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Self- Presentation:

An Exploration on How and Why People Present Online and How to Successfully Self Present on Linked-In

Intro/Abstract:

People use social media and online platforms daily and through this use they create an online personality or digital identity. They chose specific ways in which they want to present themselves online known as self presentation. There are multiple ways in which people self present. Some of those include self presentation strategies and involve the use of impression management. The communication field has done extensive research on the topic and has come to the conclusion that people self present as a form of self expression and is motivated to fulfil a personal need. This paper will explore the ways individuals choose to self present, why people self present and how to apply those strategies of self presentation and impression management to a user's LinkedIn profile.

Findings:

The why

“Self presentation refers to how people attempt to present themselves to control or shape how others view them. It involves expressing oneself and behaving in ways that create a desired impression.” (psychology) People self present to control the narrative that goes on about them as best they can. People do it as a form of self expression, for entertainment and for a way to communicate and share their lives with people across the world. Digital platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have brought about new ideas and concepts of the self, “the self has become a resonant subject (and object) as well as a site of production and consumption in the

digital age.” (Ibrahim) The self is no longer just an intangible subject it has become a quantifiable thing because of social media. “Self presentation is the intentional and tangible component of identity” (Schau and Gilly). All the data collected as a result of our actions has turned the self and our identities into numbers and data points on a server. We have become a series of zeros and ones. Self presentation has been a topic of study since early forms of social media. One study showed that people chose to self present on MySpace for self esteem boosts and how they did it was based on personality aspects. (Banczyk) Another article supports the claim that people self present for their own benefit, “the presentation of the self online and the modes of representation where we consciously seek to affirm our presence on the screen is what is characterized here as self-curation.” (Ibrahim). Self curation is based on digital architecture, politics and aesthetics, it is where selfhood is performed and made available for consumption for others. However, self curation is not based on narcissism alone. “In the process, it reveals our intimate bind with technology, and in tandem technology's ability to extend our sense of self through an array of strategies and modes including the online image economies which image sharing social media platforms are part of.” (Ibrahim). Instagram is one of those online image economies.

As social media has grown so has the growth for personal gain. This growth has led to the “influencer” and commodification of the self. People can now monetize off their personalities. As long as an individual fits a brand’s “mold” he can become an influencer based on how one self presents online. If this person's profile has a certain aesthetic or the person looks a certain way they can become “Instagram Famous” and start gaining sponsorships and earning money just for posting a single photo. “One may argue that in the new media economy, the self commodified relentlessly through a process of non-stop capture facilitated through the

convergence of mobile telephony, imaging and publishing technologies loses what Benjamin ([3]) terms as 'aura'. Or perhaps the representation of the self through technologically mediated platforms illuminates its loss of authenticity in configuring the self in the digital platforms.” (Ibrahim). The influencer and the expectations that are now set on certain platforms have created an environment where people just try to fit in and do not share the real parts of themselves. It is often found that people only share the best moments in life. It is only as of recently that you have seen a shift in people share more and more hardships, partly due to how much uncertainty has been surrounding the year 2020. I have personally noticed this shift this year with the rise in popularity that “Tik Tok” has gained. People are very vulnerable and honest about their life experiences on that application. They are a way to start a shift in our culture where it is acceptable to talk about the “hard stuff” and it brought about a sense of community and support that tells an individual “hey you are not alone”.

The How

People can self present in different ways. People present online through the posts they make, through what they share, what they comment, what posts they are tagged in, what they like and who they follow. Through these things people can control the impression they make on people. What people post and share hold the greeted value in controlling that impression. People are often strategic with what they post and when they post. Impression management is key. People are actively and should be actively managing how they self present online. “The main aim of impression management is to steer others’ impres- sion with the use of controlling information, photos, and videos and present them in a proper way in social media.” (Paliszkiewicz and Mądra-sawicka).

Impression management involves two components: impression motivation and impression construction. Common motives include maintaining self esteem, the desire for rewards, and to create a desired self identity (Ahmed). The construction involves how an individual creates their desired impression through their choices of self presentation strategies (Ahmed). There are five strategies of self presentation: ingratiation, competence, intimidation, enhancement, and supplication. Ingratiation strategies involve saying negative things about one's self and positives about another person, as well as humor, modesty and familiarity. Someone using this strategy has a goal of being liked by others. The goal of supplication is to appear helpless through the use of self deprecating speech so that others feel that they need to come to the person's aid. The strategy is often used by people that have a desire to boost their self esteem. Enhancement involves the user intentionally posting things that make them look knowledgeable and desirable. Enhancement strategies are often used on social media profiles such as LinkedIn.

Application:

“The development of social media like LinkedIn has facilitated identity construction through the abilities to shape the information, photos, and video posted on an individual's profile in attempts to control how others will perceive them in real and internet world.”

(Paliszkiewicz;Mądra-sawicka).

LinkedIn allows users to connect with employers as well as allows recruiters to find qualified candidates. The social media site has roughly 400 million uses across 200 countries. The platform allows users to fill in information that best represents who they are and the experiences they have. Impression management is key to success on this social media platform. The first thing to do to control one's first impression is a solid profile picture, having a photo

alone makes one more socially desirable according to “Results of the research presented by Edwards et al. (2015) indicates that users who post a profile picture along with their LinkedIn profile are perceived as more socially attractive and more competent than users who do not post a picture. Images help to increase social presence in electronic communications.”

