

"...there is kind of a way about being on Facebook": **A Thematic Analysis Of The Production Of Self- Presentation On The Social Networking Site Facebook**

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Social networking sites have created a new arena for social interaction with self-presentation being an intrinsic component of behaviour on these sites. The present study focused on the production of online self-presentation, from the Facebook user's viewpoint, specifically looking at what impressions the users desired to convey and how they did it. Ten semi-structured interviews with college students were analysed using Thematic Analysis. The main theme that emerged was that there is a *code of being* on Facebook. The implication of this *code of being* is that it strongly influences the desired impression one hopes to convey to others by guiding both what is said and not said on the site. Furthermore, the growing awareness that one's audience or Facebook 'friends' are comprised of different subgroups (e.g. family, friends, employers) both complicates and plays a considerable role in the process of self-presenting.

Online Self-Presentation

This study will focus on the production of online self-presentation on the popular social networking site (SNS) Facebook. Self-presentation refers to the act of regulating one's own behaviour in order to create a particular impression on others (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Gaining social approval (Iedema and Poppe, 2001) and appearing socially desirable to as many people as possible (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008) are major reasons for engaging in self-presentation. According to Leary (1996), impression management can be rooted in an individual's inherent need to be accepted and included. Individuals are also likely to engage in self-presentation if they postulate that important outcomes are riding on the impressions that they make on other people (Leary, 1996). Thus, managing one's impression is of increased importance if the target audience is more desirable, such as having power, authority or a high status (Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman, & Nuijten, 2010).

The proliferation in use of SNSs has created a new arena for social interaction. Today impression management is no longer limited to face-to-face interaction but is an integrated part of one's behaviour on SNSs (Rosenbaum et al., 2010). This study will focus on the most popular SNS Facebook, a promising ground for future research as the site continues to grow in popularity (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), following a systematic literature, proposed a dual-factor model of Facebook use - the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. Facebook enables users to stay in touch with friends and to self-present by sharing personal information and photographs in an online profile. Facebook users build up a list of 'friends' who can

view and post comments on each other's profiles in an area referred to as the 'wall'. Users can also publish what they are presently thinking and doing via statuses and check-ins. A status is a short text description answering the question – "What's on your mind?".

Online self-presentation is very different to offline self-presentation as it is highly controlled and can be inspected, edited, and revised before it is made available to others (Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell, 2001). It also lacks non-visual cues (Rosenbaum et al., 2010). Due to the asynchrony of much of the communication on Facebook, individuals can spend more time both deciding on and devising the kind of impressions they want others to have of them (Rosenberg, 2009).

Applying Theories Of Self-Presentation To Facebook

Zarghooni (2007) applies two theories of self-presentation, Goffman's (1959) general theory on self-presentation and Leary's (1996) theory on self-presentation tactics, to Facebook. Following Goffman's (1959) theatrical model, the front-stage or Facebook profile is the observable space where one is aware of being in the spotlight, the setting in which performances are constructed and displayed. The audience is one's Facebook friends who are partly blindfolded as they can only observe the on-stage profile and not the backstage self (Zarghooni, 2007). Leary (1996) defines self-presentation tactics as behaviours used to manage impressions. Many studies provide support for the existence and use of self-presentation tactics (e.g. Jones & Pittman, 1982; Lee et al., 1999). One ubiquitous strategy of self-presentation is ingratiation, which is to convince others about the attractiveness of one's qualities (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Positive traits are often emphasized whilst flaws are omitted (Strano, 2008).

Stern and Taylor's (2007) study indicates that Facebook profiles are not maintained simply for the benefit of their authors, but also for and because of their potential audience. Self-presentation is a particularly significant element of Facebook as from Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe's (2007) survey of college students, they believe those who view their profile are members of their offline social networks. According to Urista, Dong and Day (2009), who held focus groups with undergraduate students, the popularity of Facebook stems from the fact that it is a relatively open and transparent platform, one capable of being used to gather personal information about other users. Ellison et al.'s (2007) survey indicates that college students use Facebook as a primary basis to form impressions of previously unacquainted individuals they meet offline. Thus, it is the public nature of one's impression that can drive users to manage their impressions more carefully.

Facebook identities are often grounded in relationships meaning one's online identity cannot be too far removed from one's offline identity limiting the extent of deception that can be employed (Ellison et al., 2007). Haferkamp and Kramer (2009) concluded that profile owners place high priority on conveying elaborated but realistic impressions, carefully choosing information and contemplating the possible effects of certain profile features. Zhao et al. (2008) suggest that individuals may portray their hoped-for possible selves; as in emphasise or even exaggerate the parts of them that are socially desirable while at the same time seek to hide or de-emphasise the parts which are not socially desirable.

