Images in Human Computer Interaction : Digitally Embodied Identity Construction in Facebook

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Abstract: **This study is based on human to human interactions with the internet as the medium rather than human interaction with the internet itself. It examines how distributed individuals interact together using features of online social networking tools to project their identity and communicate their social selves visually on the online space. Using a comprehensive literature review and an online ethnography study on the popular social networking site, Facebook, the authors draw relevance from the emerging themes derived from photo elicitation interviews and relate them to the identity construction of the Facebook user. Through the lens of Goffman's presentation of self in everyday life, this study seeks to prove that social media like Facebook acts a catalyst of postmodernism and serves to change and revolutionize social identity of the individual and the society.**

Keywords; Social Media Technology, Facebook, Identity, Body Self presentation, Post-modernism

I. Introduction

There is an escalating focus on online social identity with the proliferation of online communication, changing interaction and communicating patterns that enable us to interact in diverse ways with a dispersed group of people. There seems to be a gradual shift from the real physical world to a virtual world which is not surprising as people tend to make space for themselves in the new public sphere triggered by the dynamic progress of Information technology. Over the past couple of decades humanity has increasingly turned to Information Technology as a boon through wherewithal that Information Technology offers, unimaginable heights of scientific and technological progress. However, rather than uplifting and emancipating society, the wholesale implementation of Social Media technology has brought with it a host of unintended and unforeseen consequences too as far as the society is concerned.

A. Impact of social Media on Society

The study of adult e-communication repeatedly shows that much online interaction is interwoven with identity performance [1]. The reason for more studies probing identity is the affordances of technology and the social interactions that are the outcome of interaction with technology. The new technology presents us an array of tools to interact with people who we have not met face to face, who are geographically remote and people reticent to emote. Social networking sites are perhaps the broadest and most infiltrating of internet mediums in postmodernism. Reaching vast audiences on local and global spectrums, these websites are user friendly, cheap and allow users to engage in conversation. This study seeks to explore the construction of identity by young adults through presentation of the self in the profile pictures of a social networking site, www. Facebook.com

The past half-century has witnessed accelerations in flows of media and communication and there have been some profound implications of these accelerations. The arts have grappled to attempt and make sense of these changes, but the sheer pace of these changes has surpassed our ability to consistently interpret them. The evolutionary shift from print to television and other digital forms of communication has not only passed on endowing machines with symbolic functions, but also on granting machines with gradual processes of creating cultural subject out of human beings [2]. Information Technology has become ubiquitous. It has spread to almost all aspects of society and has taken many differing forms. Information enabled by Information Technologies has risen to a place of prominence, becoming the central driver of modern society. Access to technology and the new online social environment where technology is embedded are the persuasive interests that influence the study of social identity. Cultures of the world have their own traditions built around centuries of relating to the world in their own ways and embrace these norms as such. But the internet has the ability to influence global culture in other ways. Even if cultural products are rejected as globalization and imperialistic attacks on ideological systems, the postmodern structure of the internet may quietly transform the way individuals relate to the world simply by allowing interactions to happen in certain ways. Conlon believes that Information Technology provides functionalities that are vital to the development of Post-Modernism [3].

Social Media technology has served to emasculate the influences of tradition, cultural heritage, community and family, and has served to create new definitions of society. With the saturation of society with Social Media technology and the rising influence that information and communication is playing, a new type of society has emerged that is very different from traditional societal structures - the Information Society. The Information Society is one that has become so saturated with information and communication technologies that it is completely dependent and is being shaped by them.

According to Conlon, 'the old structures of neighbourhood, employment, family and church no longer have the power to connect society that once they had' as in [3]. Society has evolved to a state predicted by where it can no longer be understood or represented without taking technology into consideration [4]. Owing to the pervasiveness of Information and Communication Technology in all aspects of life, and its aforementioned non-ethical nature, there will inevitably be an impact on society and the individual.

B. Post-Modernism

Post-Modernism is interpreted in various perspectives by philosophers, anthropologists and theorists. Others point out to the cultural objects identifying Post-Modernism as a set of styles brought about by artists in the form of art, movies, and other artifacts. But this is again negated and criticized for implying that Post-Modernism is simply not a style but is more than that, it is a culture change that is an impact of economic, political and cultural disorder. The postmodern entails a crisis of universality and cultural authority that is profound questioning of the very foundations of truth that shore up our knowledge of social structures and our means of producing knowledge about social relations and culture. Tarnas says 'the postmodern mind' may be viewed as an open-ended, indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual and cultural currents [5].

The shift to 'information age' has been accompanied by a dematerialization of objects and commodities, implying that non material goods play a more commercial role in the economy and consumption creating a flutter in consumerism. Process of production is governed by non material functions and there seems to be a rise in mediation of goods that is referred to as phantasmagoria of signs. The move from structuralism to post-structuralism has had some influence on postmodernism. One of the main contributions of post-structuralist thought is that all denotation is connotation. What we are consequently left with is reality composed of systems of representation. Shifts in semiotics have lead to a greater sense of intertextuality as to how signs necessarily relate to one another. Text is read in relationship to other text and visuals are interpreted in relation to other visuals, thus a range of textual and visual references is brought to bear on internet textuality. This dematerialization process has resulted in a perceived state of instability, transgression, and the blurring of boundaries and distinctions. Things that inhabited different worlds and value systems, and were consumed by different audiences, now occupy a single cultural space [6]. In this study through understanding and examining the influences of social media, the authors attempt to prove that Facebook acts to promote the various permutations and facets of Post-Modernism and has an impact on identity. It focuses on the representation of Facebook users who form the major part of the popular culture.