(Paliszkiewicz;Mądra-sawicka). One wants to make sure that their profile photo is professional and a photo taken of them not a selfie. According to Paliszkiewicz and Mądra-sawicka, employers are more likely to hire a candidate when they have as much information on them ahead of time before the first in person meeting. Next is sharing interests and hobbies that make one desirable,

“According to Goffman’s (1959) theory of identity management, people strategically present characteristics that they believe others will approve. For example, people who are looking for a job may be aware that posting specific interests personal or professional can sway how attractive they are to recruiters because they may coincide with recruiters’ hobbies”(Paliszkiewicz;Mądra-sawicka).

Another key factor to a good LinkedIn profile is the number of connections a user has. “The number of connections is important for a candidate in certain careers (i.e. sales, marketing, public relations, recruiting, etc.). It also shows how this person can create a social network.” (Paliszkiewicz; Mądra-sawicka). It tells the recruiter that the individual knows how to communicate and build on their network. Making connections is also important because it will allow for more job and interview opportunities because the more people you know and that know you the more likely you are to find a job or be thought of for the position. Another key part of successful impression management on this platform is defining and presenting one's skill set. It is important on LinkedIn not to tell one's life story but to present one's strengths and professional

skills to the best of their ability. My best suggestion is to update that list of skills often based on the kind of job the individual is looking for. Just as one would tailor the skills listed on a resume for the specific job, they should look at multiple job descriptions at different organizations for the same positions and display the skills they possess that are asked for the most frequently in the job descriptions. Overall It is very important to create professional LinkedIn Profile in which user will:

- build a complete profile,
- highlight only relevant information,
- always include photography,
- limit recommendations to trustful people,
- add credible people to network,
- join different groups, and
- provide high-quality and researched-based information.

Using the enhancement strategy of self presentation on LinkedIn would allow for an individual to be the most successful. Presenting one's self as knowledgeable and intelligent on LinkedIn is the best option. Ways to do this are to post about events one worked or attended that would be desirable to employers, filling out skills and personal experience that represent what you know how to do well, and when posting using proper grammar and punctuation. Doing just these things will make an individual seem more intelligent and desirable for the job. Using the ingratiation strategy may be slightly beneficial in the way that it presents the individual as a modest person. Using the supplication strategy would only hurt an individual's profile. Presenting as a needy helpless person would not be desirable for employers. It is acceptable to use social media platforms as a means to reach out for help but not LinkedIn. On LinkedIn the

individual wants to present their strengths not weaknesses. So, choosing to present with the supplication strategy would not prove that they are a person that has strengths.

Roughly every year 35.5 million users find jobs or receive an offer as a result of a connection made on LinkedIn, this proves the importance of having a well made profile.

Discussion

Digital Identity has been explored and studied across the communications and digital studies fields. It is the make up of who you are online and on digital platforms. Your digital identity is made up of all profiles on social media but as well as gaming profiles and all the way down to the technology you use. It's not only what you post but what you reshare, like, comment and who you follow. For example your phone or smart watch can track your location therefore building on your digital identity. How you present yourself online can be as accurate or inaccurate as you want it to be. But whatever you make it will be with you forever. Every part of your profiles can be analyzed and assumptions can be made about who you are online. That's why it is important to present accurately and appropriately online. What, how, and when you post or share things online gives an insight on who you are. Just from looking at one social media profile I could learn what your likes/dislikes are; who your friends are; places you have been; the kind of music you listen to; who you have been in a relationship with; etc. I like to view social media profiles as an overview or resume of your personality. It's incredible the amount of information people share online. Nothing is personal or private anymore.

But with that comes the responsibility of posting appropriately. Of being conscious of what you are posting. It's so important to watch what you post nowadays because there is so much weight that it holds. It is an employer's main source of information on the individual. Post

from the past can really come back around. Employers not only care if the individual is a “good person” but if they will accurately represent that the organization or company believes in. So, yes that post of doing something “dumb” with your friends in highschool matters. It’s important to remember that once it's out there it's out there for the world to see. Even after it is deleted the data still exists and can be pulled forward from serves such as the “wayback machine”.

Having good impression management skills and using the proper forms of self presentation could make the difference in whether or not an individual gets a job. This does not only apply to LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a key platform and will be the first one employers look at but they will still check others like Facebook and Instagram. It is important to be consistent about who the individual is presenting as on each platform. Once an individual chooses the strategies they want to use to present who they are and the person they want to present should be the strategy they use across all platforms.

Conclusion:

Self presentation online is becoming more and more important in the age of technology. Especially with the rise in online interviews and recruiting online as a result of covid-19, presenting online is crucial. Social media drives our society and having good impression management skills is being more and more important. Understanding and being consistent with one's impression management is important to a successful LinkedIn profile. In this paper I discussed the many ways people self present online and discussed in detail three self presentation strategies, enhancement, supplication and ingratiation. I also discussed the reasons why people

choose to self present. Most of the reasons are intrinsically motivated. I discussed the importance and methods of impression management. And then I applied those strategies and methods on how to build a successful LinkedIn profile. I talked about how making connections, having a good profile photo and listing the best skills can make or break one's LinkedIn profile. Having a LinkedIn profile is important and crucial to jumpstarting one's career but having a profile that is well done and desirable can make all the difference.

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