Online self-presentation can also have unintended negative consequences. Balakrishna (2006) and Finder (2006) identified employers as utilizing Facebook as a human resource tool to garner information and evaluate potential employees with Peluchette and Karl (2010) alluding to job offers being terminated on the basis of Facebook content. Walther, Van der Heide, Kim, Westerman and Tong (2008) suggests this shocked Facebook users with the majority self-reporting being unaware that employers could potentially screen candidates via Facebook profiles (Peluchette & Karl, 2010; Harrison, 2008) and who expected their profiles to be relatively private (e.g. college students only viewing their profile). Furthermore, they suggested some of the information on Facebook wouldn't have been posted if the users had known that a wide and diverse audience could access their profiles.

Previous studies have focused on college students' observer ratings of other users' attractiveness or extraversion from specific features such as quantity of Facebook friends or comments posted by friends (e.g. Tong, Van der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008; Walther et al., 2008). However, Facebook profiles are presented as a whole and not just one feature at a time. Zhao et al. (2008) looked at college students' production of self-presentation but their study had two limitations. Firstly it only focused on information that the user themselves put up. However, Walther et al. (2008) demonstrated that comments left by friends on a user's wall have an impact on how the user is perceived. For example, inferences may be made on negative posts such as ones relating to excessive drinking and these may be used when forming an impression of the user. Secondly, Zhao et al. (2008) performed content analyses but the static profile is no longer the main tool to present oneself. Rosenbaum et al. (2010) assert that on today's Facebook, the process of negotiating one's self-presentation has become fairly fluid. Dynamic message construction in the form of wall postings and status updates give Facebook users abundant opportunities to tweak and negotiate their presentation of self on a daily, hourly, or even more frequent basis (Carr, Schrock & Dauterman, 2012).

Introduction To The Current Study

The core psychological concept of self-presentation, which is at the crux of social psychology, will be examined within the context of the modern social arena of Facebook. Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) stated that fewer studies have examined the profile owners' strategies to create an image of themselves and highlighted this area as worthy of future research. In keeping with much of the amassed research on Facebook, college students will be used as it is predominantly younger users who use the site daily (Strano, 2008). Therefore, the current study will investigate the experience of presenting the self on Facebook, exploring how self-presentation is manifested and expressed through Facebook behaviour. To investigate the reasoning and underlying motives behind one's actions on Facebook one-on-one interviews will be used. This will add to the sparse knowledge base in this area by focusing on the production rather than the consumption of online self-presentation.

When generating the research questions particular attention will be paid to Leary and Kowalski's (1990) suggestion that self-presentation is a two-step process, namely **motivation** and **construction**. The first research question is investigating the desired impressions Facebook users hope to convey to their audience through their profile. Prior to engaging in self presentation tactics, individuals must first establish

what image of themselves they want others to perceive (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). A key factor in this could be who their target audience is as self-presentation is a conscious effort to control selected behaviours to make a desired impression *on a particular audience* (Leary, 1996; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) referred to this issue as audience segmentation, as multiple audiences (e.g. family, friends, employers, co-workers) potentially have access to one's profile. Thus, this study bridges the gap in the literature by examining how users' online self-presentation is affected by the potential multiple audiences viewing their behaviour.

The second research question will explore what self-presentation tactics are employed in order to convey this desired image to others. Literally, what is it that they do on Facebook to get across this desired image? Facebook enables users to utilize various features designed for inter-personal communication. Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011) reconceptualise SNSs as a collection of tools with different motives driving the use of the different interactive features. Therefore, the present study will be investigating what dynamic aspects of Facebook (e.g. status updates, changing profile photo, posting pictures, check-ins etc.) are employed to convey their desired impressions. Rosenberg (2009) suggested that future research should link self-reported data with information about the ways users present themselves on Facebook using their actual profile in order to elicit more explanatory results. Thus, each participant's profile and Facebook activity will be examined and the interview schedule will be tailored to them prior to the one-to-one interviews in the hope of eliciting intimate data. The use of qualitative methods should yield rich and insightful data that elicits the personal meanings, decisions and experience of presenting the self on the ever evolving Facebook profile.

METHOD

Participants

Ten undergraduate college students (8 females and 2 males), from two separate third level institutions, with a mean age of 20 years were interviewed. The only criterion was that participants were Facebook users. The snowball sampling method was used with the researcher's Facebook friends mailing out invitations to participate in the study to their Facebook friends. The mail stated that the purpose of the study was to understand how people use Facebook. The principal investigator's own Facebook friends were excluded to avoid socially desirable responses.

Method

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview. The interview schedule consisted of open questions and probes flowing from general questions about the participants' Facebook use to more specific ones dealing with their actual activity on Facebook. The three main themes of the interview schedule were self-presentation goal, audience segmentation and self-presentation tactics. The interview schedule was piloted to ensure question comprehension.

The interview transcripts were analysed using a qualitative Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involved initial coding, grouping of codes into themes using the

analytical method of constant comparison and, ultimately, candidate themes were reviewed and refined. It is important to explicitly state that inductive thematic analysis was employed, meaning the analysis is data-driven with the identified themes being strongly linked to the data itself. Secondly a realist or semantic approach to analysis was assumed, with themes being identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

The School of Applied Psychology's Ethics committee's model for ethical research was followed with each participant being given an information sheet and consent form. The principle of informed consent was upheld.