C. Identity and Popular Culture

The rise of popular culture, particularly of mediated communicated formats that infuse everyday life, including architecture, entertainment, prayer, play, and work, adds a dimension to the effective environment—the physical and symbolic environment we experience and share on an everyday basis [7]. This dimension exists more temporally than spatially; it resides in increasingly portable, fast, and, above all, chic, valued, stylish mediated interaction [8]. Self and especially identity became separated from the definition of the situation in the extraordinary contexts of popular culture. Popular culture provides the overriding context and definition, particularly for the age group most fully enmeshed in mass-mediated experience particularly the youth. As Couch proclaimed several years ago, evocative rather than referential forms of communication now dominate the meaning landscape [9]. The presentation of self has changed drastically.

The key conceptual tie for identity and the definition of the situation is the generalized other, but social media provide numerous others. When both actor and audience have at least one foot in popular culture, they hold shared meanings for validating the actor's performance. Actors still want to present a self, but the time, place, and manner in which they do it have been fundamentally altered by new awareness contexts stressing more evocative and "present" orientations rather than consequential and future ones. Social networking sites promote identity as a resource to satisfy individually oriented needs and interests to "be whomever you want," Popular culture's emphasis on entertainment and commodification of the self informs this emphasis. Any individual can identify themselves on a myriad of levels: in a personal sense, a social sense, on an ethnic, cultural, spiritual or religious basis and by way of their moral values [10]. As a consequence, identities can be seen as flexible or even conflicting, with no one person's identity being the same as another, and each person having their own unique mix of allegiances [11]. Identity is contextualized and produced in a symbolic environment shared by other actors. Popular culture and Social Media technology have influenced the arena for identity and social definitions in two fundamental ways: they opened a wide range of experiences, models, and scenarios from which people can draw; and they added unique communication formats and interaction styles. Young adults play a significant role in shaping audience expectations and criteria for self-presentations for themselves and others. With Facebook becoming a popular choice of communication and an ideal space to communicate their likes, dislikes, thoughts, opinions and ideologies through presentation of their self it implicitly define and redefine their identity.

D. Identity versus the Embodied and Disembodied Self

One of the most pervasive themes in the fiction and theory of cyberculture of the past few decades has been that the human body is vanishing, irrelevant or, interfaced with the machine, an empty shell robbed of what is variously called spirit, consciousness or identity"[12]. "Disembodiment occurs

when a person's identity is separated from their physical presence "[13]."Disembodiment" is the idea that once the user is online, the need for the body is no longer required, and the user can participate separately from it. This ultimately relates to a sense of detachment from the identity defined by the physical body. In cyberspace, many aspects of identity become blurred and are only defined by the user. But online identity cannot be completely free from the social constraints that are imposed in the real world. As Westfall discusses, "the idea of truly departing from social hierarchy and restriction does not occur on the Internet with identity construction still shaped by others [14].

Media spaces and social practices are produced through the human body in its material form, the nature of the practices being, in large part, contingent on the forms and practices of the human body. Westfall raises the important, yet rarely discussed, issue of the effects of literacy and communication skills of the online user "[14]. Indeed, these skills or the lack thereof have the capacity to shape one's online perception as they shape one's perception through a physical body in the "real world."A person can embody an identity or a particular set of identities, by the way one move, interacts, communicates and perceives. Embodiment usually refers to how the body and its interactive processes, such as perception or cultural acquisition through the senses, aid, enhance or interfere with the development of the human functioning. Within the context of multimodality the emphasis is on the relationship between physical experience, and multimodal resources, media practices and social spaces. This relationship is an interdependent one where meaning making is grounded in physical experience, through bodily form, gaze, gesture, body posture, facial expression, movement, which shapes the kind of interaction with the environment.(46)

E. Digitally embodied materiality

My body is "visible, and mobile;" it also hears, tastes, touches, interacts, and can be sedentary and blind at times. It is "a thing among things," one object among many, "caught in fabric of the world" recounts that the texture, the materiality, the haptic fabric of space and our very physical bodies is rendered into digital space via images in social networking sites [15]. Digital objects materialise on screen as a result of the interplay of multifaceted assemblages of hardware, content and software, and arrive with certain texture and grain. As they revisit pre existing media, such textures change; such different material incarnations facilitate different experiences and uses, and are accompanied by different contextual information. Attention to the materiality of the visual image and the materiality of the context may reveal the distinctive texture of the social relations in which the image performs its work [16]. Profile pictures in different time and space provide contextual information that is meaningful and reveal the materiality and texture of social relationships. Merleau-Ponty is in the view of the body as the 'subject of perception' [17]. According to him to be a subject of perception is to have a world; in other words, to be a body is to have a space where the materiality of

this body can be endowed and where it's existential potentiality of movements and hence actions can be exercised. As such, neither experience nor knowledge can be perceived as being 'out there' but rather, as emerging out of the inextricability of the body and its spatiality. Merleau-Ponty seeks to re-establish the fundamental union between the self and the world, redirecting attention to the fact that this union is but embodied, and hinting to the notion that identity by virtue of the latter is a cognitive accumulation of phenomenological bodily experiences [17].

