



# Reviews On Self-Presentation And Identity In Social Media Or Social Networking Sites

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**Abstract:** This article examines the current research on self-presentation in social media or social networking sites to guide future studies. Social media and social networking sites provide numerous opportunities for deliberate self-presentation. Based on established self-presentation theories, an analysis of research on self-presentation in social media or social networking sites identified three important context and audience variables that were incorporated into a model. Firstly, three aspects of social media – anonymity, persistence, and visibility – were explored, as studies have shown the moderating effects of these aspects on the relationship between self-presentation goal and the content shared in social media. For instance, it is expected that social media users are more likely to present their authentic selves under conditions of reduced anonymity, increased persistence, and greater visibility. Conversely, the freedom associated with more anonymous, less persistent, and less visible social media may lead to idealized self-presentation. The second finding highlighted the influence of externally generated content such as likes, comments, tags, and shares on social media users' self-presentation content, influenced by how they choose to manage such content. The third theme focused on the moderating effect of context collapse on the connection between goals and self-presentation content. The composition of an impression manager's audience varies across social media platforms, impacting and often complicating the achievement of self-presentation goals amidst merging networks of people. Social media users have adopted different strategies to navigate the complexities of context collapse in their pursuit of self-presentation. Despite the valuable insights gained from this body of literature, a more comprehensive theory of self-presentation in the hypermedia age is necessary to further advance this area of research.

**Keywords :** Social media / Social Network Sites, Self-presentation, Anonymity, Visibility, Persistence, Moderating.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that individuals engage in selective self-presentation by emphasizing certain aspects of themselves while minimizing others (Goffman, 1959). Self-presentation is purposeful and is carried out for an audience, with the effectiveness of one's self-presentation being judged by whether or not the audience approves of this performance (Schlenker, 1985). Early models of self-presentation primarily concentrated on in-person self-expression, where the audience and setting are limited and more visible (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1985). With the rise of digital media, scholars like Meyrowitz (1986) endeavored to adapt traditional self-presentation theories to mediated environments through his second-generation medium theory (refer to Meyrowitz, 1994). Early theories of self-presentation

like the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959) and Schlenker's (1985) self-identification theory have experienced a resurgence in recent times, proving valuable in comprehending self-presentation dynamics in social networking platforms.

Today's social media landscape provides users with limited control over their self-presentation, as others can easily influence or alter the way they are perceived. Another way social media has impacted self-presentation is by allowing others to share content that can affect how individuals are viewed. Individuals who want to showcase a specific image of themselves must also navigate through the content shared by others. Networked publics play a role in shaping each other's self-presentation through activities like tagging, commenting, liking, and sharing (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Following Brunswik's (1956) lens model, audiences utilize all available cues to form an impression of an individual.

According to the theory of warranting, content created by others on social media can have a stronger impact on how users are perceived than their own posts (Walther et al., 2009). Furthermore, the opinions that others form about social media users are influenced by the attractiveness of their friends (Walther et al., 2008). Although some social networking platforms offer tools to control others' contributions (such as tagging, commenting, liking, and sharing), utilizing these features necessitates active participation on social media, which older users may be hesitant to engage in (Ongun & Demirag, 2014).

Social media has not only reduced anonymity and increased contributions from others but has also led to a rise in context collapse within its vast and diverse audience. Similar to a wedding where different groups come together in one social setting, social media friend lists often combine networks from various parts of life such as work, school, family, friends, and community. This blending of contexts, combined with the hidden audience on social media, makes it challenging to present oneself selectively. In response to these difficulties, social actors have developed different strategies.

The characteristics of the channel itself offer valuable social cues that are essential for interpreting social dynamics and making decisions regarding self-representation behaviors (Meyrowitz, 1986). While Goffman (1959) and other early scholars of self-presentation concentrated on in-person interactions for impression management, it is beneficial to explore mediated channels as platforms where self-presentation and facework can take place (Meyrowitz, 1986). Analyzing self-presentation on social media is crucial as meeting this need is a key indicator of social media engagement and dependency (Chen, 2019). To this aim, the researcher reviewed existing literature on self-presentation and social media, with a specific focus on the distinct contributions of social media environments to self-presentation content and processes.

