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Identity Construction on Social Network Sites: Facebook

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The advent of the internet has changed the way people communicate and socialize in our

societies. In some ways it has made life easier for individuals in some societies. Most human

interactions are being communicated via the internet through open source software and

websites that facilitate easy transference of messages, thus rendering time and location

irrelevant. Just by the click of a button an individual can easily access lots of information

within a short period of time. Also, it has reduced the time spent going to shops looking for

what to buy. We can instead buy many types of material objects online, all because the

internet has replaced traditional methods of common activities. The advent of the internet has

produced a new way through which people communicate and manage their social lives via the

invention of a new *universe* online known as social network sites. Social network sites are

among one of the fastest growing sites and probably the most visited websites on the Internet,

and they are usually membership based. According to Danah M. Boyd in her article *Social*

Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship, She defines Social Network Sites as the

following;

 Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public

 profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share

 a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by

others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Social network sites are similar to other type of social media and online communities that support computer-mediated communication. What distinguishes social network site from other social media and online communities are some features such as friend's lists, profiles, a Wall and other (public commenting tools) and stream based updates. These features enable users to communicate effectively and perform their identity construction:

Profiles

Profile pages are not only unique to social network sites. They can be found on other sites like dating sites, but they are central to social network sites. Profile pages serve as tools for communicating and interacting with others. Because of social network sites and often the public or semi-public nature of profiles, participants actively and consciously craft their profiles to be seen by others. Profile generation is an explicit act of writing oneself into being in a digital environment (Boyd 2006), and users must determine how they want to present themselves to others who may view their self-representation. The profile serves as a tool for interacting, giving access to participants to determine who can see what and how they want others to see them. Although social network sites can be accessed by anyone, it is left for the users to control the visibility of their profiles, either making it public or semi public depending on how individual users, wish to present themselves.

Profiles also serve as a place where people gather and make comments, so most of the times, participants do not have total control over their self representation, but the users can censor others from commenting on their profiles or pictures. For example on Facebook, users have the option to delete comments which they do not like from their profiles also

users have the ability to censor their profile in such a way that when any body comments on their status only the users has access to see the comment made.

 Friend lists

Another attribute of social network sites are Friend lists. Friend lists are a common attribute in social network sites. Users censor who they want to connect with, and they confirm these ties by either confirming the friend request or rejecting it. In the case of Facebook, before one can be friends with somebody on the network, there has to be some form of mutual agreement between both parties. A user can either accept or reject one's request as a friend and when this agreement is established, the result is made public to those on each individual's friend list, making it visible to any one who has the permission to view one's profile. The way an individual chooses friends on social network site varies. An individual can decide to accept any users that try to add them as friends, or reject it. Studies show that individuals tend to accept people on social network sites based on the information displayed on their profile, like affiliated institution affiliated, location and mutual friends. Participants of social network site generally accept individuals whom they feel and consider as being part of their social lives, and these may include current or past friends and acquaintances. But users are also more careful to accept individuals who have control over them, like teachers, parents and bosses. A typical profile page consists of username, picture, age, friend list, and institution affiliated to, and on Facebook another prominent feature is

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what is called the Wall. The Wall can serve as a place where users can either post comments and links using some of the public communication tools.

Most social network sites provide different communication tools to support public or semi-public interaction between participants. The group featured on social network sites like Facebook enable participants to converge and share common interests. The common public communication tool is the commenting features that display conversation on a person's profile and the way   they are represented in social network sites differ from one to the other. For example on Facebook public communication is on the Wall," while on MySpace it is called "Comments." Comments are made visible to any user who has access to the individual's profile who answered that question. Also, users utilize the commentary space to interact with other users by posting messages on it for others to see. Profile pages, and friend's lists, are commentary tools used by various public communication channels that set the stage for users to perform their identity to the general public.

According to Danah Boyd in the article stated above, the first recognizable social network site was called SixDegree.com, and it was started in the year 1997. SixDegree.com enables users to create profiles, friend's lists and also to navigate friends' lists. Although these features existed in some form before SixDegree.com (profiles existed mostly in online dating site and other online community sites), SixDegree.com was the first site to combine the features such as profile, friend list and affiliated institution together in a single profile. Sixdegree's purpose was to help people connect with each other and send messages to each other. In the year 2000, SixDegree.com failed to become a sustainable business and the service was closed.