Procedure

The researcher created a Facebook account specifically for this study prior to the commencement of data collection to ensure the participants' privacy and also to keep the researcher's personal Facebook account private. Participants were asked to allow the researcher to friend them on Facebook using this account. This 'friending' process enabled the researcher to view their profiles, which all participants consented to, in order to make the interview schedule more specific to them. The researcher noted what features of Facebook participants mostly used and spent more time on the questions pertaining to those features in the interview. The researcher also used specific examples from the participants' profiles to generate richer data during the interview. The mean duration of the interviews was 40 minutes, with the maximum being 58 minutes and the minimum being 27 minutes. The Facebook account created for this study was deactivated when data collection concluded.

ANALYSIS

Four themes emerged from data analysis. Essentially, themes 1-3 highlight how there appears to be an implicit *code of being* on Facebook that strongly influences the impression that is being conveyed to others. It revolves around a common understanding of what information is right and wrong to put on Facebook. The fourth theme construes how one's vast audience of Facebook 'friends', comprising different subgroups, complicates and plays a considerable role in the of process self-presenting.

Prior to discussing these themes, Table 1 provides a list of the most frequently mentioned qualities the participants hoped to convey through their profiles. These qualities essentially answer the first research question by illustrating the users' desired impressions. One participant (MOB) differed markedly from the others with the qualities she hoped to convey. This will be discussed under Theme 4 as it was largely due to the potential audience she envisaged viewing her profile.

Table 1: The most frequently mentioned qualities participants' hoped to convey

Qualities (number of participants)	Related Excerpts
Fun (3)	CP: "Ahmm I dunno like I would be kinda like outgoing and stuff kinda like friendly outgoing so I try and put that across" (page 4)
Outgoing (3)	
Nice (3)	
Popular (3)	LQ: "Ya I would like people to think I am fun ya. ..Ya but I would like you know do things I suppose subconsciously anyway you know without saying right people but ya you know I would like people to think I am fun on it like you know" (page 12)
Friendly (3)	
Not boring (3)	
Not mean (2)	
Genuine (3)	BON: "The impression I suppose that I want to get across is that you know I am a nice kind of genuine I'm mellow you know I am not dramatic or anything like that" (page 13)

Theme 1: Code of Being on Facebook

An implicit *code of being* was alluded to in nine of the ten interviews, which is evidenced here:

MOB: *"..there is kind of a way about being on Facebook."* (page 4)

Peer pressure played a large role in the participants joining Facebook with CP stating that she felt "kinda like everyone was on it" and "it was almost the thing to do at that age" (page 1). From detailed analysis, it appears that Facebook is an intrinsic component of modern life, with online social networking being an almost defining feature of our generation. This is evidenced by the participants feeling like the vast majority of people are using Facebook, with BON admitting to not knowing anyone her age that does not have a Facebook account.

What stems from this notion of everyone having a Facebook profile, is the common practice of individuals using Facebook to garner information about people they meet or hear about in everyday life. It is this very use of Facebook as an information resource that makes the participants conscious of being judged or that others are forming impressions of them via their profiles. Seven of the participants state that they actively seek out news on Facebook or engage in an activity dubbed 'creeping', which involves looking at other peoples' profiles to get information on them:

LQ: *"Doing an awful lot of creeping I suppose. Awful lot of it."* (page 1)

Researcher: *"Just going through peoples' pages is it?"*

LQ: *"Ya."*

There appears to be a cycle of judging people on the basis of their Facebook profiles with the participants, at the same time, having a consciousness of other users doing the same to them. SOB identified these judgements of others occurring subconsciously, almost as if out of her control. Furthermore, IOR's comments suggest that this judging or forming impressions of others via their profiles is natural and similar to what happens when you meet someone in real life:

IOR: *"...if you were socially interacting with people, people are going to have ideas about you and stuff. It is the same about other people you know you are so blah blah blah and you have to allow for that like you have to you know like accept it like"* (page 7)

Facebook was seen as a talking point in the real world, as in there was an awareness that what one puts on Facebook could be brought up in a conversation by others. Facebook was denoted as a highly critical and judgemental arena. CM made an interesting demarcation of differing levels of acceptance about what is posted on Facebook and another SNS Twitter, with him ultimately feeling he could post more on his Twitter account. There was a feeling that other Facebook users are waiting and creeping on the newsfeed for something to gossip about:

CP: *"...if it was something that would get people talking..."* (page 16)

Researcher: *"And when you say something that would get people talking, do you think people are often just waiting to talk about something they see on the newsfeed or?"*

CP: *"Ya. Hmmmhmmmm. Ya definitely."*

Thus, participants being aware that they are being judged are conscious of most of what they say on Facebook and actively think about how others will view them from the information. BON referred to situations where she didn't post something on Facebook because she felt "everyone would be like 'what are you on about'" (page 12). CP highlighted how she wouldn't post a status about being in a bad mood because "people would be like this one is off again shut up kind of thing" (page 17). This form of internal thinking was witnessed in six participants with them actively considering how other users would perceive them before doing things on Facebook:

SM: *"..first of all I was thinking like yano should I yano not like it in case people are like thinking...see I'm really bipolar when it comes to what people are thinking. People could see it and be like why is she liking a fit page? She's not fit at all."* (page 15)

Not only are most of the participants attempting to guess what other people will think of them from their activity on Facebook, five of them referred to their activity being validated when other users 'like' it using the like function. It was seen as approval when others 'liked' their photo, status or check-in leading to increased self-esteem and confidence. The act of liking something appeared to equate as acceptance which the participants desired. Similarly, feelings of embarrassment and uncertainty were disclosed if nobody 'liked' their activity, as if no one else agreed with what they were saying. CM deemed it normative to want to get a certain amount of 'likes' because it

would look like “you have no friends or something” if no one ‘liked’ your status (page 46).

CM: “..if you got one or two like it seems like no one was really looking at it or didn’t care about it or anything but suppose well I suppose eight or nine, more than eight or nine would be acceptable to yourself like.” (page 47)

These recurring patterns in the data of feeling like everyone uses Facebook and feeling that one is being judged by others, inevitably leads to one questioning how others would perceive what is being put up and needing the validation of ‘likes’. These issues all accumulated into an existence of a *code of being* on Facebook. Participants found it difficult to put into words with many referring to it being a subconscious thing. But there does appear to be an implicit code that guides conduct on Facebook, with participants having their own understanding of it. The code is very much socially mediated, thus, reflecting social norms on the site. There seems to be things you can say on Facebook and things you can’t which will be discussed in themes 2 and 3. Six participants alluded to how they now act on Facebook is quite different from how they initially did with them acquiring the knowledge of what is and isn’t acceptable with age. It is this very *code of being* that influences, to varying degrees across the participants, what it is they put on Facebook and how they want to be perceived by others:

LQ: “Like I have changed so much from when I first started on Facebook til now like you know and I wouldn’t have been as careful with it cos you know you wouldn’t even know half the stuff that would happen but as you get older you do get wiser like and you do learn what is right and what is not right to be putting up on Facebook I think really.” (page 13)

Theme 2: What is *not* being said is Important

It is this very *code of being* that influences what participants choose not to disclose on Facebook. The website is considered entertainment and fun, thus, emotional statuses or alluding to being upset or down is not acceptable. For one participant, SOB, this was evident in her decision to keep her depression off Facebook – “there is absolutely nothing on Facebook that would have represented that even though it was a huge part of my life” (page 8). Her concerns were that Facebook is so public and that she was worried about what others would think – “you are automatically aware of everyone else looking at it and their perceptions of something like that” (page 8). Other participants described detesting how others put up emotional statuses which they see as a cry for attention stating that Facebook is *not* for that. It was also mentioned on several occasions that Facebook is not a diary, influencing the participants’ decisions to withhold emotional information such as being upset:

LQ: “..I would never put up anything if I was upset or anything like that. I keep all that to myself. It is mostly just for fun you know, mostly for the laugh and stuff.” (page 2)

As mentioned in theme 1, there appeared to be a change with age in what the participants decided against putting on Facebook. The majority mentioned how they used to put up more statuses but now they choose not to. BON stated that she wanted to

“keep mellow” (page 5) on Facebook and not have anything too dramatic so that people wouldn’t think she was looking for attention. It appears the tactic that is being adopted is not to say anything overly personal, such as being upset or emotional because it is *not the way* or *not the done thing* because Facebook is fun and meant to be light-hearted and entertaining.

Two recurring issues arose under this theme pertaining to one’s relationship status and one’s level of drinking. Eight participants deemed the relationship status to be a personal matter and too intimate for all other Facebook users to know. For some, like AM, this was another stance that had developed over time mentioning they had used the relationship status function before but wouldn’t again. They didn’t want everyone else to know about the break up with CP referring to how people would be questioning “are they single are they not you know” (page 18). Furthermore, it appears that the act of changing from ‘in a relationship’ to ‘single’ is a point of contention during a break up and something they feel others take note of and gossip about. CP said “I remember in the past now like I was like oh will I take down my relationship status first or will he you know that kind of a way.... I just wouldn’t want them knowing cos I wouldn’t want them gossiping” (page 18).