Thus the aesthetics of profile pictures are as indicative of the performance of collective character as they are a manifestation of individual identity. This identity is not an a priori condition represented through the compositional and stylistic techniques of profile pictures, but rather it is continuous with the aesthetic enunciation of the networked self embodied by pictures of the self. However, because dialogues are fluid, the nuanced adaptation of self that occurs through ecological interactions with others is fed back into the dialogic condition, resulting in the potential for numerous forms of personhood or identities. In Bakhtin's writings, it is through the dialogic imbrication of the individual within networks of association that the self is alternately realized and transfigured [18]. The study gives particular attention to the photographs in their Facebook profiles in the belief that college students use visual symbols in the images that they use to present themselves which are indicators of identity markers.

F. Identity and Self Presentation

According to Smock, self-presentation is a theoretical construct that refers to the processes individuals use in attempting to control how others perceive them [19]. Using the personal profile, Facebook users have the ability to present a controlled image of themselves to their audience of friends and acquaintances, and this information control is vital to self-presentation. As compared to face-to-face self-presentation, the ability to modify and manipulate online presentation allows the user to be selective when choosing a version of the self to present, thereby permitting the user to present multiple versions of the self [20].

Personal home pages can be created to convey an impression of one's own person and personal identity to certain audiences (eg. potential employers, chat friends, colleagues), and to improve contact opportunities and networking [21]. Personal home pages are well suited for elaborate, strategic self-presentations [22]. Vazire and Gosling argue that personal websites are highly controlled environments for self-expression and that "nearly every detail of a personal website is the result of a conscious decision on the part of the author" [23]. Boyd, suggests that many online social applications such as Friendster.com, are largely designed for self-presentation [24]. Symbolic interactionists see the "self" as fluid, dynamic, and existing "as a relationship between mind, body, and society" [1]. People's behaviour results from their understanding of social situations. Presentations are integral to defining and understanding one's

identity, "a complex social construction created and sustained by a subject's location within a culture and a society" [25].

The idea of identity has occupied the attention of philosophers and scholars for years [26]. Individuals play many roles in many circumstances. Each element of the Facebook profile contributes to identity creation; it is this identity, or self, created that can influence the way a person acts in both online social networking sessions, and even in face-to-face interactions [27].The authors of Facebook profiles may choose to represent multiple identities congruent with their multiple social roles in "real life," or may choose to represent one identity only [28]. Toma and Hancock point out that ''self-presentation is a complex and communicative process that involves understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, being receptive to the values of the target audience, and using the medium of communication to one's advantage [29]. This study conducts an in-depth investigation on a sample of Indian youth and interprets the narratives of identity construction of images, photographs posted in their own profile pages.

G. Images in interaction

The study of visual media has a long history in the social sciences. However, for a variety of reasons the use and study of images in scholarly works has been limited. Bogdan noted that while a few researchers use still and video footage, most do not [30]. One reason for this is the belief that images "do not speak for themselves" and require a greater amount of interpretation than written words [31]. Practicality and professional socialization also likely have a role in the limited use of the visual. Today, with the enhanced screen culture of laptops and mobile phones, we are able to access online communication systems anytime we want. The new cultural phenomenon of ubiquitous screen media motivates images to have a superior position than text, especially compared to the predominant text-writing culture before the invention of the screen. This significant transformation from a culture based on writing to a culture based on images opens up a new chapter for communication of hyper-visual language. Images have become one of the primary means for conveying information, entertainment, and modes of consumption [32]. One reason the visual has an elevated role is that it permits the use and display of symbols. Dramaturgical studies are largely interested in these symbols, exploring how they come to have meaning, how people make meaning of them, and how people use them. Facebook is strongly tied to making identities by the simple fact that it revolves around "profiles" of self and others. Visual communication is an integral part of this process. The profile picture is not just a nice addition, is arguably the most predominant feature of a person's activity on Facebook.

A person's home page start with a profile picture, considerably larger than any other postings on the page, and is followed by the name to the right in much smaller space. It can become clear from this instance alone that the picture carries more weight than the name does on Facebook. Also, because the picture is on the far left and we as a culture read from left to right, it can be assumed that, after the words Facebook, we will see the picture first. It is larger than the title Facebook, which is above the name, so it is arguably more eye catching than even the logo of the site itself. We can see from this argument alone how important profile pictures are. The identity of a user and how they are connected with other users starts off with an image. Through these examples, we see that the construction of image is heavily emphasized through the visual presentation of the self. Photos (referred to simply as "pics" by most Facebookers) are a dynamic element that drives a lot of activity on Facebook. Uploading pictures is merely the first step. After that, the person who uploaded the picture goes into a process of pic labeling, posting initial comments, tagging others who are involved, grouping pics in an album, and perhaps selecting one as the featured profile pic. Many pics receive not only comments from the uploading Facebooker but receive responses from other Facebookers as well.

