

Online Impression Management:

Does Self Esteem matter?

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Abstract

The rise of social networking sites (SNS) has revealed an entirely new field to impression management. This presents an opportunity to examine the relationship between self-esteem and the forms of impression management in the online sphere. The study adopted a self – presentation questionnaire by Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014), which examined the management of the real self, ideal self and false self on Facebook.

The present study examined the link between self-esteem and online impression management on Facebook and Instagram among youths in Singapore. Self – reports were collected from 216 Singapore Polytechnic students (aged 18 – 24) from varying disciplines – about social media use, self-esteem and online self – presentation.

A multivariate linear regression analysis revealed that Instagram use was a positive significant predictor in three out of four aspects of self – presentation, ‘Real Self’, ‘False Self – Compare/Impress’ and ‘False Self – Exploration’.

Youths who reported high self-esteem were more likely to present their ‘real’ self. In contrast, youths who reported low self-esteem were more likely to deceive others with their false self. Males were more likely to deceive others about their identity, while the opposite sex was more likely to make comparisons on social media. Interestingly, ‘Real Self’ emerged as the most frequently used impression management tactic on social media.

The findings affirm that the usage of social media has an effect on the strategic impression management of youths. It also suggests that self – esteem is a predictor of impression management, as youths experiment with different aspects of their online self.

Online Impression Management: Does Self Esteem matter?

The usage of social networking sites (SNS) have been prevalent. SNS usage has soared worldwide, with a penetration rate of 28% among the global population, according to We Are Social. Almost nine in ten Singapore Internet users own a Facebook account, with active users on Twitter and Instagram.

There has been a rise in literature from communication researchers who are exploring why these sites are so popular and the effects of SNS usage (Eg: Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nuijten, 2010; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011, Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja & Buxmann, 2013; Kross et al., 2013 etc).

Numerous studies (Eg: Kramer & Winter, 2008, Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis, 2014, Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011) have studied if personality traits have an effect on the social representations, benefits, consequences on online impression management. There have also been literature on the relationship between self esteem and online impression management (Eg: Mehdizadeh, 2010, Rui & Stefanone, 2013). However, even with the increase in literature on social media, little is known about the relationship between social media use and the social context of online impression management.

With a set of online social media self-presentation tactics predictors, this paper proposes to examine the link between self – esteem and online impression management on Facebook and Instagram among youths in Singapore.

Literature Review

Self Esteem

The construct of self - esteem

Self esteem is a powerful, well-studied psychology concept which has been used in the study of the 'self', including self - concept and identity. According to Baumesiter (1998), self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of the self - concept that corresponds to an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy. It is also viewed as an attitude about the self, which closely relates to personal beliefs about skills, abilities, social-relationships and future outcomes. (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

In the review of literature for self - esteem, there are many theories, which relate to the source of self - esteem. As cited in Heatherton & Wyland (2003), theories that have been proposed include the *looking-glass self* (Cooley, 1902), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Gender and cultural differences in self - esteem have also suggested that self-esteem was in fact a multi-dimensional aspect of the self.

In a study by Stets & Burke (2014), self-esteem was found to fit within the theoretical context of identity. The verification of one's social and group identity increased feelings of self worth. It was suggested that the affirmation of self-worth for social belongingness and integration might boost feelings of self efficacy and the feelings of one's authenticity such as gender identity.

The need to be socially accepted and valued in both personal and group contexts closely relates to the appeal and motivations behind the usage of SNS.

Self - esteem vs Social Media

Social interaction and the need to belong (Eg: Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Urista, Dong & Day, 2009) has been identified as some of the key motivations behind the usage of SNS. Internet self-efficacy, need to belong, and collective self-esteem have shown to have a positive effect on an individual's willingness to join SNS and attitudes towards SNS (Gangadharbatla, 2008). The need to belong was identified as a key motivation in the usage of Facebook, with self esteem closely associated with the intrinsic drive to affiliate with others (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Usage of Facebook was also shown to lead to an increase in self esteem (Eg: Denti et al., 2012).

There has also been a rise of research examining the role SNS plays in identity construction and how it affects self esteem, a majority which studied Facebook, the world's most popular social networking site.

Profile behaviour on Facebook such as customization was seen as an important construct connecting one's self esteem to the projection of one's identity (Nie & Sundar, 2013). While youths who updated their profiles and viewed their own profiles reported greater self-esteem and self - affirmation through selective self presentation, they also experienced lower self esteem when they left their profiles (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Also, Facebook usage only led to an increase in self - esteem, only if users were focused on their friends with strong tie-strengths while browsing the social network (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). The interactions and usage of Facebook was found to be useful for students with low self - esteem to bridge social capital in college life (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007).

