The measures, details and sources are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale reliabilities

Measure	Scale / details	Source
Personality	Ten-item personality inventory (TIPI) for self-personality and perception of LinkedIn brand (to allow calculation of SBC).	Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann (2003)
Social media use integration	SMUIS (SIEC six items; ISR four items). One item reverse scored.	Jenkins-Guarnieri, et al. (2013)
Attitude towards LinkedIn	Attributes: appealing - unappealing; bad - good; unpleasant - pleasant; unfavourable - favourable; likable - unlikable.	Ajzen (2001)
Features used on LinkedIn	Thirteen features	Gerard (2011) adapted from Park (2010)
LinkedIn usage patterns	Length of LinkedIn use. Average weekly log-in pattern. Average time spent on LinkedIn per session. Number of connections (open-ended).	Clarke and Çalli (2014); Ewing (2016).

Scales were considered reliable at Cronbach alpha scores of 0.7 or more (Pallant 2013, 101). Reliabilities for attitudes (0.76), SMUIS (0.79) and features used on LinkedIn (0.85) were acceptable. Note that Cronbach alphas were not calculated for the TIPI based on Gosling et al.'s (2003, 316) assertion of optimized content validity rather than reliability as indicated by alphas. Gosling et al. demonstrated sufficient proof of the TIPI's validity and reliability using other measures suitable to its nature (refer to Gosling et al. (2003) for a full account thereof).

Results

Demographics

The gender distribution of the sample was relatively even: females 52% and males 48%. The age groups of the respondents are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2:   Age profile of respondents

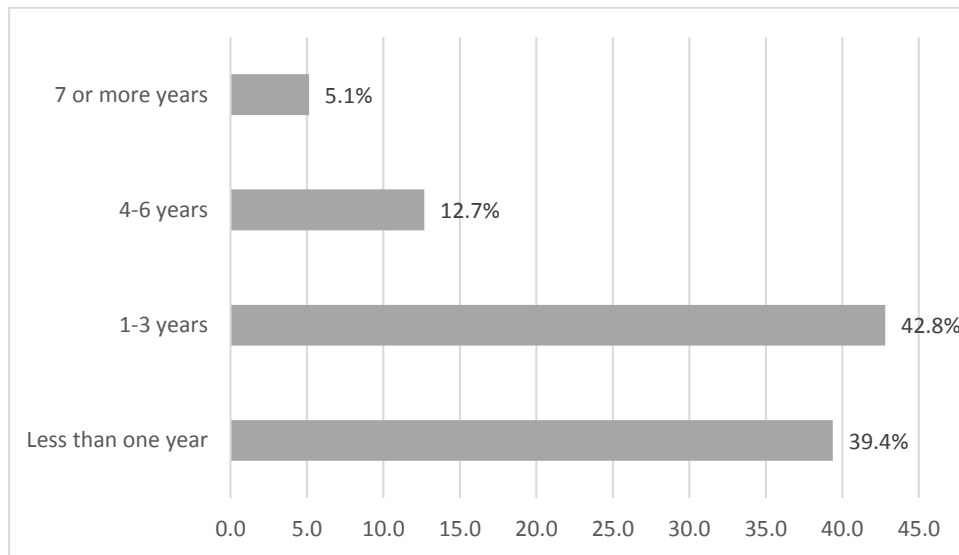|	**N**	**%**
Age:		
18-25 years	174	58.6
26-34 years	68	22.9
35-46 years	39	13.1
47-65 years	16	5.4
Total	297	100