Although the image that someone chooses to portray in an online community is in an extension of his or her real-world performance, Facebook also gives its users the chance to present themselves differently than they would in real life. Some sociologists believe that because profiles may stand alone as a representation of a person, someone can write himself or herself "into being" on his or her Facebook profile [24]. That is, online arenas may not just reflect someone's identity, but they may be tools that help someone create an identity. Facebook specifically, with its social complexity and rapidly growing number of users, is an ideal network to study when trying to discover the reasoning behind how and why users act and interact in the online space. The profile allows users to construct an identity through pictures, status updates, and personal information, presenting a self to their online network, or an audience that is imagined or perceived.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMWORK

A. Goffmans Fronts and Self presentation

A rough understanding of Facebook profiles is that college students use them to represent themselves to other college students in cyberspace and that the photographs have an important role in these representations. To understand if this is the case, Goffman's dramaturgical and impression management framework is used to help frame and inform the data. Goffman developed a framework of concepts to help understand how people convey symbolic information about themselves for others to use [25]. One of the means for conveying information is through the use of fronts. Fronts are "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" [25]. They are the sum of an actor's "expressive equipment" that an audience observes. Fronts provide observers information in the form of recognizable, standardized mannerisms, appearances, and settings. Fronts allow people to fill in information that might not be given during a performance. Photos can be seen as an

extension of a performance because audiences have learned to interpret them so that they are no longer one-dimensional "tracings," but instead are read as a representation of person or an event [29].

B. Props, Settings and Gestures

Goffman's dramaturgical and impression management framework is rooted in symbolic interaction and places great emphasis on situational performance [31]. Therefore, once actors have decided, consciously or unconsciously, on a particular front to use before an audience, they will use a variety of techniques to make their performance of the front believable. Within the dramaturgical and self-presentation framework, people use many of the same techniques in their everyday lives. Goffman identified props, settings, and gestures as being three possible components of a performance. Any object can be a prop if the "user believes that the possession or display of it will affect others" [32]. Examples may include clothing, body posture, body make up, gait, the possession or absence of car keys, and intensity of eye contact. Organizations can also use props for symbolic purposes. Like fronts, the meanings of props are socially negotiated and defined through social interactions. Gestures can be signs used by the individual to prove that he or she belongs to a certain group or it can be identified with the peer group that they belong to like college students use hand gestures to describe things and shake heads often to indicate acceptance and refusal. Settings, according to Goffman involve furniture, décor, and other background items that supply the audience with a sense of place [33]. They tend to consist of items that are immovable to give audiences members a sense of credibility about the performance. Settings are especially useful for the performance of several fronts. This study used Goffman's theatrical framework as a lens to investigate the fronts used by college students. Since it was observed that there were differences in the way males and females photographed in the profile pictures

III. METHOD

This study investigated the ways in which college students in the ages 18-23 construct a specific identity and a self-presentation strategy through photographs in their Facebook profile. Rather than examining the vast amount of social networks available, this study focused specifically on Facebook due to the growing popularity of Facebook usage among the Indian Internet users. The authors chose to study college students who were undergraduates as it was observed through the ethnographic study that the 18-23 age groups used more photographs than other age groups and changed photographs at a rapid pace. This makes colleges students who are Facebook users within this age range of particular interest to study in order to learn about social and communication behavior on social networking sites.
Primary Research Question: *RQ: How do Goffman's notions of 'fronts' explain how students read each others' Facebook*

profiles? How do college students discuss and interpret their Facebook identity?

This qualitative study employed an online ethnographic research design. Two independent sets of data were gathered for this study. They were participant observation and photo-elicitation interviews. The first data collection method was participant observation. Being in the field as a Facebook participant-observer meant creating a profile and spending some time updating it as a student. While a participant-observer the researcher usually logged on to Facebook several times a day. Initially these visits would be very brief but then would spend several hours on Facebook simply wandering around, commenting on people's walls, downloading 'widgets', observing random profiles, or trying to find classmates with whom the researcher had attended school or college and participated in several discussions.

The second data collection method was photo-elicitation interviews which were all conducted after participant observation experience. Photo elicitation is based on the idea that using photographic materials during the interview process can increase the participant's feeling of involvement with the interview and research process, assist them with memory recall and help them provide more nuanced responses, and offer them avenues for helping the researcher create interpretations for their observations [35]. Though photo-elicitation generated interest among fellow researchers, very few subsequent studies using it as a methodology have been published [36]. Used here, the term 'photo-elicitation interview' implies that participants were asked to look at either their own Facebook profile, the profiles of other users, or both and either respond to specific questions about the profiles or simply react to them.

This study used purposive and snowball sampling to locate participants for the interviews. To obtain the richest information regarding personal usage, heavy Facebook users were selected to participate. The criteria for heavy usage in this study were user log-in 4-6 times a week, and having maintained a Facebook profile for at least six months and that participants had a Facebook profile that contained at least 20 photographs. This sampling strategy is ideal for studies in which it is difficult to define a representative population and also find individuals who are representative of the entire range of experiences within a population [37]. It is a "strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" [38]. Of the 40 photo-elicitation interview participants, 20 were male and 20 were female. In this group, all belonged to the undergraduate level and the ages of participants ranged from 18 to 23. Interviews were conducted by the researchers and key informants who were participants themselves and had their own Facebook profile page. This was to ensure validity and reliability. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes in length and occurred in a face-to face setting. During face-to-face

interviews, the researcher pulled up the participant's Facebook profile so that the participant could view the information on his/her profile as she was speaking to the researcher. Each respondent was briefed about the interview session through phone and obtained the consent of the participant to display his or her Facebook profile for the duration of the interview. These subjects and questions covered general areas of choice of profile pictures, sexuality, gender and their role in identity creation, as well as specific areas of identity creation and how it relates to each participant's self-presentation strategy. The goal was to have participants openly reflect upon this process and share how they decided to include specific information on their profile, what they believe their profile picture says about them, and what factors influence the way in which they have chosen to present themselves.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