AM: *“And I think that yano when I was younger when we first started seeing each other ahmm you probably put it up and you’re all excited like “oooooh” or whatever. But then I suppose my relationship was just kind of on and off and it was just messy and everyone like you’re on you are in a relationship one day out of a relationship the other day and I was just like I don’t want people to know that about my personal life.”* (page 5)

Nine participants brought up not putting up information or playing down the level of drinking they do in real life, with NOR referring to it as “toning down the kind of drinking aspect” (page 5). Much of this was to do with audience segmentation, which will be discussed in more detail in theme 4. Many alluded to the existence of a certain *level* at which the content was too inappropriate for Facebook. Each had a different understanding of what that level was which was both influenced by their personal views and also what they thought was acceptable to other people. NOR said he “wouldn’t be putting up photos of me maybe very very drunk” (page 5). In a sense, untagging from a picture because it is *too bad* to have on Facebook or it is *too crazy* or leaving a picture up on Facebook that a friend has tagged them in because it is *not that bad*:

AM: *“Ahmm like it would depend. Like if I looked sober in it I would probably leave it up but if I look very drunk or maybe doing shots or something I might try and take them down. Haha.”* (page 9)

The fact that other Facebook users can put information about them up on Facebook can be a threat to the participants’ ideas of what they want put up about them on Facebook. They can be tagged in other user’s photographs, comments or statuses which will then appear on their profile. Nine participants mentioned this as a source of anxiety and the feeling of needing to check a notification straight away to see what has been put up about them. One participant, BON, had security settings which meant she had to approve anything that went up on her page before it could be seen by others. Many

others mentioned that they probably should have security settings but haven't gotten around to it or aren't too bothered.

In sum, participants have found over time that perhaps more important than what you do put on your Facebook is what you don't put up. One does not want to appear overly emotional or want to share information about being upset on Facebook, by in large due to the fact that Facebook is deemed as fun. Moreover, general information is given whereas specifics are left out particularly about relationship status and the level of drinking they engage in because some information is just *too personal* or *too bad* to have on Facebook.

Theme 3: What is being said on Facebook adheres to the Code

Closely connected to what was discussed in theme 2 about the participants not wanting or feeling it is acceptable to put up information about being upset on Facebook, is that they *do* put up information about things they are happy about. In a sense, there is idea that what is being put up on Facebook is what you want others to know about you. Nine participants discussed how Facebook does not accurately represent your whole life. That you choose what side to portray and from the qualities discussed at the start of the analysis section it is "your more fun side of your character" (CM, page 41). MOB alluded to wanting to seem like you have it together on Facebook. Interestingly, AM refers to wanting others to see that your life is perfect and that perhaps this is the reason for putting up information you are happy about and keeping down any information that shows your vulnerable side:

AM: "Ahmm I suppose you do want everyone to think oh everything is great and everything is perfect..." (page 20)

A recurring theme across all participants was that what one puts on Facebook has to be *something*. In other words, some form of implicit standard has to be met, meaning they will put information up about events and not everyday occurrences. As discussed in theme 1, this is why Twitter is used more for ordinary posts with CM saying "you tweet about like ordinary things but Facebook is more kind of about ah things you are doing" (page 41). The participants feel there is so much on one's newsfeed that what you do put up has to be of interest to others so that they take notice of it - "your newsfeed could be filled with them and I'm just like I have nothing good to say like" (AM, page 2). Thus, events include nights out, holidays, and checking-in in interesting places. Much of the activity revolves around being with friends as in checking-in together, being seen in pictures together and posting on each other's walls.

BON: "And I used only put one up if there was something significant or something good like but I dunno." ... "Well it would be significant to me but I'd hope other people would hope that it would be significant as well like. But obviously I first think Oh I think people would you know appreciate that or whatever. I'd put it up yano. (page 9)

Not only does a lot of thought go into what the participants decide to put up on Facebook but, interestingly, five participants outlined that a certain amount of effort goes into *how* it is said. BON referred to wanting attention by putting up what she does

on Facebook but not wanting to look like she is looking for attention. Others mentioned editing, revising and double checking what they put up to make sure it is okay to have on their Facebook with NOR saying "I would maybe I would write it, reread it edit it. I mean I do I do put thought into it" (page 24). Some admitted to exaggerating what they say in an attempt to make it funnier or more interesting to others. If a certain standard is not met, often the content never makes the profile:

NOR: *"I have sometimes not put out a status cos I have just decided that I didn't think it was funny enough or something. Or I couldn't get the wording right for it so I just kind of decided not to just leave it and not put it out."* (page 24)

It is evident that the participants put things on Facebook that they want others to know and put some effort into effectively getting what they want to say across. However, this stems from the recurring notion in the data of wanting to make other users envious. Five participants mentioned this during the course of the interviews. In essence, putting up the information of what they do or how happy they are about something is not only because they feel what they say on Facebook has to be interesting to others but an element of it is to show off how good one's life is in a bid to make others envious. BON referred to exaggerating on Facebook because "it's mainly cos you put stuff up to make people jealous" (page 12). They want to be seen as being out with friends and doing fun things so that others are jealous of them:

CM: *"I suppose you do want to make people envious that you're at places and you're doing stuff with people"* (page 49)

Some participants had changed their location to places in America and Europe during the Summer partly to make others jealous – "I suppose kind of like rubbing it in some peoples' faces, not like any particular people, that like I was going and stuff" (CP, page 16).