The majority (58.6%) of the respondents are between 18-25 years of age. Thus the respondent pool is primarily representative of an emerging adult cohort.
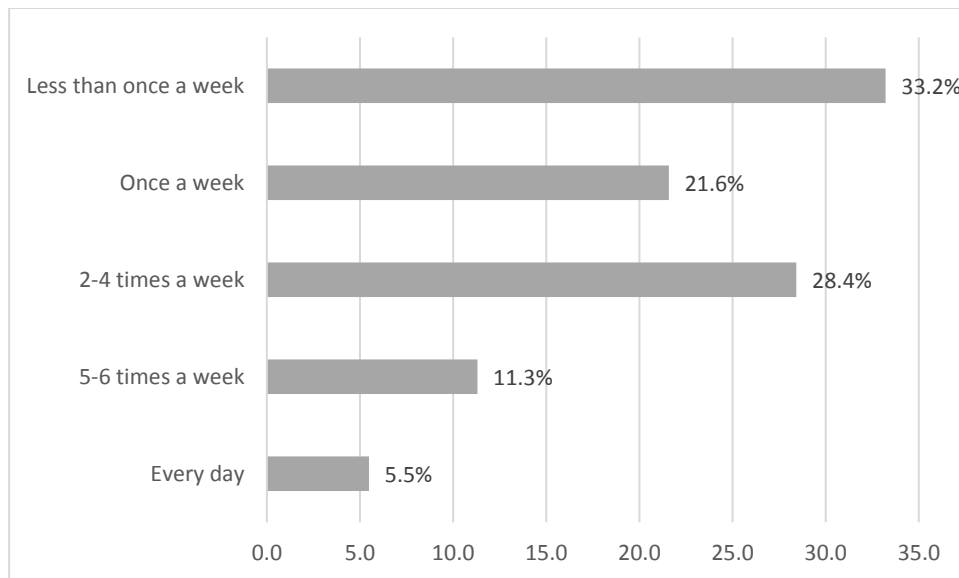
Usage patterns and behaviour

LinkedIn usage patterns

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the length of use (in years) and weekly log-ins.

Figure 1 Length of use

Category	Percentage
7 or more years	5.1%
4-6 years	12.7%
1-3 years	42.8%
Less than one year	39.4%

Figure 2 Average weekly log-ins

Category	Percentage
Less than once a week	33.2%
Once a week	21.6%
2-4 times a week	28.4%
5-6 times a week	11.3%
Every day	5.5%

The majority (42.8%) of respondents have been using LinkedIn between one to three years, and most (33.2%) log into LinkedIn less than once a week. Additionally, almost half (49.7%) of respondents indicated that they spend five to 15 minutes on LinkedIn when they are logged in.

The results suggest that the respondents are not prolific users of LinkedIn; this may be due to the nature of the platform as a professional rather than a socially-focused SNS. Additionally, as this sample was largely representative of emerging adults, they may not yet be in a position

to fully appreciate the utility of a professional SNS and thus not use it as extensively as they would a personal SNS.

These results concur with findings by Ewing (2016, 47, 48), who reported that most respondents in that study on college students were members of LinkedIn for 1-2 years, and that the majority use the platform monthly rather than more often. Contrarily, Duffet and Wakeman's (2016, 29) results indicate that in their study of social media usage amongst millennials, most have been using social media for three years (or more), and that 61% log in on a daily basis. As these authors examined Facebook and Mxit use, their results may be different due to the more personal social nature of their studied platforms.

On average the respondents in this research have around 86 connections. This is a larger network size than was reported by Ewing (2016, 50), as more than half of that sample reported between one and 10 connections. This may be due to Ewing's study focusing on students only, whereas this study also included non-students.

LinkedIn features used

In order to explore whether the 13 commonly used LinkedIn features could be grouped together, a Principle Components analysis (PCA) with Oblimin rotation was conducted. Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to ensure that the data was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity is considered significant at 0.05 or smaller and the KMO should exceed 0.6 (Pallant 2013, 199). The KMO value exceeded 0.6 (0.835) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity score was significant (p=0.000) indicating that the data was suitable for factor analysis. The results presented a three-component solution (factor loadings ranging between 0.394 and 0.899), explaining 58.1% of the variance. The three components were named Networking, Interacting and Profiling, based on the type of activities represented in the features that loaded on each component. The means for the three components (Networking 3.3, *SD*=0.910, Interacting 2.3, *SD*=0.783 and Profiling 3.1, *SD*=0.781) indicate that the respondents' main use is focused on networking, and that their use of the interacting functionalities of LinkedIn is irregular.