From 1997 to 2001, the improvement of technology enabled other websites to add more communicating tools to their websites, thereby supporting various combinations of profile and publicly articulated friends. For example sites such as MiGentr, BlackPlanet, AsianAvenue enable users to create either professional, personal and dating profiles. However, the difference between these sites and the present social network sites is that users could easily add friends to their personal profile without seeking approval from the site administrators for the connection. Shortly after other social network sites came into being, like Livejournal in 1999, the Korean virtual worlds site Cyworld in 1999 and the Swedish web community Lunarstorm came into being as social network sites in 2000. It contained guestbook's, friends lists and diary pages, while in 2002 Friendster was launched.   The year 2003 witnessed the emergence of many new social network sites and most of these sites took the profile forms trying to have some of the features of the early social network sites. Rumours emerged that Friendster would start a fee-based system, so users encouraged other people to join alternative Social Network Sites, such as MySpace, and that's how MySpace came on and grew rapidly by regularly adding features based on users' demands. In 2004 Facebook was launched as a social networking site for only Harvard students and in 2006 Facebook expanded to high school and other professionals' co-operation and eventually it was open for everyone that has a valid email address.

The aim of this research is to investigate the way in which digital identity is constructed on social networking websites like Facebook .Some of the research questions I am going to investigate during the course of this research are as follows:

- How do users or individuals perform their identities on social networking sites like Facebook?

- How do users construct and perform their identities online?

- How do users manage their digital identities through impression management?

I have chosen my research area to focus on identity construction on social network sites, placing emphasis on Facebook, because early studies only focused on online identity constructions in anonymous environments (where users are majorly anonymous) such as chat rooms, MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons). During my research I found that individuals tried to perform or act at being someone else, but recently researchers began to shift focus to the known environment such as social network sites and dating websites, and the result suggested that the way individuals perform their identities in the unknown/anonymous environment like MUDs is completely different from the way users construct their identities on social network sites. For this reason, I decided to extend the lines of research to find out how identity is constructed on social network sites placing special emphasis on Facebook, as it is one of the most popular online social networking website and can therefore provide an appropriate context for research.

Arguably one of the most influential social network website on the internet is Facebook.com; it comprises a clustering of networks based on geographical location, work place, institutional affiliations. The membership profiles are different from one to another, but many use the same interface and systems of interaction. Facebook originally started in February of 2004; it was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student. Initially it started as an exclusive network open only for Harvard students, and Facebook profiles consisted of information about the user including their age, name, picture, location and personal interests.

Beginning from 2005 Facebook, expanded its networks to other university in the world including high school students, and professionals organization. Eventually it was open to

everybody who had a valid email address and who was older than 13 years of age. Some features that distinguished Facebook users from other social network sites are Facebook users are unable to make their profiles public to all users. Not until 2011 when Facebook updated its Privacy setting were users allowed to either make their profiles or comment public or private to other public users. An Other feature that distinguished Facebook is the ability for outside develops to create "Applications" that allow users perform other tasks sure as playing games.

The impact of online environments on identity construction has been under investigation for some years, and it was found that identity constructed in anonymous environment is different from the identity constructed in the known environment, such as with internet dating sites. Research indicates that in anonymous environment such as MUDs (Multi–User Dungeons) individuals tended to play-act at being someone else until recently researchers begin to shift their attention to study self-presentation in less anonymous environment such as Internet dating sites (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006: Gibbs, Ellison,& Heino, 2006: Yurchisin , Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005). It was found that people acted differently in such environments as compared to other settings, and the identities produced on Internet dating sites is different from the identity produced in other online environments, because on Internet dating sites people tended to "Stretch the truth a bit" (Yurchisin, 742).