Research has indicated that the affordances of social media platforms, the management of content from others, and context collapse are distinct factors that should be incorporated into existing theories and models of self-presentation (Evans et al., 2017). Additionally, a model has been developed to demonstrate the potential relationships among these variables, as outlined in this paper. This model serves as a valuable tool for comprehending online self-presentation research and guiding future studies to validate these findings.

## II. IMPORTANCE

Overall, the researcher gathered a lots of papers and books for the literature review on the topic of self-presentation on social media or Social Networking Sites. The extensive search strategy allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the current research landscape in this area. The inclusion of a wide range of sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and other publications, ensured that the review was thorough and well-rounded. The researcher carefully evaluated each paper and book, extracting relevant information and insights to inform the analysis and discussion in the research study. The external review by peers and other individuals helped to validate the findings and ensure the credibility of the sources included in the review materials. By employing a rigorous search strategy and including a diverse range of sources, the researcher was able to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on self-presentation

and impression management on social media. This approach enhanced the depth and breadth of the research study, contributing to a more robust and insightful analysis of the topic.

### III. SELF-PRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

Self-identification is a complex process that involves not only how individuals see themselves, but also how they want to be seen by others. This process is influenced by various factors such as social norms, cultural values, and personal experiences. People may choose to present different aspects of themselves in different situations, depending on the context and the audience. For example, someone may present their actual self at work, while presenting their ideal self on social media. (Schlenker, 1985). Self-presentation is a strategic process that involves managing one's image in order to create a desired impression. This can involve using tactics such as self-promotion, ingratiation, or intimidation to influence how others perceive them. People may engage in self-presentation to gain social approval, achieve personal goals, or maintain relationships. However, it is important to note that self-presentation can sometimes lead to inauthenticity or deception if individuals are not being true to themselves. (Higgins, 1987). Self-disclosure, on the other hand, involves sharing personal information with others in order to build trust, intimacy, and connection. This can include sharing thoughts, feelings, experiences, or beliefs with others. Self-disclosure can be a powerful tool for building relationships and fostering understanding, as it allows individuals to be vulnerable and authentic with others. However, it is important to practice self-disclosure in a responsible and appropriate manner, taking into consideration the context and the relationship dynamics. (Schlenker, 1985, p. 67). Using verbal and nonverbal cues to influence how others perceive their identity (Goffman, 1959), whether it's their actual or ideal self. Self-disclosure, on the other hand, involves revealing personal information to others (Derlega et al., 2008) and is a crucial tool for those seeking to present their actual or ideal image (Goffman, 1959).

Self-disclosure plays a crucial role in self-representation, particularly in the online realm where verbal disclosures are carefully managed and tailored to specific audiences due to the predominantly text-based nature of social media. In addition to verbal self-disclosures, studies have shown that social media users also share photos (e.g., Barbovski et al., 2018; Pounders et al., 2016) and location check-ins (e.g., Schwartz & Haleboua, 2015) in an effort to shape the perceptions others have of them.

The concept of self-presentation revolves around the presence of an audience. Self-presentation cannot exist without an audience. When sharing and engaging with self-presentation content on social media, users take into account the opinions of their audience (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Depending on the audience, individuals may choose to selectively present different aspects of themselves, showcasing certain traits to one audience while portraying different facets of their identity to another (Goffman, 1959).

Schlenker (1985) has identified three potential audiences who may observe one's efforts at self-presentation. The first group, "Interactants," refers to the actual individuals who receive the self-presentation messages. The second group, "Imagined audiences," consists of internalized audiences whom one takes into account when engaging in self-presentation (Schlenker, 1985). For instance, individuals might consider what their parents, teachers, or religious leaders would think of a message before sharing it. Lastly, the presenter themselves serves as an audience. When engaging in self-presentation, social actors bring their own "internalized knowledge and standards for self-regulation" (Schlenker, 1985, p. 66).