Personality

The TIPI (for self-personality and LinkedIn-personality) was scored following the recommendations of Gosling et al. (2003). The average of the two items that represent each dimension of the Big Five was calculated to reflect an overall score for the specific dimension (for example, extraversion). The descriptive results of the self-personality and the LinkedIn-personality analysis are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Self-personality and LinkedIn-personality descriptives

TIPI dimension	Self-personality means (*SD*)	LinkedIn-personality means (*SD*)
Extraversion	3.55 (0.941)	3.57 (0.894)
Agreeableness	3.54 (0.750)	3.15 (0.814)
Conscientiousness	4.11 (0.773)	3.88 (0.818)
Emotional stability	3.79 (0.857)	3.65 (0.812)
Openness	3.77 (0.799)	3.68 (0.871)

Conscientiousness (*M*=4.11), followed by emotional stability (*M*=3.79), were the traits that stood out for reported self-personality. Similarly, the most prominent perceived LinkedIn brand-personality dimension was conscientiousness (*M*=3.88). Openness was the second most prominent brand-personality trait (*M*=3.68). The respondents rated agreeableness as the lowest self-personality trait (*M*=3.54) and for LinkedIn, it was the same (*M*=3.15).

In order to reach a perceived self-brand personality match (SBC), the same procedure was followed as that used by Parker (2009, 178) and Pentina, Gammoh, et al. (2013, 71). SBC was defined as the distance between the self-personality scores and the LinkedIn-personality scores (of each trait). This was achieved by using a distance-squared model – congruence thus varies by distance. The smaller the distance score, the higher the congruence that exists between the self-personality and the LinkedIn-personality (Parker 2009, 178). SBC was calculated for each personality trait using the distance squared method (Parker 2009, 178; Pentina, Gammoh, et al. 2013, 71). The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Self-brand congruence descriptives

SBC on TIPI dimensions	Means (*SD*)
Extraversion	1.48 (1.988)
Agreeableness	1.11 (1.696)
Conscientiousness	1.13 (1.584)
Emotional stability	1.41 (1.976)
Openness	1.17 (1.646)

As mentioned previously, the smaller the distance score, the higher the SBC. From Table 4 it is clear that the distance scores are low for all five dimensions, indicating overall high levels of SBC. Thus the respondents perceive a generally strong congruence between their self-personality and the brand personality of LinkedIn. In particular, the SBC for agreeableness (*M*=1.11) and conscientiousness (*M*=1.13) are the highest.

Attitudes

The respondents have a generally positive attitude towards LinkedIn (*M*=3.8), suggesting favourable opinions about LinkedIn. This result concurs with those of Pinho and Soares (2011, 126).

Social media use integration

An Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the underlying factor structure of the SMUIS. The SMUIS resulted in a statistically significant value for Bartlett's test of sphericity, and the KMO value exceeded 0.6 (Bartlett *p*=0.000; KMO=0.865). The procedures used by Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013, 43) were followed in conducting the EFA, namely Maximum Likelihood with Promax rotation (due to the components being assumed to be correlated (Pallant 2013, 192)) and Kaiser normalization. Factor loadings exceeding 0.3 and Eigenvalues of more than 1 were considered.

The results of the EFA indicated the presence of two components, explaining 50.1% of the variance. These components corresponded with those of Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013), namely SIEC and ISR. However, one of the ISR items ('Using LinkedIn is part of my everyday routine') loaded on the SIEC component (component loading 0.507). As this was in

contrast with Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013), the decision was made to delete the item from further analysis.

The means for the two dimensions were as follows: SIEC (*M*=2.47) and ISR (*M*=3.4). The results indicate that the respondents do not feel emotionally attached to the platform as the mean for SIEC is quite low. The mean for ISR suggests that LinkedIn is moderately incorporated into the respondents' typical routines. Usage of this platform may be due to habit rather than a sense of connection. Overall, the respondents do not seem to perceive LinkedIn as playing a prominent role in their lives.

Hypothesis testing

Social media use integration and attitudes towards LinkedIn
To examine whether the dimensions of social media use integration (SIEC and ISR) and attitudes towards LinkedIn were correlated, Spearman's rho was used. No violation of assumptions occurred. The results indicated that there were statistically significant correlations (*p*=0.000). There was a small positive correlation between SIEC and attitude (*r*=0.229, n=283), and a medium positive correlation between ISR and attitude (*r*=0.326, n=284). The results suggest that higher levels of social media integration are associated with more positive attitudes towards LinkedIn. These results provide support for H1.