Individuals higher in narcissism and lower in self-esteem were revealed to have greater online activity on Facebook (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Youths who considered themselves as individuals with low self-esteem, reported Facebook an appealing venue for self-disclosure, though they also elicited undesirable responses from other people (Forest & Wood, 2012).

Hence, as suggested by Forest & Wood (2012), individuals with low self esteem could also in turn utilize SNS as an avenue to create rewarding social relationships, since it has been shown to boost social belongingness and self esteem among high esteem peers.

In tandem with existing literature, in order to develop a better understanding on how social media usage affects self-esteem among Singapore youths, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a negative relationship between social media use and self esteem.

Instagram was also included in this study. Although the platform has been earmarked one of the most engaging social media platforms in L2 Intelligence Report published in 2014, till date, there is limited research literature on Instagram's effect on self esteem and impression management.

Impression Management

The nature of Impression Management - Motivations / Tactics

'Self presentation' (also referred to as Impression Management) as conceptualized here builds on Goffman's theories of identity and social behaviour. According to Goffman, self-presentation serves to manage others' impressions of the self. To facilitate social interaction in different situations, individuals play roles and wear masks that are representations of the ways they see themselves or of the ways they desire to be seen by others. This is maintained through consistently performing coherent and complementary behaviors (Schlenker 1975, 1980), through a process termed 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959).

Both impression management and self - presentation have been extensively studied, though it has been proposed that they might differ in certain respects. For instance, impression management was referred to 'an attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions', while self-presentation was reserved for instances which were 'self-relevant' (Schlenker, 1980).

In line with past research studies, for the purpose of this study, both terms will be used interchangeably.

Impression management is also defined as 'any behaviour by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impressions formed of that person by others' (Tedeschi, 1981). Such behaviour affect for how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them, as well as for their own views of themselves (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Our success at leading others to believe we possess various characteristics has a profound influence on our outcomes in life (Hogan & Briggs, 1986).

It has been stated that people engage in self - presentational behaviour in order to privately establish an identity for themselves (Schlenker, 1980). In line with Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014)'s studied theoretical framework, Leary & Kowalski (1990) highlighted that the self-concept is a primary determinant of the impressions people try to project. The self concept 'provides a guide of reasonableness of trying to create certain impressions.' People tend to manage impressions towards the direction of what they 'would like

to be and what he or she really can be' (Schlenker, 1985). People also attempt to create attributes such as attitudes, moods, roles, status, interests and beliefs (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

However, identity is characterized by the tension between how a person defines herself as an individual and how he/she she connects to others and social groups in affiliative relationships (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995, as quoted in Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). In other words, how the private perspective of one's identity translates into the public view.

Before an imagined or real audience, individuals engage in different forms of impression management as an attempt to create and reconcile these self-relevant images (Brown, 2007). In turn, as noted by Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014)'s, these feedback and reactions from the public influence the extent in which individuals make sense of their self concept. As substantiated by Leary & Kowalski (1990), identity-relevant characteristics do translate into public behaviour, also referred to as 'self-symbolize'. An individual's social role also affects the public impression one conveys (Goffman, 1959). As noted by Sennett (1978), 'appearances made in the world are not veils but guides to the authentic self of the wearer'.

This suggests a strong relation between impression management and identity. In order to establish and strengthen their self - identity, individuals translate their impressions to the public and interpersonal level. When individuals derive and interpret meanings from social interaction, they would be able to predict how impressions can be best created to represent who they are (Mead, 1934). The need for social approval and positive evaluations from people (Baumeister, 1982) also drives people to manage their impressions.

As noted by Leary & Kowalski (1990), if discrepancy exists between the image one would like others to hold of oneself and the image one believes others already hold, impression management might occur to boost self - esteem and bolster desired private identities. Such strategic impression management occurs to ensure their public persona is intact, or to create a particular impression in other's mind.

As studied by researchers, there are various forms of self presentation styles and strategies, which include assertive and defensive self presentation (eg: Baumeister, 1982; Bromley, 1993). Defensive self - presentation is used to defend or protect an identity, while assertive self - presentation is used to develop or draw attention the positive qualities or aspects

of an identity (Schutz, 1998). In particular, Jones and Pittman (1982) developed a taxonomy, which identified five different self - presentational strategies, including ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification and supplication.

In the review of literature, there are two well-studied distinct aspects of impression management: interpersonal theoretical studies and organizational-scale research. The paper proposes a study of a defined set of socially-orientated predictors for interpersonal self-presentation tactics.