If we are to consider Merriam-Webster's definition of identity as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual," it is in the distinction which constitutes our identity. According to Judith Butler, "identity is performatively constituted by the very

"expressions" that are said to be its results" (31). Sociologist Erving Goffman proposes that identity construction is dramatic performance, "When the individual presents himself before others his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited value of the society " (45) According to Erving Goffman, performance is "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way of the other participants " (15) performance in this aspect tends to sustain a specific definition of the situation and lay claim to what reality is: rather than being a result of the reality of identity, performance create it (86) Identity cannot just be claimed or expected to be pre existing; instead one must establish it by satisfactorily performing in a given situation (Jenkins 95). According to Goffman, "a status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated" (75). The form a performance takes is socialized, melded and modified by the understanding and expectations of the society in which it takes place (Goffman 35). However, these social expectations, incorporated and exemplified in performance, are an idealized version of societies values (35). Therefore performers often choose to try to avoid or conceal those actions which are inconsistent with societal standards and accentuate those actions that follow them (41). If we accept that identity is something that is performed, another important piece of Goffman's theory is that an individual fills different roles in different settings before different audiences: this can be applicable to Facebook a site for which   the primary purpose is individuals   construct and perform their identities, Occasionally, users of Facebook make comments to please particular kinds of people, thereby performing differently for different people based on contexts. So Goffman's theory illustrates that performance is sometimes problematic because it is impossible to separate the audiences because the performance is potentially is for the all of the general public to see.

A performer online or offline therefore tries "to segregate his/her audiences so that the individuals who witness him in one of his/her roles will not be the individuals who witness him in another of his/her roles" (Goffman 137). Abelson and Lessig also defined identity as "a unique piece of information associated with an entity... a collection of characteristics which are either inherent or assigned by another" (1) to which he later adds "the skills that a person possesses can also become part of one's identity" (5). Identities are fluid, and oftentimes difficult to fit into a simple definition. But Goffman argues that all "performance is not a spontaneous, immediate response that constitutes sole social reality. Performance can isolated from other forms for the user to imagine or play with simultaneously other kinds of performances of other realities" (Goffman 207). Goffman's suggestion is that identity construction is a performance that is deliberately engaged in, but sometimes it takes place sub-consciously by the individual or a person.

Identity construction can be seen as the sense-making process by which people selectively organize their experiences into a coherent sense of self (Fisher, Giddens, Ricoeur, and Somers). Identity construction on social network sites starts after an individual joins any Social Network sites, it entails filling out some kind of questionnaire/forms containing series of questions, by filling the forms the profile is generated through the answers the individual gives. Oftentimes, the question varies from site to sits. Typically, information that is normally asked includes descriptors such as location, age, interests, gender, and "about me" section, and most sites allow or encourage users to upload a profile photo some sites such as Myspace.com allow users to enhance their profile by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile look and feel. Thus by participating in all the aforementioned actions, users of social networking sites are constructing and performing their identity online.

Before the emergence of social networking sites the common way people present themselves online is through personal homepage. This form became popular around 1995-1996 when internet access became readily available to the general public. The first personal homepages were defined by their manually coded pages which required some HTML knowledge. The personal home page is about the self, and its contents are stored in one place on the server of the website The homepage was a fairly static environment until subsequent changes were indicated with the gif image and later with the latest updated JavaScript code, and it can be seen as a way of presentation of the self online where their creators are always constructing it. Another way of presenting the self online was the introduction of Blogs; this method of self-publishing changed with the introduction of one-button-publishing blog software blogger in 1999. Unlike its past predecessors that required HTML knowledge, blogging did not require HTML knowledge. Just by a simple click on the publish button, the software automatically put the latest entry on top, and it is usually in a chronological order showing the latest post at the top.   The blog can be seen as the remediation or replacement of the personal homepage and it represents the classical approach to identity which is always under construction. The major difference between the blog and the personal homepage is that in blogs, the environment is not a closed environment and it succeeds on the exchange of links, and the content is often stored using external services and other services like Flickr or YouTube can be embedded within the blog. Another difference between the personal homepage and blog is that in blogs everything that was once stored in a single server in personal homepage is now distributed on the web, the sidebar of the blog is a place for self-definition through the use of widgets.

Goffman's Symbolic Interactionalism can be applicable in studying online identity construction. In the book, *Symbolic Interactionalism*, Goffman states that humans act

towards objects and events because of the meanings they posses, and that meaning arises from social interaction and that humans interpret object and event to generate meaning (Fernback 55). According to Robinson in his article "The Cyberself" "individual interpret each other's language, gestures and actions as symbols: this interaction both reflects and constitutes the self." (Robinson 5) That means individuals construct their own identities through a range of symbolic resources such as images and signs. A Symbolic interactionist perspective challenges the traditional conception of the person as unique and bounded by suggesting that the self is the product of interaction rather than an immutable entity, self can be embodied, but it is not bounded and is constantly renegotiated in interactions (Robinson 93). Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" defines the self as the reflection generated by the generalized other that is coupled with that generalized other's judgment. In reality our sense of self is really our perception of society's evaluation of us (Robinson 95). Furthermore in performing identity, the individual tries to take the position of the other or imitate someone else and guess how they will interpret his or her symbols.

