'You have one identity': performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn

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Abstract

Social media are popular stages for self-expression, communication and self-promotion. Rather than facilitating online identity formation, they are sites of struggle between users, employers and platform owners to control online identities – a struggle played out at the level of the interface. This article offers a comparative interface analysis between Facebook and LinkedIn. While Facebook is particularly focused on facilitating personal self-presentation, LinkedIn's interface caters towards the need for professional self-promotion. And yet, both platforms deploy similar principles of connectivity and narrative – strategies that can be succinctly revealed in recent interface changes. These changing digital architectures form the necessary backdrop for asking critical questions about online self-presentation: How are public identities shaped through platform interfaces? How do these features enable and constrain the sculpting of personal and professional persona? And what are the consequences of imposed connectivity and narrative uniformity on people's online identities?

Introduction

> You have one identity. The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly.… Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity. (Marc Zuckerberg quoted in Kirkpatrick 2010: 199)

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Marc Zuckerberg's infamous quips about identity, along with his comments concerning privacy ('an evolving norm'), have raised questions not just about the CEO's personal worldview, but about the ideology that undergirds the world's most powerful social network service (SNS). Facebook and other SNSs favor the idea of people having one transparent identity that they disclose online, releasing habitual behavioral data and personal information in the process of socializing. Platform owners have a vested interest in pushing the need for a uniform online identity to attain maximum transparency, not only because they want to know who their users are, but also because advertisers want users' 'truthful' data. However, the interest of owners may run counter to users' need to differentiate between their various online personas. For most users, there is a distinct difference between one's professional persona, addressed mainly to co-workers and employers, and one's self-communication towards 'friends'. Long before the emergence of online communication, Erving Goffman (1959) theorized self-presentation as a performance; the need for a multiple, composite self has only increased since public communication moved to an online space.

This article will analyze how the struggle between users and platforms to control online identities is played out at the level of the *interface*. Users deploy SNSs for several purposes, and over the years, they have adapted their strategies in online presentation as platforms changed their functionalities. Initially, platforms like Facebook were commonly regarded as a space for (personal) *self-expression* and for making connections between friends. Gradually, users have come to understand the art of online self-presentation and the importance of SNSs as tools for (professional) *self-promotion*. Since each form of self-communication brings along a specific concept of audience, users had to learn how to handle privacy settings and presentation styles accordingly.

Parallel to the shift in users' needs, there has been a shift in the larger online infrastructure through which SNSs operate. In the first stage of their development, from 2002 to 2008, these sites were commonly run as community spaces, primed to facilitate *connectedness* between people. After 2008, most corporate site owners shifted their focus from running community-oriented platforms to monetizing *connectivity* by maximizing lucrative data traffic between people, things and ideas (Van Dijck, 2013). Along with this shift came a change in platforms' architectures; rather than being *databases* of personal information they became tools for (personal) *storytelling* and *narrative* self-presentation. The next section will explain how these shifts are intricately intertwined.

Social media's changing digital architectures form the necessary backdrop for asking critical questions about online self-presentation: How are public identities shaped through platform interfaces? How do these features enable and constrain the sculpting of personal and professional persona? And what are the consequences of imposed connectivity and narrativity on people's online identities? To probe these issues, I will use a comparative analysis between Facebook and LinkedIn. While Facebook is a general social network service, facilitating mostly personal networks, LinkedIn specifically caters for professionals. Both platforms use similar principles of connectivity and narrative to stimulate composite persona displays – strategies that can be succinctly revealed in recent interface changes. In 2011, Facebook introduced the feature Timeline to enforce a uniform presentation style on all its members' homepages. LinkedIn instigated subtle tactics to personalize the public staging of one's identity. Both sites foster the idea of one

uniform or 'idealized' self by integrating the principles of connectivity and narrative in their interfaces.

Considering the immense speed at which SNSs are still growing, the larger concerns underpinning their technological and economic imperatives are systematically understated. What kinds of self-presentation do these sites impose through their interfaces? How are people's online presentations of past performance used to assess their (future) functioning? And what diverging interests – of users, platform owners, and employers – are at stake in the battle to control people's public online profiles? These questions become quite relevant when entering legal and political discussions about privacy and information control. This article attempts to deconstruct the strategies of platforms promoting the online self as a standardized tradable product, and theorizes their cultural implications.

