



Self-Presentation on Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to analyze the interaction of Tunisian youth in virtual spaces so as to understand the motivations of change on level virtual the virtual self-presentation. In order to develop this question, our research is based on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach. In this perspective, an exploratory research has been conducted to better define the proposed problematic. This examination has been carried out following qualitative steps based on the analysis of the data collected through relevant interviews. The results bring to the three types of motivation that drive teenagers to introduce themselves differently when they are logged on a virtual space.

Keywords: SNS, Self-presentation, exploratory study, Facebook.

Introduction

The SNS have always been a part of social life (Torloting 2006). Recently, they have taken a large size thanks to Internet and new information and communication technologies (NICT). Actually, Internet has created a growing passion in all domains.

This phenomenon has encouraged even the brands to be present online SNS and to interact directly with their current or potential clients, which allows them to build a close relation with those clients. This condition creates the need to understand young people's behavior on the net.

Contrary to everyday life, virtual life provides individuals with better control of

information, a perfect manner to control their presence in a virtual environment and it is a conscious choice of virtual social network (Klein 2001). Those sites enable users to share their personal information with a great number of "friends" (Stefanone and al., 2010).

Yet, if the virtual self-presentation is supposed to reflect the individual's reality, Joureguiberry (2000) confirms that this transition is accompanied by metamorphosis, or even break-up in self-presentation. Hence, the problematic that this research seeks to examine is the duality in self-presentation as determined by a real or virtual context. Indeed, we analyze this shift in teenagers' self-presentation. The Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach is

considered the most adequate within the framework of our research, given that the author analyses this duality with focus on the gap between real and virtual aspects of one's identity. This approach has been chosen in order to help us understand how self-presentation is reproduced, abandoned, or modified in a virtual context or in this specific online context that constitutes the online social networks sites.

For the exploration of the issue, the first section presents the dramaturgical approach developed by the American sociologist Erving Goffman. The second section is interested in the relevance of this approach to the online social networks. The last section exposes methodology and results.

Section 1: Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach

According to Goffman, the dramaturgical approach represents a way of organizing social actions and facts (Decoster et al., 2006). So Goffman imposes from the outset sociology as a figure of the interactionist trend. He tries to describe, to classify, and to organize the ways in which individuals interact and establish relations in everyday life (Bedin and Fournier 2009).

In this approach, the sociologist assumes that "social life is a stage" on which each one of us shapes his character. On this social stage the ordinary social relations are themselves combined in the way of a theatrical show, with the exchange of actions, reactions and accentuated theatrical responses (Goffman 1973).

Goffman (1973) introduces the theatrical approach from the beginning of his book as follows: "the perspective adopted here is the theatrical representation; the principles that we have drawn are the dramaturgical principles. I will examine the way a person, in the most trivial situations, presents herself and her/his activity to the others, the means she directs and controls the impressions she produces on them, and what kind of things can or cannot be allowed in whole assuming a virtual identity".

In his writings, Goffman has recourse to several metaphors (theatrical, ritual and play), although the theatrical metaphor, remains the most prominent (Manning 1991). Indeed, the author presents in this book an exciting vision of human behavior in social situations of interactions. Using the theatrical metaphor, he describes the way in which the individual introduces himself to his entourage. Goffman offers a lively overview of the most ordinary and the commonplace social situations (Bedin and Fournier 2006).

The ritual of face to face interaction is presented in a theatrical mode; daily life is a miniature scene where the characters play their social role (De coster et al., 2006).

Following this logic, all interaction implements a drama or a representation thanks to which the author plays a character and develops one or more roles in public, which in fact may be reduced to another actor (Goffman 1973).

Hence, the individuals' activity in their daily life is a form of "a staging" involving an audience, actors, those who are in direct interaction, and a scene.

Actually, all human interaction is a drama in which each individual is an actor, in the theatrical sense of the term, who acts consciously or unconsciously, one or several roles that expressed with appearances as by the words (Blandin 2004).

The use of theatrical vocabulary is based on the idea that several aspects of life can be presented theatrically, just life on actor who chooses his role in a play; the social actor can choose his role from a directory based on his representation. Also, the individual is simply an actor who often changes roles and situations, who portrayed a presentation and who do his best so that he can project an image most compatible with the identity that he claims to be (Manghan 2005).

The face to face interaction is considered as a mutual representation, given that each individual contributes, simultaneously as actor and audience to the interaction in

emitting and receiving impressions. It is a game of mirrors multiplied to infinity.