BON: *"I dunno I suppose there is an aspect of making people jealous or whatever at home and stuff like that to let everyone know you are having a good time."* (page 2)

While the participants are conveying what they want to convey to their Facebook audience, there is an awareness that others are putting across an image too. In essence, what one wants others to know is what comes across via the Facebook profile. There appears to be an implicit understanding that the vast majority of content on Facebook pertains to only one side of one's life. It is not the whole picture; but the happy fun loving sociable side who *does things* that others will be envious of.

LQ: *"My facebook page is my facebook page for a reason. I can control it.....if I want people to see it people will see it. If I don't then I don't like and I will hide it or I will delete it."* (page 11)

Theme 4: Audience

The *code of being* is strongly influenced by this theme of audience. Audience members impact on one's desired impression and how it is conveyed. Eight participants alluded

to their vast audience of Facebook friends which have been accumulated throughout the years, many of whom they would no longer have any contact with:

IOR: *"..there are so many people that I am friends with now that I am just like aren't really relevant to my life that I don't even know"* (page 11)

Thus, the strength of one's relationships with Facebook friends can vary from very close to very distant. This essentially has an effect on, as discussed in theme 2, what the participants choose to keep off Facebook. Information is deemed as too personal for *all* of their audience because of not knowing just who on one's friends list will see what goes up:

AM: *"...cos I suppose the thing about Facebook is you don't know really who is going to see it out of your friends."* (page 7)

This leads to the participants having to negotiate the very public nature of Facebook and the uncertainty surrounding just exactly who will see what they post. One tactic of negotiating the vast Facebook audience is to utilise the private instant messaging 'chat' element with LQ stating that "the instant messaging is there for a reason" (page 11). IOR said "It is easier on chat because it is not public and stuff" because if everyone could see what she was saying "we are going to be like hmmm censor" (page 10). There is very much a private versus public decision-making process with most of what is done on Facebook. If one wants something known – it can be but will be known very publicly, otherwise it can be shared privately with specific people. MOB chooses to use chat for some things due to not wanting others to judge her by misinterpreting what she shares on Facebook.

MOB: *"...instead of posting it on to someone's wall I would message it to them because maybe some people wouldn't get it maybe you know people would judge it like negatively or something."* (page 18)

On the issue of audience segmentation, two particular subgroups were repeatedly mentioned across participants as affecting their Facebook behaviour, namely family members and future employers. Immediate family members, especially parents, were the cause of some censoring and toning down of some forms of information, particularly one's level of drinking. Older siblings annoyed IOR and BON by questioning things they saw on their Facebook profiles causing them to un-tag from some photographs. CM, however, did not mind his siblings seeing his activity on Facebook because he thinks "their photos would be the same as me like yano", in other words that they *would get it* (page 40). An interesting discovery during analysis was the anxiety of being friends with extended family members (e.g. aunts and uncles) with five participants saying it affected their Facebook activity. NOR said "I kind of up my standards really of social interaction with them. I would be kind of more polite to them", thus, he didn't want them "going on my Facebook profile and seeing that I am clearly not like that" (page 26). In a sense, he didn't want his family's image of him contradicted by his Facebook activity. Extended family members were also a cause of concern due to talking about what they saw on Facebook to other family members. SM spoke of her aunt talking about her photographs from Gay Pride Week when her father was not aware that she was a lesbian:

SM: *"..see I hadn't come out to my dad at the time and my aunt who is really shes lovely like apparently she was saying to him after I had put up the photos up or saying to his girlfriend or something 'oh have you seen S's photos recently have you been on her facebook" (page 22)*

Eight participants spoke about potential employers and how with age they had realised the implications of putting something on Facebook that could jeopardize the chance of getting employment. They were aware that employers could utilize Facebook to screen candidates:

SOB: *"..nowadays there are employers that will seek you out ahmm who you are on Facebook ahmm to see you know what you do because in a sense it is a good representation of how much self respect you have" (page 33)*

Due to the element of risk of employers seeing undesirable information, some participants employed tactics to curtail this risk. CM and SOB changed their names on Facebook so that their profiles would not be able to be found if employers or co-workers searched for them. LQ advocated privacy setting so only those she accepts as friends can see her profile - "lock it for your own self just to keep it to who you want to see it like you know" (page 14). There was a sense of having to be careful of what goes up on Facebook, that in most cases, wasn't there a few years ago, probably due to the participants coming to an age where looking for employment is not too far in the distant future:

CP: *"..looking into the future we're all getting older. Probably a few years ago I wouldn't have cared cos you know but like as you get older I kind of think that ah you should kind of restrict a bit what you put up" (page 20)*

As mentioned in the opening section of the analysis one participant (MOB) differed from the others in the qualities she wanted to portray through Facebook. She stated that she didn't want to look too crazy or look like she was going out too much. This stemmed from the fact that she actively invited employers to view her profile by putting it on her curriculum vitae. Thus, she was tactically censoring information or specifically putting information on her profile that was in her interest to convey to potential employers:

MOB: *"..an awful lot of the stuff that I put up on Facebook is aimed at people that I might be applying for a job ahmm people that might be checking out my Facebook page to see if I am okay" (page 18)*

An example she gave was checking-in at a blood transfusion clinic because she had applied to volunteer in a similar setting and wanted that information to be seen. Although MOB was the most pronounced example of using Facebook to increase the likelihood of obtaining future employment, two other participants did allude to it. SOB said that instead of always emphasising one's wild and fun side, individuals "could possibly use Facebook to their advantage to network a little bit" in their particular field of interest (page 34). CP, a volunteer with the college radio, spoke of posting information specifically for the station manager to see - "some things I put up I want to kind of look like I want to go places" (page 4).