SBC and attitudes towards LinkedIn
To determine the associations between self-brand congruence and attitudes towards LinkedIn, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Assumptions as required by Pallant (2013, 163-166) were met in terms of sample size, multicollinearity and normality of distribution, as well as homoscedasticity of variance. Mahalanobis distances exceeding the critical value of 20.52 (Pallant 2013, 166) were found, indicating some outliers. These cases were subsequently removed from the regression analysis. Cook's distance was less than 1, indicating that the one case with a standardized residual of more than 3.0 or below -3.0 was not problematic. As assumptions were now completely met, the analysis was conducted.

The results indicate an R square value of 0.034, indicating that the independent variables (SBC extraversion, SBC agreeableness, SBC conscientiousness, SBC emotional stability and

SBC openness) explain only 3.4% of the variance in the dependent variable (attitude). Furthermore, the ANOVA results indicated that the regression model was not significant. Thus the five independent variables in combination do not influence attitudes towards the LinkedIn brand significantly. H2 is therefore not supported.

The regression results suggest that self-brand congruence in the LinkedIn context is not an important aspect of influence on attitude and could therefore possibly also not play a prominent role in influencing intention to use (or keep using) the platform. The results are in contrast with theoretical underpinnings that propose that the self-congruity effect is predictive of variance in attitudes (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. 2012, 1183), and concur with Liu et al.'s (2012, 930) study on luxury brands.

A decision was made to examine whether the two SBC dimensions that were shown to be the highest in the descriptive analyses, namely agreeableness and conscientiousness, would predict positive brand attitude. A multiple regression was thus run with SBC agreeableness and SBC conscientiousness as independent variables and attitude as the dependent variable. This regression resulted in a significant model (p=0.047), which explained 2.2% of the variance (R square value = 0.022). Of the two SBC variables, only conscientiousness was a significant (β= -0.131 p=0.030) predictor of brand attitude. The Beta-value signifies a weak, negative relationship, meaning that the more conscientious a user is, the lower his/her level of brand attitude.

Discussion and implications

The profile of LinkedIn users provided in this research may be useful to organizations using LinkedIn to market job opportunities or other products and services, and also to LinkedIn itself as it describes the usage patterns and preferences of LinkedIn users. Furthermore, it examines the influence of social media use integration on attitude, which (as mentioned previously) is a theoretical precursor to continued use of the platform.

The findings revealed that the respondents do not use the platform extensively, as indicated by their low usage patterns and their moderate use of the features on LinkedIn. The low frequency of usage is in accordance with the findings of other studies (Archambault and

Grudin 2012, 2744). This may indicate that the content on the platform is not as interesting to all users, or that users fail to recognize the advantages of using LinkedIn. This concurs with the findings of Ewing (2016, 86) in that aspects such as content were not particularly useful to the respondents in that study. From the perspective of LinkedIn itself, efforts should be made to improve the content offered on the platform and to educate users on the benefits of utilizing LinkedIn for professional purposes.

Respondents' use of the platform features for networking (albeit not to a prolific degree) corresponds with one of the main aims of the platform. These results are similar to those of Ewing (2016, 85), who found that students in that study reported some usefulness of LinkedIn for networking purposes. As LinkedIn is not a personal social network, such a Facebook, its moderate general use and specific focus on networking seem fitting in the professional context. However, LinkedIn could find innovative ways to increase usage of features on LinkedIn and specifically promoting its important networking functionality. Once again, engaging and interesting content is the key. Goldstuck (2015, 2) emphasizes the rising importance of visual content, in particular video, in the online realm. LinkedIn and companies seeking to use the platform for marketing purposes, should pay attention to this phenomenon. Additionally, the networking aspect could be used as a starting point to draw users into using a wider variety of functionalities on LinkedIn. LinkedIn should research the effectiveness of currently featured functionalities to determine where improvements may be made, which may result in more general use of the platform.

The users' reported self-personality indicate that conscientiousness was the Big Five trait that was most prominent (M=4.11). The respondents thus see themselves as organized, dependable and as achievers. Interestingly, Wehrli (2008, 9) indicated that people who rate high on conscientiousness tend to refrain from social networking, whereas Wilson, Fornasier and White (2010) report that extroverted individuals spent more time using SNS in their study. The prominence of conscientiousness and low extraversion (which was the second-least prominent trait) may therefore be contributing reasons as to why the interactivity with LinkedIn in this research is rather low. LinkedIn could utilize the higher conscientiousness of these users to engage them in functionalities that support their goal-driven personalities. Features that enable these personality types to achieve their goals may draw them into using the platform more often.