Generally, when an individual be in the presence of others, they try to acquire informations about him or to mobilize the information they already have. The individual, in his turn, tries to convey informations through his verbal and non verbal expressions (Goffman 1973).

Indeed, in every social situation (dinner, wedding...), the individuals are involved in a real stage, where each participant strives to maintain the role which is required by the situation. The responsible (the house lady, married...) ensures care for her appearances, in the domestic or social setting in which "the scene" takes place (Goffman 1973).

In conclusion, Goffman confirms that "the ordinary social relations are themselves combined in the manner of theatrical spectacles, through the actions exchange, of theatrically accentuated responses and reactions... life itself is something that takes place in a theatrical way. Of course, the entire world is not a theatre, but it is not easy to define by which it differs" (Goffman 1973). Indeed, during the whole interaction, the presence of other *interactants* and the requirement of social interaction weigh on the individual and transform his reactions in a scene or a play. All the aspects of theatre actually end up in everyday life and in ordinary social relations.

The main components of dramaturgical approach are: separation of areas, impression management, and the concept of face and the idealization of face.

Separation of Regions

Separation of the physical space or regions is a key idea in Goffman's approach. At this level, two regions are mainly distinguished: "the front region" or "scene": it is the place where the performance takes place (living room, dining room, theatre stage...) and "the back region" or "backstage": it is the place where the performance is suspended and where guests are not seen (kitchen, bedroom...) (Goffman 1973). In this back

region the responsible of representation can drop the masks taken during the performance, relax and prepare for further performance, or even complain of fatigue or boredom (Goffman 1973).

Practically, when a family receives guests, she tends to exclude children from the representation and the front region, since it cannot be trusted because they may act in a manner that is incompatible with the impression that the family seeks to produce (Goffman 1973).

Impression Management

First impressions are generally crucial, so the individual must take care to work on his impressions in order to achieve the successful staging of his character (Goffman 1973). Therefore, he must take care of his socio-economic status, the identity that he makes about himself, his feelings towards the others, his competence, honesty, etc.

This concern about impression management is at the origin of interaction order. This order allows the anticipation of other people expectations as a reaction on the part of their vis-à-vis. Well informed, the individual knows how he acts to achieve the desired response (Goffman 1973).

In all representations, the actor must act and remain in control of his impressions. This concept of the impression management refers to "the basic attributes for an actor to successfully complete the staging of his character" (Goffman 1973). But it happens that many minor acts, committed by mistake, are capable of eliciting inconsistently impressions with the definition of the maintained situation. When these incidents occur, the reality presented by the actors is threatened and people nearly react by being embarrassed (Goffman 1973).

When this gap becomes noticeable, reality supported by the representation may be weakened and the actor may be troubled and lose control. Therefore, the signs of nervousness manifested by the actor, referring to the person who plays a role, not the character he plays. The actor reveals to

the public an image of the man who hides behind the most (Goffman 1973).

In this regard, Goffman confirms that “one of the most interesting moments to observe the impression management process is when an actor leaves the back region and enters the front region where he must meet with the public, or the moments that we have come back from this place, because it is in these very moments that we have maximum chances to see the actor takes a mask or removes it” (Goffman 1973).

So the boundary between front and back region is the changing point between the real and the fraudulent. The success of this operation is never acquired: everyone tries to make a good impression, but there is always a risk of losing (Bedin and Fournier 2009).

Notion of the Face

According to the dramaturgical approach, social interaction is controlled by the desire of actors to save face and not to lose it with others, so that he protects the social order. Generally, saving the face is “a condition of interaction, not its purpose” (Goffman 1974). In fact, it is about accidents or breakdowns of the interaction, taking into consideration that every social interaction is guided by the need not to lose the face. It is the case of rupture, it is essential that the deviant performs repair work or apologizes and that the person in front or offended accepts the means of redress and responds with tolerance. With this condition, the interaction can be continued and the order can be maintained (Goffman 1973).

Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims through the line of action that others assume it has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman 1974). It is as well “the image of the self-delineated according to accepted, yet shareable social attributes” (Goffman 1974).

Idealization of the Face

As mentioned above, the main task of each individual in interaction is to save face and give an idealized impression, given that “the

world, indeed, is a ceremony” (Goffman 1973). In other words, each individual in the presence of others does his best to defend officially recognized social values and project the best impressions he wants to communicate about himself. The actor must, therefore, manage his representation to provide the maximum of facts in order to fit the role he plays with reality and to preserve the face (Goffman 1973).