The success of one's self-presentation hinges on the audience's acceptance of its accuracy. As per self-verification theory, the responses of others to a performance play a significant role in shaping one's self-perception (Swann, 1983). Individuals wish for others to perceive them in the same manner they perceive themselves, and social media platforms offer numerous chances to showcase and evaluate self-perceptions to different groups. Recent studies have indicated that users of Facebook view paralinguistic digital features (such as one-click reactions) as a gauge of achievement (Carr et al., 2018).

Barbovschi et al. (2018) discovered in a qualitative research on adolescents that young girls in particular viewed the number of likes on a post as a measure of their popularity. This finding suggests that social media platforms play a significant role in shaping the self-esteem and self-worth of young girls, as they equate the number of likes they receive with their social status and popularity among their peers. This emphasis on external validation through likes can lead to feelings of inadequacy and pressure to constantly seek approval from others online. It also highlights the potential negative impact of social media on adolescent mental health and well-being, as young girls may feel compelled to curate their online presence in a way that garners the most likes, rather than expressing their true selves authentically. This research underscores the importance of promoting healthy self-esteem and self-worth independent of social media validation, and the need for parents, educators, and mental health professionals to support adolescents in developing a positive sense of self that is not reliant on external feedback from social media.

Swann (1983) elucidated that individuals create opportunity structures that align with their self-perceptions. Within the realm of social media, this could entail meticulously selecting friends who will endorse the user's self-representation and provide favorable reactions to their posts. It is crucial to note that the success of self-presentation can serve as a form of feedback that shapes subsequent impression management strategies. If the responses of others do not validate and embrace the user's self-representation, the individual may analyze that feedback to assess its validity. In general, self-verification theory suggests that individuals will usually seek to maintain their self-concept by disregarding or reinterpreting feedback that contradicts it (Swann, 1983).

This shift in focus has led to a deeper understanding of how different social media platforms shape the way individuals present themselves. For example, the visual nature of platforms like Instagram may lead users to focus more on their physical appearance, while the text-based nature of Twitter may encourage users to focus on their thoughts and opinions. Additionally, the affordances of social media platforms, such as the ability to edit and filter photos, or the character limits on posts, can also impact the way individuals present themselves. These affordances can either enhance or constrain the ways in which individuals can express their identity and shape the perceptions of others. As a result, individuals need to be mindful of how the specific characteristics of the social media platform they are using can influence the messages they create and the way they are perceived by others. By understanding these dynamics, individuals can make more informed choices about how they present themselves on social media and better align their self-presentation with their identity objectives.

### **Affordances of Social Media**

Analyzing the capabilities of social media platforms is a method to assess how the platform influences the way users present themselves. Emphasizing on these capabilities also offers a way for researchers to expand on previous research results in the rapidly changing landscape of social media platforms and their features (DeVito et al., 2017).

This approach focuses on the potential actions and opportunities that social media platforms offer to users, such as the ability to share content, connect with others, or engage in specific activities. By considering these affordances, researchers can better understand how individuals interact with social media and how these interactions may impact their behaviors and attitudes. This approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of social media use, as well as help to identify common patterns and trends across different platforms and time periods. Overall, Bayer et al. (2020) argue that an affordance approach has the potential to enhance the coherence and generalizability of research findings in the field of social media studies.

Evans et al. (2017) proposed various affordances in communication research that are pertinent to self-presentation on social media. Among these, anonymity, persistence, and visibility emerged as key predictors

in the literature review. These three affordances play a moderating role in the connection between identity goals and self-presentation content.

### **Anonymity**

Social media platforms provide the opportunity for anonymity when the source of the message is undisclosed and unidentified (Scott, 1998, p. 387), effectively creating a distinction between an individual's online persona and their real-life identity. Anonymity, like other affordances, can be found along a spectrum from identified to anonymous (Evans et al., 2017; Scott, 1998). In situations of increased visual or discursive anonymity, where individuals are not linked to their real-life identities, users of social media are likely to feel more unrestrained in how they present themselves (Suler, 2004; Walther, 1996). Walther (1996) posited that anonymity enables individuals to be more selective in how they present themselves, according to the hyperpersonal perspective.