Summary

An implicit *code of being* was found to exist on Facebook, which largely stemmed from the participants' sentiments that *everyone* had a Facebook account. Furthermore, there was awareness that one was being judged on the basis of what content was put up on the site. This accumulated into the knowledge, which appears to develop over time, of how to be or act on Facebook. Essentially, what information is both acceptable and unacceptable to put on the site. The participants learnt not to put up anything overly personal or emotional and also to downplay their level of drinking. The content posted on one's profile portrays your happy fun-loving side that is worthy of other users' envy. Finally, the participants learnt to consider and negotiate their vast audience of Facebook 'friends' when posting content due to their growing awareness that different subgroups, particularly family members and employers, can potentially access their profiles.

DISCUSSION

The current study set out to investigate the experience of presenting self on the popular social networking site Facebook, specifically participants' desired impressions and how they conveyed those impressions to their Facebook audience. The qualities participants identified as desirable (e.g. nice, fun, popular etc) were not surprising and were very much in line with the literature discussed earlier, e.g. wanting to be socially desirable (Zhao et al., 2008). The pervasiveness and apparent importance of online impression management to the participants resonates with Rosenbaum et al.'s (2010) proposition that contemporary impression management is very much an integrated part of one's behaviour on SNSs like Facebook. The feeling of being judged on the basis of one's Facebook profile suggests that the continuous process of self-presenting on Facebook is extremely important justifying this study's rationale to investigate its production from the users' perspective

The main theme that emerged from the analysis suggests that there is an implicit *code of being*, reflecting socially mediated norms, that influences this desired impression by structuring people's Facebook behaviour. The *code* subtly and implicitly guides what information individuals both put up and do not put up on their profiles. Participants' thoughts about Facebook being a judgemental arena where all content being posted is scrutinised by others leads to increased surveillance of what exactly they do put on the site and a consideration of how others would react to it. All of this accumulated into the existence of *code of being* on Facebook that guides what one should say and also what one should not say on the site. In essence, what is acceptable for others to see and what is not. It is an indication of the merit of Erving Goffman's seminal dramaturgical theory (1959), which guided this study, that it remains an applicable and useful framework for understanding the act of self-presentation in the contemporary social arena of Facebook. The powerful theatrical imagery of the actor's 'front' which is performed on-stage transcends powerfully to the Facebook profile. The participants could be likened to actors whose online 'front' followed a script in the form of the *code of being*.

Many of the participants denounced the act of posting emotional or overly personal content and were highly critical of individuals who did this suggesting it is *not the done*

thing, or not following this implicit *code*. Self-censorship appeared to be the tactic with participants acknowledging that they would not publicly post emotional statuses about being upset. This finding supported Rosenberg (2009) who suggested that individuals would mediate both Facebook's public nature and mass audience by using the private 'chat' function, thus, informing only close friends that they were upset. Thus, a conscious 'surveillance mechanism' (Zarghooni, 2007), appears to be exercised whilst self-presenting online. In essence, if it is deemed that particular content potentially goes against the *code of being*, one can negotiate this by either deciding not to post it at all or else sending it privately to a number of parties using the 'chat' function.

This novel finding of a *code of being* discredits the notion outlined in the literature review that college students have a reckless tendency to post everything and anything (Peluchette & Karl, 2010). In essence, the participants did have a filter in relation to what content they posted on their Facebook profiles. This filter appears to stem from how they think others will perceive or judge them on the basis of the potential content. A possible explanation for the increasing censorship could be to do with a change from when Ellison et al.'s (2007) study recorded college students thinking only their peers saw their Facebook profiles to the present time with the internet-driven transformation of social life, seeing more adults entering the social networking world.

Audience segmentation does appear to be an issue whilst self-presenting online with one participant, LQ, summing up the situation by stating that you never know who is going to see what you put on Facebook. Potential employers were identified as one group causing concern for participants. Two studies discussed in the Introduction (e.g. Peluchette & Karl, 2010; Harrison, 2008), found that the majority of their participants were unaware of the possibility of prospective employers utilizing Facebook to screen employee candidates. However, in the present study the majority of the participants described being conscious of this possibility and actively censoring their Facebook profile. This finding supports Leary (1996) and Rosenbaum et al.'s (2010) suggestions that individuals increase their self-presentation if they believe important outcomes are riding on the impression created, particularly if the target audience is authoritative and possesses some form of power. Family members were also highlighted as a contentious sub group of the 'friend' list, with extended family being singled out in particular.