Goffman combines interactive behaviors, social roles and expectations of audience in what is known as the Front. The Front is constituted by consistency which "functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. The Front, then is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance." (22). Individuals have an idealized perception of themselves in a social context and what a situation should look like and act accordingly: "When an individual presents himself to others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so in fact, than does his behavior as a whole." (35). The Front becomes "a collective representation in its own right." (27) The *Front* (identity) is represented by the context in which performance

takes place, including audience and situation. The situation consists of the social setting, recognized by scenery and location. Furthermore in reference to team performance Goffman identifies abstract regions of operation, which are determined by the presence of the audience and actors. Goffman draws upon the ideology of a stage, which implies what's going on with both performers and audiences.

The main function of the *Front* is the front stage where both audience and performers are present. The front may have some cinematic apparatus that enables performance. The back stage is where performers are present but the audience is not present, and then the back stage is where the idealized character or actor is at least safe or welcome. Communicating with and audience relies on two modes of communication, most often through covert cues, written communication and verbal, sometimes purposed and sometimes unintentional. Goffman expresses this as "two radically different kind of sign activity: that expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off" (2).

Identity performance

According to Goffman performance can be defined as the sum of activity of a given participant which seeks to influence the audience in any way (15). The process used by individuals to construct their identities through performances is similar to how an actor performs a role. People's dramatizations of roles become a part of their identity and are used in varying circumstances dictated by the "established social role" (15). Moreover, appearance and manner can contradict each other: "When a performer who appears to be a higher estate than his audience acts in a manner that is unexpectedly equalitarian"(25). The audience does not have to accept the influence, but can assume either active or passive roles with respect to the individual performance. According to Goffman in his book "*The presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life", he argues that individuals are motivated in trying to control the impression of the situation their audience receives (15). He describes this action as impression management. By participating in this activity, a performance can be influenced by an individual's expectations of how the audience will respond. For example, waiters do this when they want to make good tips. They use a certain language and method of interaction when performing before their customers and then employ a different form of identity with their friends. Sometimes a performance can mistakenly confuse the audience's expectations and /or establish a social role (27). Goffman's example includes: "seamen, whose home away from home is rigorously he-man, tell stories of coming back home and inadvertently asking mother to "pass the fucking butter" (15). When this occurs, the response from the audience can further cement the established social role, or if the response (or lack thereof) does not attempt to inhibit the performance, the establishment roles can be changed altogether, this illustrate the impacts the audience has on the performer, demonstrating that while the performer tries to determine the situation for the audience, and the audience reaction will greatly influence the performer (22). It is through this concept that I will investigate how Facebook has been used by the users as a way of constructing and performing identity hoping for a quick audience reactions and I will call this concept "impression management" on Facebook. To further investigate this issue, it is important to first understand how online identity is constructed.

  Digital Identity

   As the population of internet users increased researchers investigated the possibilities of how the technology of the internet will affect how individuals construct their identity online. Two of the most famous researchers in the 1990s were Danna Haraway and Sherry Turkle.

Danna Haraway explored feminist concept such as affinity polities and oppositional consciousness, and she investigated it through the idea of the cyborg and agreed to reject boundaries such as those between machine and man (Haraway). Sherry Turkle investigated the importance for fragmented, multiple selves and she summarized that "computer - mediated communication can serve as a place for the construction of identity." (Turkle 14) She also investigated how people negotiate the virtual and the "real" as they represent themselves on the computer screens linked through the internet. For many people such experiences challenge what they have traditionally called identity which they are moved to represent in terms of multiple windows and parallel lives. Online life is not the factor that is influencing identity in this direction; there is no simple sense in which computers are causing a shift in notion of identity. It is rather that today's online life on the screen dramatizes a range of cultural trends that encourage us to think of identity in terms of multiplicity and flexibility. In online environments it is well known that one's body can be represented by one's own textual descriptions and the fact that self representation is written in text means that there is time to reflect and edit one's composition and make it easier for the shy person to be outgoing in the online environment. (Turkle 121)