People employ fronts in nearly all social interactions, especially when they know they are observed in public settings. In this way, fronts are the stereotypical performances that audience members believe they are about to see. Fronts function to provide audience members and actors with an understanding of excepted and expected performances. Without these socially negotiated, generally agreed to standards, people would have no idea how to act properly in a new environment. Social life requires that people act differently in different situations and in front of different audiences. If people acted exactly the same in all circumstances, it would be very difficult for audience members to understand the actor. Fronts are learned behaviors that once understood, are selected by actors, not created [25]. People learn fronts through social interaction and develop a repertoire of them that they can use across a multitude of settings. The visual self-representation on Facebook portrays an easily editable identity. The user's narrative identity can therefore always evolve through the consistent uploading of visual information. This system of persistent metamorphosing empowers online identity through Facebook to have its own narrative life. This study investigated the ways Facebook users construct an identity and create a self-presentation strategy through their Facebook profile, data was collected through 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews after which the results were coded and condensed into categories and compared with Goffmans self presentation techniques.

This phase involved comparing and contrasting participants' responses relevant to their perception of audiences and comments found in photographs and relating them to Goffman's self-presentation theory. During each interview, the researcher wrote direct observation notes in addition to transcribing each participant's answers. At the end of every interview, the researcher analyzed the notes and wrote analytic memos to refer to at the conclusion of all interviews. After several participants shared similar responses to a certain question, the researcher marked the topic of the question as a potential theme to be explored at the culmination of the data collection process. When all 40 interviews had

been conducted, the researcher used open coding with the help of key informants to initially analyze the data collected, looking for emerging themes that had not already been discovered in the data collection process. The researcher condensed the data and coded to further dissect the categories and distributed the data into various sections accordingly.

A. Self Presentation Fronts

The results of this study are intended to develop a cohesive reasoning and explanation of a young adult's identity construction and self-presentation on Facebook. From the analysis numerous categories (18) emerged but the most common and popular fronts that most college students use were then downsized to five general "fronts" in their profile pictures that lead audience members to see them as: (a) Solo Front (b) Buddy Front (c) Party Front (d) Humour Front (e) Celebrity Front. Taken together, these fronts represent a typical student. Students use props, settings, and gesture to provide their audience members visual cues to help them form the desired impressions. Much of the material that students place on Facebook is meant to attract attention to the profile.

a. Solo Front

Solo fronts are profile pictures that are passport size like photographs, which was natural, glamourised versions of the profile owners' pictures of animals, places, and abstract art. The natural type of profile pictures was rare and when questioned in the interview a participant said that they had little idea of using software to edit photographs. When asked to a participant who had a passport pic on his profile he said, "I just put a photograph of what I had and I am not interested in changing my profile picture often as I think it's a waste of time". It was also noted that passport fronts had few friends and not all that social, gauging by the number of interactions on the timeline. Another version of solo Front is a glamourised version of the self taken usually by a mobile phone camera by the individual or taken by another person. Photographs taken by the self through a hand held device like the mobile phone is called a 'selfie'. Their profile pictures evince striking compositional similarities, as they smile widely, purse their lips in a pout, and emphasize their eyes and cheekbones through elevated angles of capture that simultaneously narrow their jawlines. These are performances of mostly young-adult females, each one as unique as the individual behind the image, yet constrained by the compositional and aesthetic conventions that lend them the collective legibility. Males did not find it necessary to spend time on clicking pictures like the female participants did and were not very choosy like the females. One male participant stated, "I usually crop a picture from a photograph if I wanted a photo of myself or take a picture. But we guys do it fast without wasting much time. It is the girls who spend a great deal of time taking pictures posing this way and that". One female participant said, "I take most of the pictures for my profile picture by myself with my mobile phone. I pose and give a certain look and click a pic. Most of my friends do it too." It was observed that students

take a lot of time to pose and click a picture as they deemed profile pictures to be very important part of their profile and wanted to present their best front. Individual pictures and photographs of things, animals, places etc are observed in the Solo Front. One of the participants had a picture of a cat as her profile picture and she stated "She is Ginny my pet and I wanted her as my profile picture as I love her more than anybody else". So profile pictures indicate the person to be an animal lover or an outdoor person or attached to a particular non living thing as it might hold a symbolic meaning for the person.

b. Buddy Front

A second front used by 90 percent of college students in their Facebook profiles was the Buddy front. This front required that students demonstrate to audience members that they had friends and enjoyed spending time with them. Photographs illustrate how Facebook users demonstrate that they have buddies in twos, smaller and larger groups. The importance of the buddies front was evidenced by each interview participant mentioning how social (or not social) a student appeared in their profile. Students have several ways to enact the social front. The first is to have many Facebook friends listed on their profiles. This was an important piece of information that participants looked for when seeing a profile. While the number of Facebook friends a person had did not necessarily mean that the person was social, it did give an indication about whether the person was socially active. As another participant observed "just because someone is a friend on Facebook doesn't mean that you're actually best of friends with them." A second way students can enact the buddy front on Facebook profiles was to include many photographs in which students appeared with one or more other people. If a Facebook profile had numerous pictures posted participants often commented on how social the person was. Participants noted that these were the people that they would most likely want to meet in person. Used in this way, friends demonstrated group affiliation and served to represent a person's social capital. Appearing in a photograph with others is a powerful way to illustrate social capital, even if it does not really exist, because it is not easy for viewers to determine the actual relationship between the individuals pictured. When pictures with the same group of buddies are seen it indicates that they belonged to a clique or a gang. Sociability is an especially important aspect of peer groups and social norming. Social interactions, as a signifier of sociability, represent an important opportunity for the exchange of symbolic information. As Astin noted, "interaction" is a key signifier for affiliation and belonging [39]. Social interaction affirms membership in a group and provides a mechanism for sharing and negotiating the group's norms. In addition, social interaction helps to make public which groups a person identifies with. In this way, the social front provides audience members with information that they can use to make assumptions about person.