This suggests that when individuals feel more anonymous, they are more likely to present themselves in a way that reflects their ideal self, rather than their actual self. This aligns with the concept of online disinhibition, where individuals feel more liberated to express themselves authentically when they are not constrained by social norms or expectations. Furthermore, the idea that anonymity moderates the relationship between presentation motivations and content suggests that the level of anonymity a person experiences can influence the extent to which they tailor their presentation to align with their ideal self. This has implications for online interactions, as it indicates that individuals may be more likely to present themselves in a way that is consistent with their desired self-image when they feel anonymous. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of considering the role of anonymity in shaping online behavior and self-presentation. By understanding how anonymity influences presentation motivations and content, we can gain insight into the ways in which individuals navigate their online identities and interactions.

### **Persistence**

The concept of persistence refers to the longevity of a message, ensuring it is stored and accessible over an extended period (Evans et al., 2017). Users of social media platforms with increased persistence are likely to be more cautious and discerning in how they present themselves, as the content remains available for a longer duration. This means that individuals may think twice before posting something that could potentially harm their reputation or be taken out of context in the future. The idea of persistence also highlights the importance of digital literacy and understanding the implications of sharing information online. It is crucial for users to be aware of the permanence of their digital footprint and to consider the potential consequences of their actions before posting on social media platforms. Furthermore, the concept of persistence can also have implications for businesses and organizations that use social media as a marketing tool. Companies must carefully consider the content they share and ensure that it aligns with their brand image and values, as it can have a lasting impact on their reputation. By understanding the concept of persistence and taking a strategic approach to their online presence, businesses can effectively manage their digital footprint and build a positive online reputation.

Facebook is considered a platform with high persistence in social media research, as people are often driven to use it to document important life events through posts and photo albums. Similarly, Twitter also has high content persistence, with posts being archived and usually made public (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; DeVito et al., 2017). This persistence in social media research allows for a wealth of data to be analyzed and studied over time. Researchers can track trends, behaviors, and attitudes by analyzing the content that users post on these platforms. This data can provide valuable insights into human behavior, social interactions, and cultural trends. Additionally, the persistence of content on platforms like Facebook and Twitter allows for the documentation of historical events and moments in real-time. Users often turn to social media to

share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences during significant events, providing a unique and immediate perspective on current events.

Users showed greater apprehension regarding the privacy of their data on Instagram compared to Snapchat when examining privacy issues in social media platforms, possibly attributed to the lasting nature of content on Instagram (T. R. Choi & Sung, 2018). This finding suggests that users may be more concerned about the long-term implications of their data being stored on Instagram, as opposed to the more ephemeral nature of content on Snapchat. The fact that Instagram posts are typically permanent and can be accessed by anyone at any time may contribute to users feeling a greater sense of vulnerability when it comes to their privacy. This could also be due to the fact that Instagram is owned by Facebook, a company that has faced numerous privacy scandals in the past, leading users to be more cautious about the security of their personal information on the platform. Overall, this research highlights the importance of considering the different ways in which privacy concerns manifest on various social media platforms, and the need for platforms to prioritize user data protection in order to maintain trust and engagement.

## Visibility

The visibility of social media is greatly influenced by the ease of locating or retrieving information (Evans et al., 2017). Features like trending hashtags on Twitter and public story posting on Snapchat indicate increased visibility. In high visibility conditions, users tend to be more selective in how they present themselves to create an ideal image. According to DeVito et al. (2017), Facebook users perceive this platform to offer the highest level of visibility control, allowing them to use built-in tools to manage who can view their content. However, Y. H. Choi and Bazarova (2015) found conflicting results. In their survey of Facebook users, participants expressed more privacy concerns on Facebook compared to their private Twitter accounts due to the unrestricted nature of the audience, where posts may be visible to friends of friends, beyond the original intended audience. Velten et al. (2017) suggested that Snapchat users generally have high expectations of privacy due to the restrictions on allowing others to enter the collective boundary. However, if a message is 'screenshot' and saved, it can lead to boundary turbulence as the expected invisibility is violated (Velten et al., 2017).