Audience considerations play a prominent role in the process of self-presentation, which is reflected in the dedication of an entire theme to the subject. It appears that with the increasing numbers of adults joining Facebook, college students have had to reassess what is and what is not appropriate to have on Facebook leading to increased censorship of profile content. Peluchette and Karl (2010), as outlined in the Introduction, suggested that college students allude to alcohol in order to increase peers' social acceptability. An element of that did indeed exist but participants had to constantly consider whether the content was *too* bad to have on their profile due to the possibility of family members or employers seeing. Essentially, for many of them it was suitable to be photographed holding a drink; however, photographs where they looked too drunk and messy were deemed unsuitable to have on one's profile. The majority of the participants engaged in tactics such as un-tagging photographs or having security settings so that they had to approve content before it went on their profile, in order to reduce the risk of anything *too* bad being put up about them on Facebook.

An interesting discovery that was discussed in Theme 4, which merits further discussion, was one participant (MOB) actively and tactically placing information on her Facebook profile for prospective employers to see if they did utilise Facebook as a screening tool. In essence, she was using Facebook to her advantage in an attempt to secure employment. Future research is required to investigate if this is common practice amongst college students nearing the end of their degrees. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this practice could be becoming increasingly popular due to the fact of two other participants alluding to it. Furthermore, with a growing awareness of employers checking Facebook profiles it is highly likely that more individuals are tactically placing content for their benefit.

Facebook's *code of being* also influenced participants in what they *do* say on the site. As previously mentioned, Peluchette and Karl (2010) proposed students post particular content in order to increase their social acceptability amongst peers. However, the findings from the present study suggest that making peers envious is the driving force behind much of the content posted on Facebook. From the literature review, it is evident that some research on self-presentation tactics has discussed ingratiation or the process of emphasising positive qualities and omitting flaws (e.g. Valkenburg et al., 2006; Strano, 2008). The participants do indeed emphasise what they think others will find desirable but no previous research, to the author's knowledge, has credited the jealousy factor as a motive for doing so. Not only did the participants want their Facebook friends to see that they were out having a good night, they wanted them to be jealous because of it. Information is only posted if the participants want others to see it, usually having some connotation to how good their lives are. Essentially a very one-sided portrayal of one's life is conveyed with the positive aspects being emphasised.

A major implication of the present study is the finding of a developmental transition or change with age in how individuals use Facebook, which relates to both the aforementioned implications of the existence of a *code of being* and the issue of audience segmentation. The participants both learnt how to act on Facebook and also how to manage their content with the developing awareness that groups other than their peers, namely future employers and family members, could see their profiles. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that the tactical placing of information on Facebook profiles is occurring due to this awareness. The majority of the participants mentioned that they used to say and do a lot more on Facebook in the past implying that some form of change had occurred in how they behave on the site. It is apparent that this developmental pattern needs to be further investigated. For instance, at what age does one become aware of the *code of being* and the need to negotiate one's vast audience of Facebook 'friends'. There is preliminary evidence to suggest that different codes of being operate for different age groups. For example, the participants alluded to being able to post information about their relationship statuses when they were younger which is now deemed unacceptable. The code does appear to be ever evolving with changing norms that seem in sync with differing time points in life. A riveting and organic extension of the current study would be to explore the different codes of being in operation across the age groups of Facebook users.

It must be acknowledged that due to the small sample size of ten participants these findings can only be suggestive. Furthermore, with a discrepancy between the amount of males and females interviewed further research needs to investigate if this finding is

robust across both genders. However, the strengths of the current study, namely the measure of interviewing participants who weren't known to the investigator, tailoring the interview schedule to each participant from viewing their Facebook profile and the rigorous piloting of the interview schedule itself increased the validity of the responses obtained. Thus, it may not be unreasonable to assume contextual generalisation of these findings for the university population. To strengthen this assumption more systematic and extensive interviewing is merited with different samples from the university populations, taking different educational and socio-economical backgrounds into consideration. If similar findings were obtained, the current findings would be strengthened via a process of triangulation. In order to generalise beyond the college student population, a very systematic programme of interviewing or a large-scale survey would be required to investigate the robustness of a *code of being*. Similarly, cross-contextual research is required to generalise outside of the Irish population.

The present study yielded an intriguing insight into the reasons behind participants' behaviour on Facebook and how their desired impressions are strongly influenced by a common *code of being* that appears to develop or change with age. It stems from the knowledge that one's Facebook friends are judging what content is put on the social networking site, leading to a common understanding of what information is appropriate and inappropriate to share. It also appears that audience segmentation of one's Facebook 'friends' influences behaviour, particularly the knowledge that potential employers and family members can access one's profile. It is apparent that the findings reported in the current study are worthy of further investigation.

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