c. Party Front

A front that was mentioned during each interview, and which became very familiar during the photo elicitation interview was the "party front". Key informants defined the term party Front as referring to a photograph where the individual frequently attends parties which involves alcohol. Every participant interviewed for this study mentioned that there were many "Party Fronts" related images on Facebook, and noted specific photographs on Facebook profiles they believed gave the impression that the student was a hard core party person. Party fronts show students cheering with a toast or drinking directly from liquor bottles or glasses. A participant observed, "It is college and we have fun partying. We put up pictures immediately taken through our mobile phones or cameras. Another participant echoed the same opinion, "Only in college can we party and have a great time". We would like to tell all our other friends there that we are having a great time. It tells everyone that "our gang is an action gang". Both these participants highlight the very powerful and pervasive belief that many study participants had about the college experience.

College is not simply a place to study. It is where one gathers friends and socializes. Participants believed that a 'cool college student' culture required them to have "partying" pictures on their Facebook profiles. If they did not have them, the student ran the risk of giving the impression that they were not 'cool' or 'hip'. That is, they were not participating in the activities that others believed were part of being a student. One of the participants said, "I go to parties but I don't drink. I go only to have a good time. In this way, participants let it be known that even if they were not hard core partiers, they liked to be a part of the partying people. This observation is significant because most of the students interviewed for this study identified themselves as a person who does not drink but don't mind being seen in pictures with the party people. A participant, provided some insight into this apparent contradiction when he identified two categories: "booze parties" and "non-booze parties" When asked how he reconciled to the many images of him posing with other students consuming alcohol on his profile with his statement that he was not a party person in the strictest terms, he stated that he usually attends "non-alcohol parties". Another participant observed, "But there are hard core parties where alcohol is the main idea of a party". Key informants affirmed this distinction. "Real partiers" engaged in this type of behaviour often. A participant stated while looking at several profiles that had numerous party pictures: "I mean most people who have pictures like that… it looks like they are just drinking to get drunk. They think it's cool. They are just drinking to accomplish a goal. So the other people see it and think that these to be good people to party with".

Evident in these quotes is that a great deal of social pressure exists for students to present themselves engaging in behaviors that are valued in college culture. This type of social pressure is not new. However, as the participant observed in the above quote, engaging in extreme behavior due to social pressures is

no longer enough in the digital age. It now requires college students to have photographic evidence of party behaviour in order to make them seem cool. The power of the "partier" impression extended even to those students who did not identify themselves as hard core partiers and who did not have any of these types of images on their profiles. For example, when asked what impressions someone might form from looking at her profile a participant responded, "I am not a huge partier because I don't have pictures of myself drinking or party type things on my profile." Instead of providing an example of an impression that students would form of her based on the actual material she had placed her profile, she believed that the impressions other students would form would be based on the absence," of any party pictures. This represents the power the "party front" has on college students. There were other participants who were not interested in any way to party and were categorised as nerds, geeks or "oh she is not our type" by the party going ones.

d. Humour Front

Humor played a significant role in most Facebook profiles and participants noted when a profile made the student look humorous, funny, or silly. Several participants actually stated that they expected to see humour in every profile they looked at. The humour front showed participants that the person was enjoyable to spend time with and that his or her friends probably really like the person. Participants observed that humour can appear on Facebook profiles in many forms, in both the text and the images. Humour was observed in the form of cartoon pictures and funny quotes. For example, a photograph shows a student trying to be funny by distorting her face. Participants also mentioned that they enjoyed looking at the many silly faces and commenting on them. Humour appeared to be one the most important self-presentation techniques that students use on their Facebook profiles and participants frequently used humour to imagine what the person might be like in person how. This suggests that humorous, funny, or silly material on a Facebook profile serves as a powerful signifier that a person would understand and engage others in a humorous manner. In this way humour may also serve the secondary purpose of providing a non-threatening way to initiate communication with another Facebook user. Humour Front suggests that the person is easily approachable and easy to be friends.

e. Celebrity Front / Cinematic Front

Celebrity front and cinematic fronts sported pictures of film actors, sports celebrities, musicians, singers etc indicating that the profile owner was a fan of the particular celebrity. Some of the participants even posed with their favourite celebrities. One participant stated," I love A.R Rahaman and got to take a photograph with him after a long wait". Another participant who was a fan of the cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar sported pictures of Sachin on his profile picture. One point to be noted was most of the profile pictures of such fans had their favourite celebrity on almost every profile picture. Cinematic

front wore pictures of individuals who posed in a certain way that film actors did in their movies. This was particularly highlighted by the way an individual stood, sat or looked. For example a photograph showed a student tilting her head and smiling in a certain way that was not natural and was glamour personified. When asked to the participant about the pose she said girls usually posed in certain way to look beautiful and enticing. Most of the girl participant echoed her opinion. When asked to other participants about the cinematic pose the male participants said that it was girls who usually posed, preened and gave stylish poses. During participant observation it was noted that when compared to female participants male participants gave off less cinematic poses.