Also, the relative anonymity of virtual environment gives an individual the opportunity to have different names, such that multiple aspect of the "self" can be explored in parallel. For example it is not uncommon for somebody to be called Agaken in one online community, Vovocal in another and Inevitable in the third online community. The experience of constructing different identity online and trying new identity is more explicit in the virtual environment such as Multi–User Domains or MUDs in "role playing" whereby an individual creates a character and can visit any location and place, the construction of identity in online community like social networking site may be less explicit than on MUDs,

Construction of different or multiple identity online depends not only on adopting a new names, for shifting of individuals in MUDs happen with a change of virtual place, navigating through the virtual environment is made possible by the existence of the technology known as a "Window" in modern computer environment. The window in the modern computer enables the computer to place the user in a different context or application at the same time but as a user, the user is attentive to one window on the screen at a time but in a certain way one is placed in all of the windows at the same time and one's identity on the computer screen is the sum of one's distributed presence. The development of windows enables the users to navigate and work simultaneously with different applications but in reality, the window has become an important metaphor of thinking about the "self" as multiples, a distributed "time sharing" system (Turkle). The "self" does not play different roles in different settings as traditionally known but rather the window metaphor suggests a distributed self that exist in many worlds and play many roles simultaneously. Unlike MUDs or any other online environment that allow users to have multiples usernames, on a social networking site like Facebook, it is more of constructing real identity in an online environment and it is less limiting than internet dating sites,. The site Facebook in some way is similar to other popular social networking sites such as Twitter and MySpace but it has some unique features that are important to the study of online identity on social networking sites. The reason why Facebook is different from any other social network sites is that the college and university version of Facebook is institutionally bound and the user's real name and the institution affiliated to appear on the user's profile make the Facebook environment almost fully real.

The way Facebook users present themselves to the general public is different. People use different ways in constructing their identity on Facebook, and it involves the use of verbal

and visual techniques. The method of self presentation on Facebook can range from explicit to implicit identity claims. A Facebook user is said to be implicit (that is visual) when he or she decides to display personally uploaded photos and pictures on his/her own wall or pictures along with comments posted to his/her account by others known as a post. The implicit or visual self represents him/herself by adding large numbers of photographs, thereby representing the "self as a social actor" Facebook users often try to make certain implicit identity claims aimed at producing desired impressions on their viewers especially in terms of social ties. Another way users present themselves on Facebook is through explicit claims. Unlike the implicit claims that deals with mostly visual identity claims, the explicit claims involves the use of verbal descriptions of themselves, through explaining their interests and preferences as well as narrated description of themselves.

Facebook users engage in explicit identity construction claims when they simply list a set of preferences that they feel is more appropriate in describing them for their viewers. For example, in a Facebook account there is a self description section where users are given the opportunity to describe their personal interests and hobbies, including their favourite activities, music, movies, books and favourite television shows and favourite football clubs. The explicit modes of identity claim involves the most explicit verbal description of self. On Facebook they have the "About Me" section and this section is a self descriptive section that gives the users the opportunity to introduce themselves directly to the viewers. So it can be seen that users can either be explicit or implicit in their modes of constructing Identity on Facebook.

Impression Management on Social Network Sites

Over the years, social networking sites have been the focus of researchers in term of how individual utilizes the sites in communicating and socializing. Also researches focused on how the sites influence people's privacy and mode of communicating and managing their relationship with others. The users of social networking sites make use of impression management methods, which allow the users of Social networking sites to manage the way, other people or audiences distinguish the users.

Social networking sites enable users to post photos and update comments. The photos that users post, the updated comments and personal information they expose are ways through which they construct their identities and how they want the audience to distinguish them (that is painting an image on how a person is aiming to portray him/herself to others). Users construct their identity and control their perception by deliberately exposing some particular information and presenting it in unique ways; this is what Goffman refers to as "Front" stage. The information that a user exposes on social networking sites are expected to be true because of the "realistic" nature of social networking sites such as Facebook, but some users tend to give false information Sometimes we take for granted that the information an individual exposes has been constructed in particular ways because we assume that it is real information.