Social media users have the ability to reveal their location as part of their self-presentation, in addition to the content and visual aspects of their posts. This can enhance visibility to others in the same geographic area or to those who have also checked in at that particular location. Users can convey spatial information through various platforms such as location-based social media networks like Foursquare, photo-sharing platforms like Instagram, and mixed-use networks that offer multiple modes of communication like Facebook and Twitter (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015).

This discrepancy in perceptions of visibility control on social media platforms highlights the complex nature of online self-presentation. Users must navigate between the desire for visibility and the need for privacy, as well as the potential for unintended audiences to view their content. The visibility of social media also plays a role in shaping online interactions and relationships, as users may adjust their behavior based on who they believe can see their posts. Furthermore, the visibility of social media can have implications for individuals' personal and professional lives. Employers, for example, may use social media to screen potential candidates, making it crucial for users to carefully curate their online presence. The visibility of social media can also impact social movements and activism, as platforms like Twitter and Instagram can amplify marginalized voices and bring attention to important issues. Overall, the visibility of social media is a multifaceted concept that influences how users engage with online platforms, present themselves, and interact with others. As social media continues to evolve, understanding and managing visibility will remain a key consideration for users seeking to navigate the digital landscape effectively.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The aim of this review was to consolidate current research on how technological features and audiences influence the way social media users present themselves, with the goal of inspiring new avenues for research and theoretical advancements. Conventional theories on self-presentation can be enriched and broadened by taking into account various factors, such as the makeup of the audience. Through this literature review, numerous variables have surfaced that warrant inclusion in comprehensive and up-to-date self-presentation theories. Social individuals have a multitude of options for expressing their identity. Each social media platform offers unique social and technological features that can play a significant role in the process of self-presentation. Therefore, the selected platform(s) should be considered when developing a model of self-presentation.

The research delved into the impact of affordances like anonymity, persistence, and visibility on how individuals choose to portray themselves on social media. These factors play a crucial role in shaping the connection between a person's inclination to showcase their authentic or ideal self and the strategies they employ for self-presentation. Furthermore, social media users not only have to navigate their own posts but also interact with content shared by others through tagging and commenting on user-generated material. The way in which individuals handle this external content can significantly influence the content of their own self-presentation. Additionally, audience characteristics, such as the size and diversity of one's network, play a pivotal role in determining how presentation motives align with the content that is ultimately shared.

Traditional theories of self-presentation could be enhanced by updating them to align with the current social media era. The factors identified in this literature review have the potential to be integrated into the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959) and Schlenker's (1985) theory of self-identification. For instance, performances on social media platforms often exhibit greater levels of persistence, which could give them more significance compared to the transient performances of individuals managing impressions in face-to-face interactions. Moreover, the context within social media environments encompasses more than just the physical and temporal aspects initially considered; instead, audience demographics and technological capabilities play a crucial role in shaping self-presentation on social media platforms.

The effects of these variables on self-presentation should be considered within specific limitations. Firstly, most existing research on online self-presentation is qualitative, offering a detailed view of the experiences of many social media users without implying universal effects for the majority. Further quantitative studies, built on the qualitative research discussed, will offer more definitive evidence either supporting or contradicting these findings. Secondly, while efforts were made to encompass all available research on the subject, this review may not be exhaustive. For instance, other factors like relational motives for social media use, gender identity, personal characteristics, cultural background, group affiliation, specific self-presentation content (both verbal and visual), and audience feedback could be integrated for a more comprehensive understanding of social media self-presentation. Lastly, the research covered a span of approximately 15 years, during which social media has evolved significantly. It remains uncertain whether the conclusions drawn during the early days of social media still hold true today. This underscores the importance of adopting the affordance framework in social media research, although the changing landscape of social media platforms and usage norms may prompt a reevaluation of findings from the past.

This paper provides an overview of studies on self-presentation in social media, focusing on the impact of different channels and audiences. It aims to guide future research and theories in the realm of online self-presentation. Given the widespread use and diverse functions of social media in contemporary society, there is a need to revisit and enhance conventional self-presentation frameworks. The primary objective of this study is to enhance the existing body of knowledge by proposing a quantitatively testable model that delves deeper into the intricate mechanisms of self-presentation on social media platforms.

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