Online Impression Management - Social Media

The introduction of social media has introduced a new sphere of research for impression management. Early research on online impression management suggested that digital environments could be used by individuals to create multiple identities through manipulation of material, such as text, images and icons (Nguyen and Alexander 1996). As noted by Papacharissi (2002), identity reinvention and community construction was apparent in multi - user domains (such as virtual worlds, online chat rooms), where users put on their online personae to sleep when exiting these sites (Simon & Schuster, 1984; 1995, as cited in Papacharissi, 2002).

Consumers also used multiple self-presentation strategies on personal websites to construct a 'digital self', where elements such as guestbooks, banners, hyperlinks and add-ons were used (Papacharissi, 2002; Jensen Schau & Gilly 2003). Before the advent of the world's most popular SNS, Facebook, personal and social identity were the most common self - presentational themes across both genders (Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008).

In an exploratory study by Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nuijten (2010), it was suggested that Facebook users were concerned with presenting themselves in an authentic way, with authenticity being a reactant. Users were also concerned about portraying themselves in a positive, current and professional manner. Zhao, Salehi, Naranjit, Alwaalan, Volda, & Cosley (2013) showed that individuals had 'a performance region' for managing recent data and impression management. Similar results were obtained in the study of online dating sites, where participants aimed to mediate the tension of impression management and the desire to present a 'real self', - through tactics such as creating a profile to reflect their 'ideal' self (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

In a study, Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014) examined the presentation of different selves on Facebook and the potential relationship between identity state, well-being and self presentation on Facebook. Three representations of self - presentation online was proposed: (i) The Real Self - which includes authentic feelings, and appears to be motivated by internal attributes of the self (Harter et al's, 1996) (ii) The Ideal Self - The ideal attributes of oneself (eg: aspirations, hopes), which could be positive or negative (Higgins, 1987) (iii) The *False Self* - feeling and acting in ways that are not true to oneself, which can be motivated by reasons such as deception, exploration and impressing others.

Reflecting on the new social media landscape, an updated measure of the Self - Presentation Tactics Scale (Lee et al., 1999) was proposed by Rosenberg (2009). The conceptual model of self - presentation tactics suggested that personality traits predicted communicative adaptability, secondary goals and self presentational tactics adopted by Facebook users. Based on Lee et al.(1999) and Lewis & Neighbors (2005), the study reliably proposed four online self - presentation scales, with the strategies of manipulation, damage control, self promotion, and role model.

Subsequently, the Self Presentation on Facebook Questionnaire was developed by Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014). The twenty-one items scale was created based on Harter et al's (1996) and Higgins' (1987) definitions of the multiple facets of the self, and descriptions of online self - presentation from Manago et al. (2008). The theoretical framework of online self - presentation draws upon the study of two concepts, namely self - identity and self - concept. It was proposed that individuals grappling with their personal identity and cognitive advances in of oneself would present multiple facades of themselves.

As Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis's study closely matches the author's theoretical study, it will be closely referenced by the author in this study. In tandem with existing literature, more research should be done to better understand the different forms of impression management practiced by youths in Singapore. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2A: There is a positive relationship between social media use and online impression management (Real Self)

H2B: There is a positive relationship between social media use and online impression management (False Self)

Online Impression Management vs Self Esteem

While there has been limited literature with regard to the link between self - esteem and online impression management, it has been suggested that users who 'stake their self esteem on public evaluations' were more strategic in the management of their social networks sites (Rui and Stefanone, 2013). Selective self-presentation behaviour (such as editing of personal profiles) in digitally mediated environments can have a positive influence on self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

In particular, a study by Mehdizadeh (2010) examined how self - promotional features (such as About Me section, no. of friends) were related to personality and identity. It was found that users could select attractive photographs and write self-descriptions that are self-promoting in an effort to project an enhanced sense of self.

Self identity and psychosocial well-being (self-esteem, depressive symptoms) were positively associated with real self-presentation on Facebook and negatively associated with false self-presentation on the site. Ideal self-presentation was associated with lower identity state and lower psychosocial well-being (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis, 2014)

To develop a better understanding on how self-esteem affects impression management for youths in Singapore, in tandem with existing literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3A: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem scores and the management of 'Real Self'

H3B: There is a negative relationship between self-esteem scores and the management of 'False Self'

Research Method(s)

(i) Participants and Procedures

Youths (N = 216) who possessed a Facebook and / or Instagram account were recruited from Singapore Polytechnic, a leading tertiary institution in Singapore. The sample consisted of 127 females and 89 males, aged between 18 - 24 years old. A convenience sample was obtained due to the close proximity the author shared with its research subjects, although it differs from an ideal sample in terms of gender distribution and size. To minimize effects such as cohort differences, a diverse set of respondents were recruited from contrasting disciplines such as Engineering (17%), Media (34%), Design (15%) and Business (34%). Permission was granted to collect data in the midst of a classroom / lecture setting.