Self-expression versus self-promotion; connectedness versus connectivity; databases versus narratives

In line with Goffman's (1959) theory of symbolic interactionism, self-performance distinguishes between signs *given* naively, unconsciously, and signs *given off* consciously, deliberately. For instance, signs about one's gender or marital status can be given away unintentionally, while talking or chatting, but they can also calculatingly be emphasized or suppressed. Goffman stresses how intentional presentation is a very basic persona-sculpting strategy, even if naïve or unaware identity displays are always also a part of self-expression (Manning, 1992). When we look at social media platforms, Goffman's multiple levels of identity display come to mind when scrutinizing these sites' interfaces; platform owners use interface technologies to promote unconscious self-expression while also enabling conscious self-promotion. Users of online platforms, for their part, have adapted their strategies over the years, as they became savvier in deploying these new 'technologies of self'.

The emergence of what Manuel Castells (2009) has termed 'mass self-communication' refers to a global system of networked interaction – a system within which platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, GooglePlus and Twitter offer crucial tools to galvanize the performance of online identity. From the earliest days of social media, platforms were presented as tools for making connections, promoting human connectedness and community building. As boyd and Ellison (2007: 221) observed in 2007, social network sites were about enhancing human relationships that already existed in real life as well as about supporting expansive networks of weak ties. It is important to recall how most social network sites, notably Facebook, started out as 'friends sites' in protected environments such as college campuses. It took two years for Facebook to expand its service to a general global audience, changing the nature of the game for a rapidly expanding user base. As user numbers soared after 2007, a page on Facebook increasingly implied presenting a public persona that could be seen and contacted by users worldwide. Online connections no longer automatically paralleled offline contacts, but favored weak and latent ties. Networked connectedness quickly came to dominate the organization of everyday sociality (Christakis and Fowler, 2009; Van Dijck, 2012).

Towards the end of the first decade of the millennium, a noticeable change occurred in the organization and architecture of social media platforms, shifting their center of gravity from connectedness to *connectivity*. Key terms denoting routine human social activities – terms such as 'friending', 'liking', 'connecting' and 'following' – rapidly penetrated the discourse of platforms. Interface technologies translate relationships between people, ideas and things into algorithms in order to engineer and steer performance. Most of these buttons tend to register emotional, immediate, and intuitive responses, generally treating them as unintentional expressions of the self, in line with Goffman's vocabulary. Whether or not these responses are truthful or unconscious is disputable, as many automated buttons can also be deliberately manipulated and played by users. However, algorithms, as coded quantifications of sociality, are implemented to trigger as many connections as possible, even though users are still often unaware of the effects they have upon them (Beer, 2008, 2009). Goffman's two levels of conscious and unconscious self-performance are thus newly relevant when it comes to online platforms. While users consciously construct their own profile, platform owners and investors collect behavioral data that users are unaware of creating; data companies are particularly interested in signs of desires and wants, as advertisers need this information for marketing purposes.

Personal and behavioral data, once a mere byproduct of connectedness and online sociality, has now become a valuable resource in the exploitation of platforms. 'Friending' no longer refers to people you know, but people you *may* or *should* know according to an algorithm's computation; 'liking' has turned into a provoked automated gesture that yields precious information about people's desires and predilections. 'Following' discloses and connects people's interests and allows for the detection of trends. The more connections users make to both human and nonhuman entities, the more social capital they accumulate (Ellison et al., 2007). And the more social capital people assign to things and ideas, the more economic capital can be gained from connectivity. The automatic mining of personal and behavioral data is arguably platform owners' most important driver for promoting online traffic; at the same time, standardizing data input guarantees better results. If users' input is channeled through formatted interfaces, it enhances a site's connective potential.

The so-called 'connective turn' in social media platforms is a double-edged sword when it comes to the online performance of self. While gradual interface changes massaged users into presenting their public persona in a standardized way, users have developed a keen understanding of these mechanisms and have learned to exploit these same algorithmic mechanisms for their own advantage. Over time, social acts of self-expression on SNSs quickly began to give way to more conscious acts of self-staging as people's presence and popularity was increasingly measured by their online manifestation. Roughly after 2009, the self turned into an object of marketing and promotion now that connectivity could transform online social value to real rewards in the offline world. Stars and politicians pre-eminently exploit the possibilities of marketing individual personalities as products. Celebrities' self-presentation via Twitter or Facebook exposes the lucrative side of the connective turn: their online personas equal their brands, and the ultimate successful presentation of self is to have millions of followers. From Justin Bieber to Barack Obama, online personas have become an indispensable part of self-branding. In contrast

to previous public staging by mass media like television, PR teams can now better control their personal messages and maximize their profitability, whether in terms of votes or money. It has become fairly common for people with large followings to take on brand promotion for products or causes. If Madonna recommends particular kinds of shoes to her millions of followers, she cashes in on the connective value of her personal popularity.