. According to Piwinger & Ebert, "impression management is a goal directed conscious or unconscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object or event, they do so by regulating and controlling information in social interaction". Impression management is a form of self-presentation method in which a person tries to influence the perception of their image. Goffman presented impression management dramaturgically; the main goal of impression management is to influence the

behaviour of the audience. Goffman in his book, *The Presentation of Self in everyday Life*, approached impression management dramaturgically. He explained impression management in terms of motivations; he believed that there is a complex human performance within a social setting based on a play metaphor, which he believes that interaction is much like a play. Impression Management occurs on social networking sites when users of social network sites fill out their online profile and post comments. The Users have total control over managing the profile information about themselves they wish to either censor or include when filling out their profile information thereby maintaining their privacy setting.

Ellison, Heino and Gibbs explained impression management in terms of expressions given (that is communication in the traditional ways, for example, spoken communication) and expressions given off (unintentional communication, such as nonverbal communication cues). According to recent research, the unintentional expressions of self' takes places more frequently on social networking sites because of the nature of online communication which lacks some social cues involved when compared with face-to face interactions such as attractiveness or facial expression. According to Ellision et al,

> These same self-presentational behaviours exists online, although online self presentation is more malleable and subject to self-censorship than face-to-face self-presentation due to the asynchronous nature of computer-mediated communications (CMC) and the fact that CMC emphasizes verbal and linguistic cues over less controllable nonverbal cues. (2)

Ellison et al, argue that belonging to and communicating on social networking sites is important for the construction of social identity, and users of social network sites construct their social identity either by "communicating with people who are already a part of their

extended social network" or by expanding their social networks by making new friends and their goals are accomplished through the use of impression management techniques for constructing social interaction because individual has the ideology that presenting themselves to others in certain ways will increase the opportunity for communicating and interacting with others (2 Boyd et al).

The self presentation method of impression management allows social network sites users to control or disclose information about themselves on their profiles. According to Ellison et al. "the greater control over self-presentational behaviour in computer mediated community CMC allows individual to manage their online interactions more strategically". Profiles of social networking sites can be considered as the representation of the self, and moreover impression management may contribute to construction of identity either through bias self or non-objective. For example, users may decide to choose a profile picture depending on how attractive they believe it makes them appear to others. Impression management can take places either consciously or unconsciously, however the main aim of impression management is still a goal directed action.

Moreover, the ability for users to control their information and construct their identity online represents their identity online based on the information they provide on their profiles. Ellison et al, carried out an experiment on Facebook user profiles. The experiment involved measuring how many fields were filled out on each profiles. Participants construct their identity by filling out their profiles; the participant's use of fields in their profiles was then correlated with the number of links or relationships they had between other users. The final results indicated that populating the fields in profiles was positively related to the number of friends a user has. At the end of the experiment Ellison the authors suggested that

by filling out profile fields, such as institution, a user attended or contact information such as place or location, a user can reduce the perceived risk of deception and increase the chances of connecting with people of similar backgrounds or interest. In summary the authors concluded that the more information provided by users on their profiles, the less other will feel they are being deceived by them and the more likely they are to construct new online relationships or social networks online.   So impression management is the reason why individual keep on updating his or her profile online, and as a result sending a signal on how they want other people to perceive them.

Identity Management on Social Network Sites

"Online identity management" can be defined as any attempt to consciously manage or control the "growing mass of information about ourselves and our social or business transaction and relationships that exists in digital form whether stored within commercial or government databases or scattered on the web in blogs and social networking sites" (Evans).Online identity management arises from the desire to control private or personal information in a networked environment online.

Identity management is different from the concept of impression management because identity management deals with the security and management of personal information, Online identity management involves not just "the presentation of the self" as explained by Goffman, but also deals with a potential response to a range of treats arising from the exposure or spread of personal information online, that is the consequences of exposing personal information online which may lead to invasion of privacy, fraud, discrimination and exclusion of opportunity.