Most of the respondents completed all self - reported measures on an online survey platform, Surveygizmo.com, to facilitate data collection and reduce instances of missing data. Physical copies of the survey sheets were also issued, which were manually entered into the digitized version of the survey. Respondents were also briefed on a few instructions to encourage accurate responses, such as 'answer with an open - mind' and 'avoid discussion if possible'. The author was present throughout the data collection process to supervise / answer any questions pertaining to the questionnaire.

(ii) Materials or measures

Demographic questionnaire Participants' age, gender, and the possession of Facebook/Instagram account were collected in a demographic questionnaire.

Facebook / Instagram use questionnaire Participants' average daily frequency and activity levels (1 - Not active at all, 5 - Extremely Active) of Facebook / Instagram usage were collected.

Adapted Self Presentation on Facebook Questionnaire (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis., 2014) To measure impression management in the online context, the 'Self Presentation on Facebook Questionnaire (SPFBQ)' was adapted with permission. The original Likert-type scale was adapted to fit the context of this study's objectives. The referenced report proposed

three aspects of online self presentation among youths: Real Self, Ideal Self, False Self (Deception, Exploration, Compare/Impress).

Based on the Principal Components Correlation Matrix figures given by the authors, the top 3 questions (all above .65) for Real Self and Ideal Self were adopted. The questions for false self (deception, exploration, compare/impress) remain unchanged. To adopt the same questionnaire for the Instagram users, options were rephrased to include 'Facebook / Instagram', to fit the context of this study.

Self Esteem Scale Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) - the most widely used measure of global self-esteem (Demo, 1985, as cited in Heatherton & Wyland, 2003) was used in this study to measure self esteem. The RSE is a 10-item scale with high internal reliability (alpha .92). Higher scores indicate greater levels of self-esteem. To aid data analysis, the results were compiled into scale, where the overall means of the ten questions were compiled.

Results

(I) Descriptive Analysis: Self Esteem, Facebook Activity and Instagram Activity

A majority of respondents reported normal Self Esteem levels (defined as >15 , according to Rosenberg, 1965). 65.3% of the sample reported an overall average of 1.51 and above for the ten questions. No gender differences were observed between the self-esteem levels. Respondents reported spending an average of 1 hour 5 mins on Facebook, as compared to 2 hours 50 mins on Instagram. Instagram activity was generally higher than Facebook activity ($M = 2.83$ vs $M = 2.21$). Respondents were more likely to practice Real Self ($M = 3.73$), followed by False Self (Compare / Impress) ($M = 2.91$). False Self (Deception) was the least practiced among the respondents ($M = 1.97$).

(II) Presentation of the Real, Ideal and False Self on Facebook / Instagram

In order to measure online impression management, the Self Presentation for Facebook Questionnaire was adopted with permission from Michikyan M. However, in this study, the phrasing of all fourteen questions included 'Facebook/Instagram', as opposed to 'Facebook' in the original study. Based on the Principal Components Co-relation Matrix figures given by the author, the top 3 questions (all above .65) for Real Self and Ideal Self were adopted for this study. The questions for false self (deception, exploration, compare/impress) remain unchanged.

The 17 Self Presentation for Facebook Questionnaire items were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis where only three out of the five dimensions had significant Eigenvalues and variance numbers. One dimension accounted for 0.956 of the variance. Subsequently, a second factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted, with a fixed extraction of four factors. The recommended loading criterion of 60/40 was observed. As such, one question from each dimension (Real Self, False Self – Compare/Impress, False Self - Deception, False Self - Exploration) was removed. The results for Ideal Self were poorly loaded during both analyses, with its results excluded from the final data analysis.

A four-factor solution was retained. Please refer to Table T1 for the factor loadings of the final four-factor solution. The final four factors contained 9 items, accounting for 62.445% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha for the adapted Self - Presentation Questionnaire was .724.