This “idealization” of representations forces the social actor to hide or abandon any action that is not compatible with those standards (Goffman 1973). This tendency to idealization is not limited to face to face interactions, but also includes the structures of virtual social meetings.

As Goffman suggests, the individual is the sacred object of interpersonal modern life and his main function is to maintain a ritual order of social life. Indeed, most of the face presented in interaction is not chosen freely, but they are rather granted by the company (Lemert and Branaman 1997).

The virtual interactions used to state variously places faces in the order of the statuses. The individual’s task is to appear in a way that shows the acceptance of their social situations, because the basic rules of self-respect, consideration, and mutual acceptance of lines of action taken in the social interactions are structural features of the social interaction (Goffman 1974).

So, being aware that we can “save face” allows us to get some self-confidence and assurance. However, to do a “bad figure”, “poor figure” (Goffman 1974), or even losing face, leads to feelings of shame related to some humiliation perception. In this context, the self-image that we wish to present has not been confirmed by otherness.

Relevance of the Dramaturgical to SNS

By switching to a virtual context, it is always possible to manipulate the impression that the individual uses as substitutes for reality, for anyone who wants to be socially accepted must have extensive experience in staging techniques (Goffman 1973), either in real or virtual life. This manipulation that

Goffman (1973) speaks about is much more important with the advent of NICT, because unlike the interaction of face to face, interaction on the Internet facilitates fraudulent representations. Indeed, membership to virtual spaces is achieved through the creation of an avatar or profile, that passage frees the individual from all social constraints inherent in face to face interaction, which allows freedom to the individual's imagination to choose the most satisfactory presentation of his dreams and desires.

This context encourages deception, in the sense that the individual manipulates his image more easily. SNS are a dream opportunity for an actor to work on his image and to assert along-fantasized identity. It is these networks that will finally allow him to bridge the gap between what he was and what he has always dreamed of being (Jauréguiberry 2000). Giving free rein to their imagination, users are freed of the weight of society to create their own world.

Social networks, specifically Facebook, are therefore creators as they make their users free of social, physical and cultural constraints. Therefore, the virtual identity of the user in the forums refers to the supposedly real identity (Jauréguiberry 2000).

ICT confirms Goffman's claim that identity is the product of every social interaction. Indeed, the published information, shared publications, posted commentaries and personal data thus have an impact on the image of the surfer and his self-presentation on the web. Facebook hence reinforces Goffman's idea of self-multiplicity.

In this regard, the advent of these technologies facilitates the maintenance of the individual's face. Indeed, if self-control in face to face interactions requires an immense effort on the part of the social actor, online networks facilitate this task and users have bigger control in the virtual environments.

Users, who identify themselves through a profile on SNS, feel tension between the presentation of an authentic self and the

impression management which arouses the desire to give an idealized image.

In the same context, Ellison et al., (2006) notice that the ability to anticipate the face to face interaction allows minimizing the gap between the ideal self and the real face. For some users, building a profile online can lead to a personal development process to reduce the gap between the ideal self and the present one. The ideal self further illustrates the officially recognized social values and presents the tremendous advantage of reducing the gap between what users display on the web and what they hide behind the screen, away to comply with social values (Degreef 2008).

One of the ways in impression management resides in the distinction between the back and the front region in society. Reminding that this region is the place where self-presentation takes place, while the back region denotes backstage where the actor may consciously contradict the impression held by the presentation.

According to Goffman, the frontier between the two regions exists everywhere in our society. Consequently, by applying the region's concept in SNS, the net surfer's home can be compared to the back or backstage region of self-presentation. However, the self-presentation through an online profile can be assimilated to the front or staging region.

Facebook has taken into account this duality in self-presentation by allowing the user to be able to restrict access to his profile for some public or limited access to certain photo and publications and it all depends on the image that he wants to convey. The Facebook profile therefore includes two regions: one accessible and another confidential, one which is a front region and well organized and one which is back and plain.

Methodology

To address the issues raised in this research, we used and exploratory qualitative research as this work is part of untapped area of research.

The sample is composed of 21 young Tunisians aged between 15 and 20 years (Table 1), chosen for convenience, they were interviewed via an interview guide consisting of four themes inspired by the Goffman's dramaturgical approach. Respondents were contacted in their high schools and the realized interviews have been recorded by means of a tape recorder.

Results

Erving Goffman stresses the importance of self-presentation in everyday interpersonal interactions. He supports the idea that the relationship between the individual and his entourage, is strongly influenced by the way he presents himself to the others, the information that he projects on others help to determine who is he exactly and how he must be treated.