The biggest problem facing identity management on social network sites is privacy. When participating on social networking sites there is significantly more problems to worry about than just trying to connect with your friends and trying to extend your social network. Social network sites pose a great deal of threats and privacy concerns, these include fraud, identity theft, financial losses, security, sexual assault. These are just few problems users can encounter from using social network sites. The majority of social network sites are free and most of the time these sites offer no assurance as to the true identity of those users using social network sites, but the main aim of social networking sites is for users to construct their true identity. However, that is not always the case, and even the major social network sites can not guarantee if the identity of the users are accurately represented, Potential users on social network sites may easily lie about their identity by simply changing their names, age, location and interest. Although some of these social network sites have privacy law designed to make the users feel more safe and comfortable with the sites, but none of these site offer assurance that users in social network sites are truly who they claim to be.

Furthermore, another issue facing social network sites is the availability and accessibility of users' information. The majority of social network sites enable interested individuals to access and review user's profile information: the information review in many s can expose a great deal of information about a person, the information includes, name, location, city of residence, appearance, age, interest, occupation and personal affections, by combining with using other public resources' on the internet users end up revealing more information about themselves than they originally intended to. For example users can easily get information about a person by conducting a search with a user's email address within Yahoo or MSN and simply search information on any social network sites maybe like Facebook and easily get the information about the users in another social network sites. Some of the information that can

be obtained is the name of the person, location, phone number and other personal information. This is just one case to show how easy it is for user's information to fall into wrong hands, and if it does, it may lead to risk of being stalked or even robbed. With all of these dangers of using social networking sites, safety and protections for users of social network sites is becoming a pressing issue. Hence the need for users to manage their online identity.

In conclusion social networks sites enable individuals to construct their identities through membership profiles which are connected to individuals that the user already knows and to potential friends as a method for extending their social networks. Also social network sites provide a stage or space for constructing one's identity, but also, they are a means of social interaction by providing communication tools that facilitate the construction of identity. Such tools include photography, text and other multimedia applications. Performance of identity is mostly aimed at performing for one's social connection or friends who also use these tools as a means of introducing the self and authenticating their identities freely within the circle or environment of social networks. Social network sites thereby provide the space for different individuals to collectively or individually construct their identities simultaneously and present themselves publicly or semi-publicly. Also, the way individuals construct their identities on social network sites varies either by filling out questionnaires that contains series of questions and at the end the question generates their profile information, or by simply filling out designated fields on such sites. Some social network sites such as Facebook provide communications tools like the "Wall" for comments and tools to enable users to upload pictures about of themselves or an event. The construction of identities on social network sites is non- linear, in a way, and the creators of social network sites cannot totally determine the way users choose to construct their individual identities because there really is no censorship as such on contents uploaded by users. Most of the time the user's identity is fluid,

so with these attribute associated with constructing identity online it is difficult to define what influences construction of identity online.

If I am to accept the definition of identity by Richard Jenkins, which states that "identity can not just be claimed or expected to be pre existing, instead one must establish it by satisfactorily performing in a given situation" (95). That means identity is non-linear and individuals can successfully construct their identities by performing it either consciously or unconsciously. Also, suffice it to say social network sites are not new forms of media but just the refashioning of previous media, like personal homepages and blogs. Social network sites are an improvement of the combination of personal home page and blog.

Again, the construction of identity on social networking sites relies primarily on the advanced technology incorporated into this environments and this in turn aids diversity in self presentation. Whichever way a user seeks to project him/her self online, he or she is aided by the technology involved. Whether or not the self presentation of self by any user at any given time is real or otherwise, the existence of social network sites and the involvement of such user on the network make it possible.

The emergence of social network sites has created avenues for expression of the self. Although, there are several other ways of portraying the self or constructing an identity , it is more pronounced and definitive on social network sites. The construction of identity on these sites is supported by spatial and temporal factors. Spatial in the sense that, the issue of space is eliminated and the user is free to do as he/she pleases without constraint of time. There is no limitation based on time either, and the user is free to post comments, upload pictures or update his/her status whatever time suits him/her. Hence, identity construction is more or less effortless, devoid of physical constraints and spatial constraints.

Though identity construction on most social networks sites is non linear and fluid, it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of such identities. Though site administrators strive to maintain authenticity by requesting for basic information from potential users, it is nevertheless still difficult to pinpoint who is real and who is not. The purpose of this essay is not to determine the authenticity of identities but rather to explore the construction and process of performativity of identity in an online environment, particularly on social network sites

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