Factors/ Dimensions	Real Self	False Self (Compare/Impress)	False Self (Deception)	False Self (Exploration)
<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	.711	.798	.519	.753

Table T1: Principal Components Loadings for Final Four-Factor Solution

		1	2	3	4
FalseCompare2	I try to impress others with the photos I post of myself on my Facebook/Instagram profile.	.841	.238	.061	.076
FalseCompare1	I compare myself to others on Facebook/Instagram.	.782	.252	-.012	.190
FalseCompare3	I only show the aspects of myself on Facebook/Instagram that I know people would like.	.758	.153	-.072	.063
FalseExplore3	I feel like I have many sides to myself and I show it on my Facebook/Instagram profile.	.288	.747	-.022	.026
FalseExplore2	I change my photos on my Facebook/Instagram profile to show people the different aspects of who I am.	.354	.712	-.113	.043
RealSelf2	Who I am online is similar to who I am offline.	.041	-.058	.855	-.060
RealSelf1	The way I present myself on Facebook / Instagram is how I am in real life.	.062	.101	.821	-.003
False Deception3	I post information about myself on my Facebook / Instagram profile that is not true.	.062	.073	-.046	.867
False Deception1	I sometimes try to be someone other than my true self on Facebook/Instagram.	.340	.080	-.270	.590

Mean scores were computed for each factor, which were used to address the hypotheses in this research study. Co-relations were also examined between the final four factors of Online

Impression Management. All three False Self dimensions were found to be positively associated with each other. However, Real Self was found to be negatively associated with False Self - Deception ($r = -.24$, $p < 0.01$). Please refer to Table T2 for the Pearson co-relations figures between the Impression Management variables, self-esteem and social media activity.

(III) Social Media Usage Predicting Self Esteem - Hypothesis 1

Table T2: Co-relations, means and standard deviation figures between Impression Management, Self Esteem and Social Media Usage

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
A: Facebook Activity	-	.524* *	.115	.123	-.122	-.100	.044	-.039	.124
B: Average no of hours on Facebook	.524* *	-	.154*	.485* *	-.052	-.042	-.050	.008	.066
C: Instagram Activity	.115	.154*	-	.436* *	.028	.312* *	.359* *	.021	.299* *
D: Average no of hours on Instagram	.123	.485* *	.436* *	-	.005	.033	.202* *	.023	.105
E: Self Esteem Scale	-.122	-.052	.028	.005	-	.150*	-.140*	-.133	-.069
F: Real Self	-.100	-.042	.312* *	.033	.150*	-	.041	- .240* *	.031
G: False Self(Compare/Impress)	.044	.050	.359	.202	-.140	.041	-	.362* *	.538* *
H: False Self (Deception)	-.039	.008	.021	.023	-.133	-.240	.362	-	.266* *
I: False Self (Exploration)	.124	.066	.299* *	.105	-.069	.031	.538* *	.266* *	-
Mean	2.21	1.09	2.83	3.17	1.763 4	3.726 9	2.905 9	1.969 9	2.828 7
S.D	.941	1.877	3.345	1.553	.5128 2	.8180 6	.9772 2	.7837 1	.9342 6

**P < 0.01. *P < 0.05.

Hypothesis H1 predicted a negative relationship between social media use and self esteem. There was no significant co-relation between the computed Self Esteem Scale and social media (Facebook / Instagram) use. Henceforth, Hypothesis H1 is not supported.

Table T3: Summary of two-step hierarchical regression analysis for social media use, self-esteem and online impression (n = 216).

Variables / Steps	Real Self			False Self C			False Self - D			False Self-E		
Step 1	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²
Age	-.111 [^]			-.054			-.009			-.067		
Gender	.081			.148*			-.181*			.050		
Facebook Activity	-.080			.049			-.126 [^]			.057		
Instagram Activity	.292**			.316**			.089			.281**		
		.121	.121		.153	.153		.035	.035		.099	.099
Step 2	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²	β	R ²	Δ R ²
Self Esteem	.145*			-.136*			-.151*			-.067		
		.142	.021		.172	.018		.057	.023		.103	.004

**P < 0.01. *P < 0.05. [^]P < 0.1

(III) Regression Analysis

A two-step hierarchical regression was conducted. Table T3 presents the results of the regression analysis. In the first step, Age, Gender, Facebook activity and Instagram activity were entered. In the second, Self Esteem was entered. This was to examine the effect of Hypothesis 3A/3B, with the effects of social media usage, age and gender controlled.

The regression model for Real Self was statistically significant ($F(210,5) = 6.941, p < 0.001$). Overall, the control variables, social media activity, and self-esteem explained 14.2% of variance.

The regression model for False Self – Compare/Impress ($F(210, 5) = 8.704, p < 0.001$) and False– Exploration was significant ($F(210,5) = 4.828, p < 0.001$). Overall, the control variables, social media activity, and self–esteem explained 17.2% of variance and 10.3% of variance respectively. However, the regression model for False Self – Deception was not significant, only accounting for 5.7% of the variance.