The results showed that the respondents also see the LinkedIn personality as primarily conscientious. The LinkedIn brand is thus perceived to be a dependable, well-organized brand. The lowest-scoring trait, agreeableness, indicates LinkedIn is also seen as a personality which is reserved and distant (Clark and Çalli 2014, 328). As agreeableness is commonly associated with social interactions (Wehrli 2008, 9), this result supports the idea that LinkedIn is not a brand perceived as suitable for social pursuits. As LinkedIn is a professional social network, these results seem appropriate as social interactivity is not its primary aim – professional networking is. Being perceived as conscientious is a positive aspect for the LinkedIn brand as that represents a level of professionalism that is suitable to this type of SNS. Its low perceived agreeableness, however, may discourage use and interaction with the LinkedIn brand.

The results of self-brand congruence suggest that the respondents perceived a high level of similarity between their personality and that of LinkedIn. Conventional marketing wisdom dictates that such a high level of congruence bodes well for the brand. Furthermore, as the strongest SBC was for agreeableness, the connection between the users and the brand in this context is based on a mutual disinclination for relating to others and interacting on a social level (Wehrli 2008, 5).

The results of the regression analysis of SBC as predictive of brand attitudes did not support the hypothesis, in contrast with self-congruity theory. These results negated the theory's assertion as SBC was not a significant predictor for brand attitudes in the LinkedIn context. It may be that a social media context – and indeed the professional focus of this particular platform – does not lend itself to applications of SBC in attempts to create and maintain positive brand attitudes. Additionally, other aspects could have stronger predictive capabilities of brand attitude in this context and should be examined in future research. For example, self-expressive motivations may have a stronger effect on brand attitudes (Parker 2005, 4) in a social media framework.

From a social media use integration perspective, LinkedIn does not seem to be a very important part of the respondents' daily lives. The results suggest low levels of emotional attachment to the platform, as well as moderate integration into the typical routines of the respondents. As LinkedIn is a professional network, its main aim is not the support of

personal social relationships, thus these findings seem appropriate as emotional attachment is not considered pertinent in professional contexts. That LinkedIn does not feature prominently as part of the users' social routines is supported by the relatively low usage patterns.

Despite the seemingly low prominence of the platform in the lives of the respondents, their attitudes towards LinkedIn are positive. This may indicate that the respondents see some utility in using the platform. The results of the hypothesis test also revealed a positive correlation between social media integration and attitudes towards LinkedIn, suggesting that higher social media use integration is associated with more favourable attitudes.

Developing more compelling content or improving the platform's features may result in higher levels of social media use integration and even more positive attitudes due to positive user experience. Ajzen (2001, 43) postulates the theoretical link between attitudes and behavioural intent, asserting that favourable attitudes lead to favourable behavioural intentions. Improvements to the platform that enhance integration and also attitudes may thus lead to users continuing and even increasing their use (behaviour) of LinkedIn. Favourable user experiences may also result in users seeing the platform as a more important and prominent part of their routines.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

As with all research, this study features some limitations. Notably, the non-probability sampling method used means that the results may not be generalized. Additionally, the sample was slightly biased in favour of emerging adults, who may not yet fully realize the usefulness of a professional networking site. The lack of previous research on LinkedIn does not allow comparing this research's results with those of previous studies. The deletion of one of the ISR items from the SMUIS may also influence the results regarding social media use integration. Also, the study was limited to one geographical area.

Further research into LinkedIn is necessary to better understand LinkedIn users and their preferences. As the most prominent professional SNS, and a growing one, it has many possibilities for managers considering using it for marketing purposes. Also, more research will inform LinkedIn of possible strategies to enhance the platform's usefulness and to engage

users more productively. As the sample in this study reflected relatively low general usage, future research should attempt to include heavy, medium and low users in order to allow comparisons. It is possible that heavy users may have different levels of social media use integration, for example. It is also recommended that future studies should attempt to represent a larger proportion of older users as age may play a role in the use of the platform.

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