Results have shown that young Tunisians are concerned about what other people think of them, as the reality of each individual is not noticeable, so the individual tries to work on his appearances to create the impression that he wants to give to his entourage (Goffman 1973).

The possibility of being able to create a presentation image of our dreams and fantasies is a focus to everyone. Yet, real life with all its normative constraints and its indestructible assumptions denies the individual the freedom to create.

Many are the motivations that lead human being, primarily adolescents, to create their own front region to overcome the shortcomings of the back one, which is the life of everyday. These motivations move from the social to the technological one via the personal motivations.

The Social Motivations

Satisfactory experience of creating a false account on SNS has encouraged users to talk about it to their friends and to recommend it to them. In fact, after browsing through the fake account, we found out that users feel more satisfied with their social networks and misleading account, which encourages

them to speak positively of their experience to their friends.

"My friend told me about his false account; I liked the idea and decided to create one"

The Personal Motivations

Face Maintain and Protection of E-Reputation

When interacting via Facebook, the adolescent tries to keep face and give an idealized e-reputation. This confirms Goffman's conception of face to face interaction and the idealized image concern. Therefore, the adolescent must give the maximum of facts, images, and videos... to match the role he tries to play with the reality he wishes to impose. The data published by the teenagers on Facebook, would necessarily, enhance a digital reputation and influence their notoriety.

"Everything we say on Facebook is recorded either on the site itself or in the memory of others on Internet, things go differently when we speak verbally, and we can lie and pretend that nothing was said, but Facebook keeps track of whatever we say."

Therefore, trying to ensure a good personal image and his e-reputation in an account with real information is to try to give the most idealized image while being most compatible with his ever-present implicit reality.

"Each one of us has a reputation within his social circle, and when we sign on Facebook, we try to keep and even improve it."

The basic e-reputation, generally, on the evidence offered by the conversations between users or person's opinion about the other is based on the items of Facebook profile (photo, publications, comments, etc...).

"Photos can be misleading and information can be fake but through the posts we can deduce, approximately, the other's personality, his entourage, especially through his conversations on the wall, we can know his social and intellectual level, so we can create a clear image about him."

Then, during the interactions via Facebook, teenagers try to maintain face and give an idealized e-reputation. This reminds us of the Goffman's conception of the face to face interaction and the idealized image concern.

"All this is clear through my status, comments, conversations, photos and even in the choice of my friends, in short, it is a whole soul, the profile has a soul, it is felt, it is obvious, it is understandable."

The Dream Image

Contrary to everyday life interactions, Facebook interactions are much more flexible. The young person may try as many roles and new selves he wants, without risk of punishment from his family or his entourage. The virtual world allows free unlimited experiences that encourage adolescent's imagination.

"On Facebook I try to show off much more better, whether physical or morally, I try to put the best profile photo, to publish the popular videos which everybody likes on Facebook, and make the most courteous comment, in order to get more friends and digital admiration."

Virtual Self-Enhance

Also, we notice that among the factors that contribute to the pointing of a self-esteem portrait, the choice of brands plays a big role. Indeed, adolescents try to take care of their image by showing their belongings to some brands as luxurious as expensive.

"The brands boost my image among these groups and in front of my virtual friends."

The Technological Motivations

Control of the Regions

By applying the concept of regions in online social networks, the false account of the user can be associated with the back region or backstage of self-presentation. It is in this space that the adolescent removes his social mask and acts freely.

Therefore, the screen would no longer be a separation between what is true and what is

false and division goes beyond the screen to reach the accounts themselves.

The true is revealed, paradoxically, only through the false account that offers the user an outlet to say what he feels, just as the backstage in Goffman's theory, while the account with real information continues to present a production capable of meeting the expectations of the social environment.

"I can safely reveal my feelings without threats of face to face communications. Proximity is not a problem for, as I am in that background placed in the shade, I feel relaxed and at ease."

Ease of use

The perceived ease of use was defined by Davis (1989) as the "Degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will be exempt of effort." The concept of usability included in our study is part of the same logic of Davis (1989).

Facebook users are switching to it for its convenience as the other SNS present certain constraints and complications that are not without putting off teenagers.

"Facebook ensures speed and immediacy of communication, it is easy to use."

Conclusion

So as shown in this study, self-presentation and online self-presentation overlap each other and mutually reinforce each other.

Studying particular connections with the works of Goffman, we find that the virtual self is one of the roles that the individual can play and it is interdependent on the context and the scene in which it occurs. The link between the real self and the virtual self is obvious during interactions via Facebook. Consequently, and in accordance with Goffman's philosophy, the self is not stable but rather variant.