Age and Gender

Age was not a significant predictor for all 4 dimensions of Impression Management. However, gender was a significant predictor in the presentation of the 'False Self – Compare/Impress' and 'False Deception - Deception' online. Gender was a moderate predictor for the presentation of 'False Self - Deception' ($P < 0.05$), suggesting that more males presented this form of impression management. This is in contrast to 'False Self – Comparison/Impression' ($P < 0.05$), where more females presented the corresponding tactic.

Social Media Activity

As predicted, Instagram activity was a positive predictor of Real Self ($\beta = .292, p < 0.001$). Respondents with higher usage of Instagram were more likely to present their Real Self on Social Media. However, Facebook activity was not a significant predictor. **Henceforth, H2A is partially supported.**

Instagram activity was also a positive predictor of False Self – Compare/Impress and False Self – Exploration. Respondents with higher Instagram activity reported a greater frequency of False Self – Compare/ Impress ($\beta = .316, p < 0.001$) and False Self- Exploration (β

= .281, $p < 0.001$). The impact of Instagram activity on False Self- Compare/ Impress was notably greater than on False Self- Exploration as can be seen from the β values.

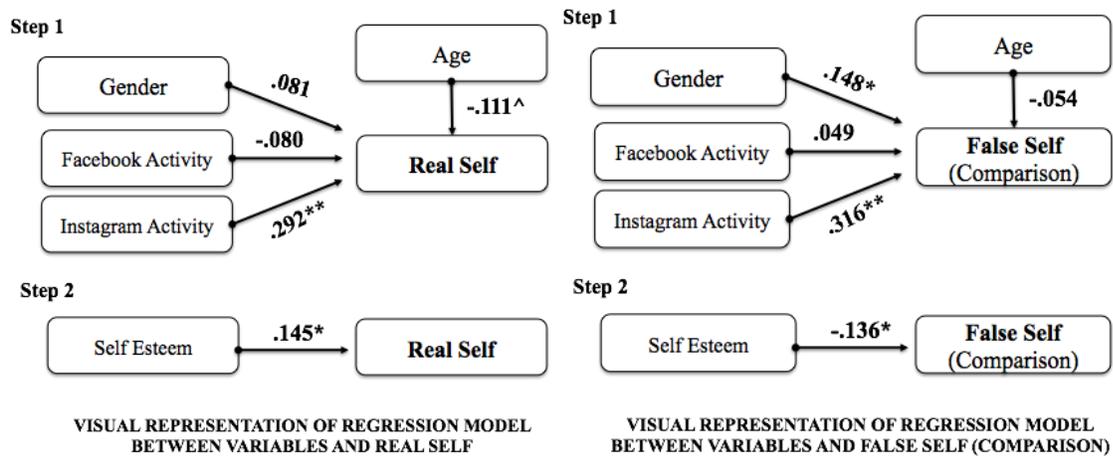
However, Instagram activity was not a significant predictor for False Self- Deception. Facebook activity was not a significant predictor for Real Self or any of the False Self dimensions. **Henceforth, H2B is also partially supported.**

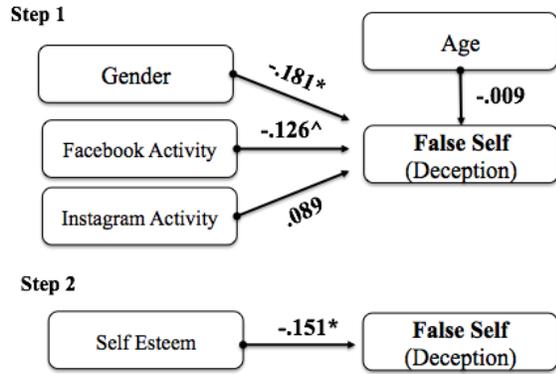
Self-Esteem

As predicted, Self - Esteem was a significant predictor of Real Self ($\beta = .145, p < 0.05$). Self Esteem explained for a further 2.1% of the variance of real-self, after controlling for age, gender, and social media activity. **Henceforth, H3A is fully supported.**

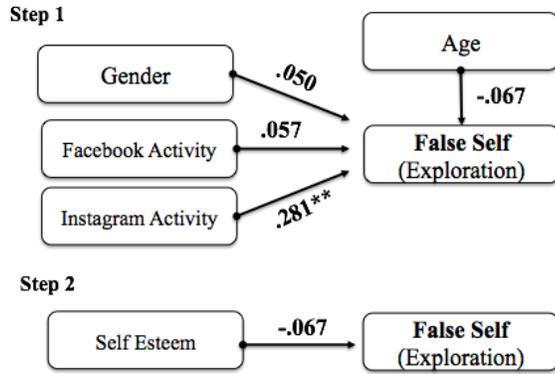
In contrast, Self Esteem was a negative predictor of False Self – Compare / Impress ($\beta = -.136, p < 0.05$) and False Self - Deception ($\beta = -.151, p < 0.05$). The impact of Self Esteem on False Self- Deception was notably greater than on False Self- Compare / Impress as can be seen from the β values. Self Esteem explained a further 2.3% of the variance of False Self - Deception, after controlling for age, gender, and social media activity.