B. Visual Symbolic Images

Goffman was aware that people use visual symbolic images to convey information during face-to-face interactions. His framework categorized these pieces of information into three types: "props, settings, and gestures." [25].The symbolic information that participants pointed to in Facebook photographs also fit into these into these three categories. The profile pictures were analysed for props, settings and gestures during both participant observation and photo elicitation interviews.

a. Props

College students used both animate and inanimate objects as props. As far as animate objects were concerned most of the students used birds, animals and people as props. The animals used as props in profile pictures ranged from dogs, cats, horses, snakes, kangaroo and other exotic birds. People props were friends, celebrities, family. Inanimate objects included dresses, bags, shades, shoes, bikes cars, umbrellas and other accessories worn on bodies. Food and drinks like alcohol, carbonated drinks, fast food like cakes, pizzas, burgers, chips etc featured as props in most of profile pictures of college students. During the photo elicitation interviews students revealed that they like to take photographs in outfits that they bought recently and in places that were popular. A participant observed, "I got a red outfit for my birthday and wore it to McDonalds where I gave a treat to ten of my friends". Another participant stated, " Sometimes my friend and I go into the trial rooms in the malls while we go shopping and click pictures but we do not buy the dresses as it is very expensive. That way we get to pose in a new outfit without spending money". A male participant states that, "boys usually pose with their cars and bikes". Other inanimate objects used by participants included sports equipments, electronic gadgets and other equipments as props to present themselves on Facebook.

b. Settings

It was observed that settings used in profile pictures were both indoor and outdoor. Pictures sported settings in local and foreign locales. Coffee shops like CCD, eating joints like KFC, Mc Donald, pubs and bar settings were seen in profile pictures. These settings were used more than homes were used as settings. Students used college campus, cafeterias and

classrooms as settings in profile pictures. Malls were another popular setting that was observed in participant observation and photo elicitation interviews.

c.Gestures

It was observed that college students used their faces, hands, poses to gesture. Profile pictures had distorted faces to appear funny, hands and specifically fingers were used to gesture and students posed or stood in a certain way to gesture. These gestures all looked happy, silly, funny and random. It was observed that boys stood tall and looked straight to the camera while girls mostly stood stylishly with hands on their hips, tilted faces and eyes looking intensely to a particular side. All participants took notice of the facial expressions students made in Facebook photographs, especially if they were exaggerated. Goffman understood our faces to be expressive masks which we could alter depending on the audience and the social interaction [40]. They are our primary means to provide an audience with symbolic information about ourselves. In addition to gathering symbolic information from these images, many participants described their own photographs in which they made particular faces and gestures with hands and fingers.

C. Reciprocity in Facebook through Interactivity

Likes and comments are an important part of photographs and visuals. The comments posted by friends reinforce group cohesiveness and closeness. Comments are tied to the pictures, not to the individual, meaning that everyone tagged in the photos will have the same set of shared comments. The group nature of comments can be seen through the consistent use of nicknames, references to inside jokes or past events, statements of affection and compliments, and gentle ribbing of each other. All these jokes are understood by those in the know. The context of relationship or friendship allows for statements that those outside the group cannot make or would possibly find offensive. Likes are somewhat passive form of reciprocity when compared to comments. When an individual is close to the person in the photograph then comments are made to show a sense of camaraderie and closeness. A very good partner or friend might show his or her interest by liking a picture to indicate that he is following the photographs and posts. Comments are a more active form of reciprocity. Comments allow friends and partners to relive the pictured events, emphasizing the shared good times. Most comments are always accompanied by a smiley that tries to show the mood of the commenter.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the Facebook users true to Goffmans theatrical framework present their fronts in the profile pages of Facebook through visuals, updates and posts. Findings suggest that there is more style than content in Facebook. Style in a profile page is distinct in the photos and pictures while the content is usually frivolous and a rehashed up version of content shared, duplicated or forwarded from another site. Style of language, style in photographs and

images takes over the importance of content. The way the users construct their profile with very carefully edited photographs and pictures and the way they choose what sort of content can be displayed on their profile page makes it a very self constructed medium as far as the presentation of the self is concerned.

Among this sample of young adults, they were found to relish the opportunities to play and display, continuously re-recreating and a highly decorated, stylistically elaborate identity. Having experienced this euphoria young adult tended to favour a plain aesthetic that foregrounds their links to others, expressing a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others. This apparent shift in phases of identity development has implications for young adult Facebook users' experience of transitions of identities. The respondents in this study relied on carefully crafted text and selected photographs, to construct ideally balanced, authentic yet desirable identities. They take advantage of the asynchronous nature of online communication to reflect on the implications of their disclosures, and they adjusted their profiles, added or deleted content to better parallel what they imagined their audience would view most favourably.

One of the constructs of identity and which is of mammoth importance is gender. Previously, users had to identify themselves as male or female. They were also given the option of not answering or keeping their gender private which allowed for manipulation of gender identity. In a latest move Facebook introduced dozens of options for US Facebook users to identify their gender. Users can now select a "custom" gender option. Facebook will also allow users to select between three pronouns: "him," "her" or "their." There are also variants of genderqueer (any gender outside male/female); genderfluid (moving between genders); non-binary (an umbrella descriptor for all genders that are not simply male or female), two spirit and pangender (rejecting singular gender); and agender (rejecting gender altogether) [41]. Also provided is intersex, which covers individuals whose sexual characteristics do not map to stereotypes of male or female. This new change in gender acceptance may be welcomed by some while others foresee an endless list of gender options. This move by Facebook may create gender identity confusion among the users themselves as not many are aware of the numerous gender identities. The line between the online and offline worlds are very fine and blurred and may cause spill over, spelling gender trouble for governing bodies of various communities in the world.