Promoting and branding the self has also become a normalized, accepted phenomenon in ordinary people's lives. Following the examples of celebrities' self-promotion, many users (especially young adults and teenagers) shape their online identities in order to gain popularity and hopefully reach a comfortable level of recognition and connectedness.[1] Indeed, teenagers have always modeled their self-image after celebrities' exposure through mass media such as television and movies – a phenomenon theorized by British sociologist John Thompson (1995) well before the advent of social media. But with these platforms, common users have gained an instrument for self-promotion that actually pays off. Those users who attain high levels of acknowledgment from their peers are regarded as 'influencers'; they may receive offers from companies to distribute promoted messages (e.g. in the form of messages distributed to people's Walls) and be rewarded materially or symbolically. Online self-promotion is not just for teenagers. Professional adults of all ages manifest themselves online to emphasize their skills and proficiency, hence attracting contacts, contracts, customers, or employers. There are many ways to shape online identities for many different purposes, and, in theory, there are several platforms to choose from – platforms which, over the years, have specialized in catering towards specific functions and audiences: job markets, social markets, dating markets, creative markets and so on.

The 'connective turn' in social media came with a noticeable shift in the organization of platforms from *database* structures into *narrative* structures. In the early years of Web 2.0, new media scholar Lev Manovich (2001) theorized the distinct architectural nature of interactive platforms as databases – organized collections of textual, audio-visual, numerical data supported by a database management system. Unlike previous media, interactive platforms forced users to present information in a nonlinear, non-narrative fashion. Databases do not tell stories with a beginning or end: 'in fact, they do not have any development, thematically, formally, or otherwise that would organize their elements into a sequence' (Manovich, 2001: 218). Instead, he argues, the user interface of digital media relies upon a concept of spatial montage where the retrieval of data is highly dependent on search systems (2001: 322–3).

For the first decade of the 21st century, the dominance of databases over narratives as a new logic of information order was exactly what distinguished digital platforms from other types of communication media. The applicability of Manovich's concept could be discerned in the contingent ordering of data on social network sites, which at the time still centered on users' needs rather than on platform owners' interests. Facebook's interface, as British researcher Garde-Hansen (2009: 141) observed, used to be presented as a database *of* users and *for* users where 'each user's page is a database of their life, making this social network site a collection of collections and collectives'. As a result of the database logic in the visible interface, each user could define the distinctive functionality of his or her profile. For some users, their page presented a personal archive, a way to

share life histories and memories with selected others or open it up to the public at large. For others, SNSs appeared to be a 'stage for digital flâneurs', a place to 'see and be seen' (boyd, 2007: 155). In sum, Facebook and LinkedIn's visual interfaces served users' desires for variable modes of self-presentation, allowing for openness and randomness. Drawing on Manovich's database/narrative opposition, SNSs used to favor a spatial-visual ordering of information over a linear-textual one.

But what happened to database logic in the light of the connective turn and how does this show in recent changes implemented in social media platforms' interfaces? In the next sections, I will analyze recent interface changes of Facebook and LinkedIn, to understand how they smoothly integrate self-expression with self-promotion, connectivity with connectedness, and narrative with databases. Facebook and LinkedIn are the two largest SNSs that have proliferated over the years (Papacharissi, 2009). As their functionality became more focused, their interfaces became more directional, thus channeling users' modes of self-presentation. Whereas, in the early years of social media, there was still a relative freedom in online presentation, platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn have gradually tweaked their interfaces and protocols not just to facilitate users, but also to serve businesses and advertisers. With the recent introduction of Timeline and LinkedIn's interface overhaul, we can see the double shift toward connectivity and narrative.