However, Self Esteem was not a significant predictor for False Self - Exploration, accounting for only a further 0.4% of variance. **Henceforth, H3B is partially supported.**





VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF REGRESSION MODEL BETWEEN VARIABLES AND FALSE SELF (DECEPTION)



VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF REGRESSION MODEL BETWEEN VARIABLES AND FALSE SELF (EXPLORATION)

Discussion

The results of this study reaffirms that social media use (especially Instagram) is a positive predictor for impression management. Self esteem also affects the likelihood of strategic impression management online.

Self Esteem and Impression Management

The main objective of this study was to determine the extent of self-esteem on the different dimensions of Impression Management. It was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem scores and the management of 'Real Self', while a negative relationship between self-esteem scores and the management of 'False Self'.

The results indicate that youths who reported high self-esteem were more likely to present **their 'real' self on Social Media**. Youths who **reported low self-esteem were more likely to deceive others with their false self on Social Media**. Males were less likely to deceive others about their identity on social media, compared to the opposite sex who was more likely to compare with their identity with others.

Limited research has been done on the effect of self - esteem on impression management; which limits the amount of comparisons drawn. However, it has been suggested that selective self-presentation, afforded by digitally mediated environments can have a positive influence on self – esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

The results in this study are consistent with the results of Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis (2014). Our findings suggest that the level of self – esteem indeed affects online impression management, rather than otherwise argued by researchers (Eg: Kramer and Winter, 2008).

This suggests that youths with high esteem are perhaps, driven and motivated by the public nature of social media to manage their social identity with their real selves, as they do not have much to hide. High self-esteem scores are associated with a tendency to present oneself in a self-enhancing fashion that is characterized by willingness to accept risks, focus on outstandingly good qualities, strategic ploys, and calling attention to self. (Baumeister, Tice and Hutton, 1989). These qualities could be best represented and exemplified with the portrayal of their real selves online, such as 'liking myself and being proud of what I stand for'

Youths with lower self esteem are perhaps, more driven to deliberately manage their social identity, resulting in more deception. Given how social media is primarily driven the need to belong and need for self - presentation (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012), it suggests that social media might relate to 'social self - esteem', how individuals believe others perceive them (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). This perception might ultimately affects the way they see themselves. Youths with low self esteem might be more cautious and anxious about portraying their real selves online, thereby practicing deceptive online behaviours, such as 'trying to be someone other than my true self on Facebook / Instagram'. After all, it has been suggested that individuals with lower self-esteem have a higher likelihood of practicing self – protection (Baumeister, Tice and Hutton, 1989).

At a broader level, the results draw parallel to past research. Elliot (1982) explained that the lower the self – esteem, the greater the tendency to present a false front.

The findings suggest that besides factors such as personality (eg. Kramer & Winter, 2008, Davenport et al., 2014, Subramanian et al., 2014), the evaluation of their personal self - worth affects the strategic presentation of the identity online. The results from this study suggest that while self-evaluation could significantly influence the selective form of online impression management. It was also stated that the success of selective self - presentation could in turn could lead to a likewise positive reinforcement of an individuals' self - esteem. (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). This possible vicious relationship, while not explored in this paper, is a worthwhile future research direction for researchers in this field. After all, humans have a continuous “need for self-esteem” (Schlenker, 1980).

Social Media Use and Impression Management

Another of the main research objectives of this study was to determine the extent in which social media use affects online impression management.

The results indicate that Instagram usage was a positive predictor for impression management. The higher the Instagram use, the more likely they are to portray their Real Self, False Self (Exploration) and False Self (Compare/Impress). These findings offer an extension to the existing social media impression management findings, which are almost always based on

the Facebook (Eg: Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis, 2014, Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nijtjen, 2010, Rosenberg, 2009).

Interestingly, the strongest and most significant dimension of Impression Management among heavy users of Instagram in this case, was False Self (Compare/Impress), followed by Real Self. The False self (Compare/Impress) was also the strongest, and most well – loaded dimension during factor analysis.