Another aspect shown through Facebook is the influence of subjective forces during the process of subjectivation. This can be easily shown on a variety of identity categories (as opposed to just gender construction). One force which subjects upon Facebook users is the observation and expectations of other Facebook users. As shown in a study on Facebook user behavior users behave in ways which produces relationships between the user, his displayed friends (e.g. people tagged in the same photo or status), and other users whom observe the interactions [42]. College students behave in ways which are

socially acceptable among their peers, or they may face social rejection from the group they want to belong and be part of the interactions. However, it is not only fear of social rejection from peers which is subjected upon students but, there are cases where students are forced to behave in a certain way to avoid issues with family, teachers and relatives.

It is conceded that commodification, which is directly related to power and domination is very much present on Facebook. Identity is an accomplishment of interaction with the broader market/context rather than merely one's peers, who are likely to promote the diverse range of popular culture trends and marketing strategy to capture the largest possible market. Facebook users, while updating their personal profiles, pixilated manifestations of themselves, are bombarded constantly with advertisements and pop-ups of products. This makes the Facebook user, buy the product which maybe endorsed by a celebrity, a status symbol for young college students thus creating an identity of possessing the latest brandss which is typical of young adults. It is almost a fad. Many users spend hours trying to capture the perfect profile picture, or articulate the ideal set of beliefs, interests, books, movies, etc. It's a game of self-fashioning and Facebook encourages it because it sells. Identity as a feature of mass media and popular culture increasingly is presented as a product and a resource to be used and marketed. Advertising pushes products, not processes; identity has been gradually transformed from being an "esoteric" social science process to a mass-mediated and readily available product [43].

This study divulge that Facebook users' aesthetic universe in the virtual world is the one of repetition of the identical, in a muddled relation between introspection and narcissistic reflection, between documented artistic influence that is cadged and copied. The impetus for change and identity formation rests on acting, presentation of self, and conduct consistent with products widely shared by fellow consumers, who comprise the legitimating audience for one's performance. As new media and their proliferation give a new place to representations, the focus of visual analysis gradually adjusts from content to effects and spectator studies, not just because visual images are more and more common or because, increasingly, knowledge of the world is visually articulated, but because we interact more and more with totally constructed visual experiences [44]. It's very appropriately revealed in this study that the Facebook user becomes a social illusion. The remnants of whatever is left of the self take a flight into the network and become a non entity. The individual is gauged by its performative actions rather than the individual itself. To sum up, postmodernized identity is internalized surface-acting playfully performed, and presented in a highly competitive and pressure-driven economic environment which forces the lured ' free' individual to make choices every day.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study proves to a certain extent that the use of social media like Facebook allows users to present a controlled image of themselves to their audience. However, it became apparent in observing the group over time that the individual identity was also both an intersubjective and an emergent creation. The study reveals that not only is the group part of the individual identity and vice versa, but the individual persona is further articulated and differentiated over time through an emergent process of social feedback. Facebook users perform identity on an individual basis for the benefit of the community and as a means of personal expression. Positive and negative social response prompted further actions, ad infinitum. Users emerged as opinion leaders and creators through this process of improvised emergent identity formation; they discovered and developed new talents and abilities as a result. A number of other cases revealed not only that their identity evolved through group interaction, but also that being a persona in a social context had a palpable impact on the individual person. Most users concurred that being in Facebook changed them and not being in Facebook would have stumped them. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan: First we shape our tools; thereafter they shape us [44].

Information and communication technology brings with its use, destructive and constructive forces, as well as liberating and constricting ones. By its very nature social media serves to change and revolutionise the very identity of the individual and society. As the popularity of social media continues to rise, this study provides a strong theoretical basis for any future research that may be conducted on the topic of social networking and identity creation. It builds on the literature of personal photography by examining the more public use of personal photographs on social networking sites. When a social media platform like Facebook actively takes a stand to be more inclusive and accepting to the gender queer community, the reality of their existence can no longer be ignored. There maybe people who are disillusioned, citing religious texts claiming the existence of only two genders, but it seems like their disillusionment is being eclipsed by the urgency of the Post modern society's gradual push toward sexual, gender and religious diversity. Now that Facebook has joined that push, other social media platforms are sure to follow suit and may soon spill over into the real world. Social media has raised ethical and moral dilemmas that the current ethical and moral standards cannot answer. This stance on the inadequacy of current ethics and morals can be seen as nihilistic as well as evidence of a rejection of the meta-narratives that are proposed by these value systems.

This study will contribute to a better understanding of 'identity' in the online social sphere as well as in such practical matters as the design of digital systems and policies in the postmodern society. Further it will contribute to the articulation of gender rights, rights of religious choices etc.

Baudrillard has pointed that the real and the virtual are often confused, stating that the scopic regime of post-modernity is dominated by simulacrum, which is not a copy of the real but rather the way the virtual becomes truth in reality [45]. There seems to be a blurred boundary between the offline and the online world as the findings reveal that the community that exists on public sphere like Facebook is real and have to be taken seriously by the authorities who draw policies, rules and regulations and have to be made inclusive in their agenda. As far as the individual is concerned the persona is slowly but steadily undergoing transition into a social product that will be soon priced, packaged and promoted.

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