It is constructed, however, from social interactions rather than from multiple social roles that the individual adopts in his life.

These results are of particular interest to companies that plan to invest in advertising on online social networks. Indeed, with a better understanding of the stimuli that leads adolescents and young Tunisians to change their self-presentation, and the consequence of such a change, marketing actions, namely segmentation and targeting, are more successful in terms of efficacy and efficiency.

Like all researches, this study has some limitations; the first is related to subjectivity of qualitative research in gathering and analyzing data. Moreover, the choice of a convenience sample reduces external

validity. In other words, the results of this research represent only this population; they cannot be extrapolated to the general population. Similarly, the sample size can be considered small.

Another limitation is related to the scope of this empirical research, all respondents are only users of the social network Facebook.

Yet, we believe that this research can be a starting point for further quantitative research to verify the identified relationships and to test the model developed in this study.

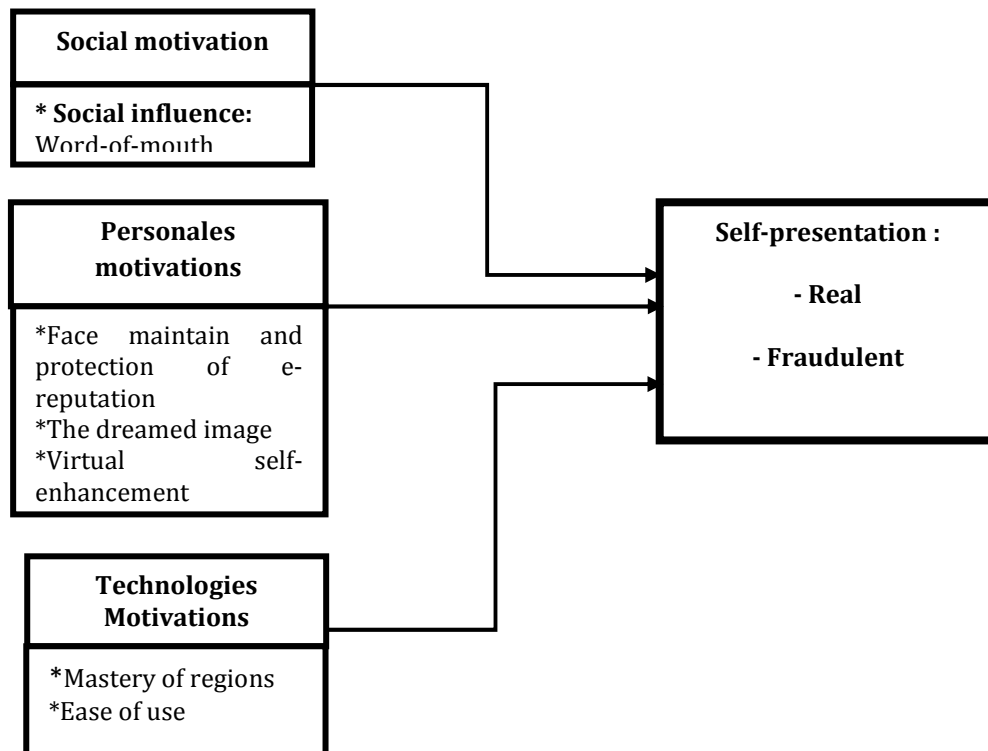


Figure 1: Empirical Model Resulting from the Data Analysis

Table1: Sample Profile

Case	Sex	Age	Level of study	The use of Facebook/D
Case 1	F	16	2 nd year	4h
Case 2	F	18	3 rd year	8h
Case3	M	19	Baccalauréat	4h
Case 4	M	17	3 rd year	15h
Case 5	F	16	2 nd year	5h
Case 6	F	18	3 rd year	5h

Case 7	F	18	3 rd year	5h
Case 8	M	15	1 st year	4h
Case 9	F	16	1 st year	2h
Case 10	F	19	Baccalauréat	3h
Case 11	M	18	Baccalauréat	8h
Case 12	M	16	2 nd year	1/4h
Case 13	F	20	Baccalauréat	4h
Case 14	F	20	Baccalauréat	3h
Case 15	F	16	1 st year	8h
Case 16	M	19	Baccalauréat	3h
Case 17	F	18	3 rd year	2h
Case 18	M	15	1 st year	8h
Case 19	M	17	3 rd year	2h
Case 20	F	19	Baccalauréat	8h
Case 21	F	16	1 st year	8h

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