While majority of photos posted on Instagram are selfies and friends (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014) - reflecting the interpersonal nature of Instagram, they have also been shown to attract more likes and comments (Bakhshi, Shamma and Gilbert, 2014). This suggests that given the highly interpersonal and comparative nature of these photos, heavy Instagram users might utilize such likes, comments and interactions as an evaluation of their personal identity, a parallel to what was suggested by Schlenker (1980). Such behaviour and usage might lead to the increased presentation of False Self – Compare/Impress on social media.

The results are in contrast to Michikyan's study, which suggests that Facebook use was the strongest predictors for Real Self and Ideal Self.

Recent research (Global Social Media Impact Study 2013; Piper Jaffrey, 2013) has suggested the dwindling popularity of Facebook among adolescents. Similarly, corresponding research has shown that an increased usage of Facebook might cause a decrease in subjective well-being (Kross et al., 2013). It was also pointed out that the Facebook activity causes a decrease in mood, an effect mediated by a feeling of not having done anything meaningful. (Sagioglou and Greitemeyer, 2014).

This is a possible interpretation on why the results in this study between Facebook Use and Impression Management were statistically insignificant. The finding also suggests that extent of Facebook usage for self – presentation might be of lesser significance as suggested by previous researchers, possibly due to the decline of Facebook use.

Limitations & Strengths

There are numerous strengths and limitations to consider while interpreting the conclusions drawn from this study.

One such limitation is the choice of research design. Unlike longitudinal studies, this cross-sectional survey does not involve drawing relationships and making inferences about characteristics over a period of time. The study does not measure how social media behaviour could change over time. Due to choice of research design, the study could not explore if self-esteem was a context-specific trait, which could better measure whether the trait could be manipulated or affected by different social media circumstances over time. Another disadvantage revolves around the possibility of the results being affected by cohort differences, which might only affect a unique sample.

Another limitation of this study deals with the sampling method. As with convenience sampling, there are limitations with respect to sampling bias and generalization of findings. All efforts have been made to improve the validity of the study. For instance, the sample size includes students from different disciplines.

However, based on previous research studies, adolescents were much more likely to report extreme levels on psychosocial and behavioral outcome variables, which could pose serious challenges for the validity of research findings in special subgroups (Fan et al., 2006). The effects of social desirability bias might also occur mainly for items or questions that deal with personally or socially sensitive content (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964)

Last but not least, another limitation involves the usage of measures in this study. The original intended usage of two separate sets of measures for Facebook and Instagram, with similar impression management dimensions was scrapped due to inadequate results. The subsequent questionnaire adopted measured impression management on 'Facebook / Instagram'. The phrasing of the questionnaire options had affected the key findings, as the results could not predict whether Facebook or Instagram had a stronger effect on Impression Management. The author could only draw conclusions from the usage of regression control variables to determine whether activity levels on Facebook or Instagram, had a stronger effect on Impression Management.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should further examine and evaluate the possibility of 'Ideal Self' being a cross - dimensional self - presentation tactic with relation to self - identity. Due to weak results, this study cannot draw direct conclusions.

Rogers' (1951) refers to true self (or Real Me') as traits or characteristics that individuals possess and would like to self - actualize, but usually not able to express. Theoretically, an individual can only express the real self with 'unconditional positive regard'. Most of the time, we reach out for our 'ideal selves', something that we cannot reach. 'Incongruity' occurs between two selves. However, Michikyan M. (2014) presents False Self - Comparison / Exploration as a way to try out different facets of the self or conforming to perceived expectations. In addition, he also stated that 'Ideal' self could have a positive and negative version. With respect to that, it is thus foreseen that the negative expression of an individual's Ideal Self, could also be an interpretation of the individual's 'False Self'. Ideal Self could also be presented as a positive interpretation of an individual's Real Self.

The effects of time, if possible should also be considered. Given that it has been shown that personality (Eg: Boyce, Wood & Powdthavee, 2013) and identity (Eg: Burke, 2006) changes over time, different situations across different social media platforms might elicit different impression management techniques. Gender differences (Eg: Deaux, 2001, Whitty, 2008) in identity formation could also influence the approach towards online impression management. It is also suggested that similar to what was suggested by Whitty (2008), it is crucial to examine the effects of how 'Real Self' and 'False Self' online presentations translate into everyday face-to-face situations, given there are expectations held between the difference between online and offline impressions.

Last but not least, various forms self-esteem could be considered in the online context, for instance the distinction between state and trait (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) or implicit/explicit self - esteem (Eg: Subramanian, Wise, Davis, Bhandari & Morris, 2014). In conclusion, the author strongly believes that more research is needed to fully understand the links between self esteem (and possibly more aspects of self - concept) and online impression management.

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