Facebook's interface after Timeline

When Marc Zuckerberg introduced the new Timeline feature at a public event, in September 2011, he described it as follows: 'Timeline is the story of your life. It has three pieces: all your stories, all your apps, and a new way to express who you are.' He then continued to explain how Timeline lets you 'tell the whole story of your life on a single page' (Zuckerberg, 2012). The most significant ordering principle of the new interface layout is a vertical bar on the right indicating a chronological order from the present to the past: starting with the most recent months, months are slipping into years when you scroll towards the bottom. The entire left side of the page is filled with events, 'stories of your life' in the form of pictures, posts to friends, music that you like(d), recipes you exchanged, all your likes and pokes, updates, maps of the places you have been, and a lot more. Every single piece of data (text, picture, video, sound) you ever uploaded on Facebook is automatically transferred onto the Timeline upon opening it in the new format – a format that becomes compulsory for every user after it has been rolled out and implemented. But the new Timeline is much more than a glitzy new interface feature: it is a complete architecture overhaul that smartly disciplines its user into combining *self-expression* – in this case memory and emotion – with *self-promotion* in a uniform format.

Timeline's format is organized as a narrative biography, a story chronicling how life has been up to the present day by rearranging bits and pieces uploaded previously. The resulting narrative is a construction in hindsight, a retroactive ordering of life events at one moment in time. Facebook's encoded activity resembles the analogue real-life shoe-box experience: people reassembling pieces from their old photo albums, diaries, scrapbook and weblog into one smooth presentation of the past (Van Dijck, 2007). Due to the

Timeline format, all online lives contain the same key ingredients. At the bottom of the Timeline, you are cued to post a baby picture and, as time moves on, standard milestones pass in review: family pictures, school classes, old friends, college years, wedding pictures, honeymoon, (partner) pregnant with first child, baby's first picture, first-step videos, holiday trips and so on. Since few user profiles contained pictures or posts from one's 'pre-Facebook' life – which is 2004 at the earliest – the interface incites users to fill in the gaps and illustrate them with pictures. Memory and emotion are explicitly made part of the Facebook Timeline experience. As one blogger explains:

> Years-old memories flashed before me – old friends, old places, things I hadn't thought about in ages. I got sucked back into the past the same way I would have in front of my mother's old cedar chest, a trunk packed full of childhood tchotckes and pictures that holds our family's history. This innocuous social web tool had just made a powerful and convincing bid for more than my information or my time. Facebook was grasping at my emotions by way of my memories, and it was doing a damn good job. (O'Dell, 2011)

Combining spontaneous memories and emotions with consciously released new personal data is exactly what Facebook intended to accomplish by rolling out their mandatory new interface.

However, transforming a database into a narrative requires not only adding new data to already existing content, it also triggers a new awareness of *how* you want your life story be told, *to whom* and *for what purpose*. The *how* question is all about layout and polishing. Timeline's new look is much more picture-heavy than the old interface: the opening image requires a large-size eye-catcher, friends become big pictures, and many posts carry much larger versions of pictures than originally posted. You are asked to emphasize some events by inserting streamers and pictures, thus adding 'highlights' in retrospect. The month-by-month and later year-by-year ordering gives profiles the look and feel of a magazine. Your former profile suddenly becomes the center of a slick publication, with yourself as the protagonist. This awareness involves a number of layout decisions that are heavily steered by the interface's default settings.

The questions *to whom* and *for what purpose* you craft your self-image raise more profound issues of personal and professional branding. When switching to Timeline, all previous posts had automatically been transferred into the chronological preformatted layout. By default, every formerly inserted piece of data was set to 'public' even if you had previously set it to 'friends only'. As the site explains, users received a grace period of seven days to make decisions about their self-presentation (Facebook Timeline, 2011). For those users who take their online profile seriously, the transfer to Timeline implied a balancing act between self-expression and self-promotion. With every piece of data – both new and old – one had to decide to whom to make it accessible: to friends, a wider circle or the general audience. In other words, every post from the past had to be reassessed in terms of current audience and potential effects: if I add a picture of my wedding, will this upset my jealous ex-spouse displayed in the picture? Should the picture of a rowdy student party really be open to the general public if it affects former roommates? Each decision to customize your Timeline implied not only a decision about the (private) reassembling of one's past life, but also a conscious effort at (public) identity shaping.

Users were forced to combine reflections on self-expression and self-promotion in terms of re-imagining their audience when turning on their revamped Facebook profile.

The introduction of Timeline also exposed the interface as a means of exploiting connectivity in the double meaning of the term. On the one hand, users deploy the new tool to redesign their strategy for self-presentation. As research has demonstrated, Facebook users have gradually become more skilled in the techniques of audience appraisal and personal branding (Marwick and boyd, 2011). For those users who put in the time and effort to really work on their profile, this revamping exercise increased their audience-awareness. On the other hand, Facebook used the new interface layout to increase the platform's control over personal data, since the overwhelming majority of Facebook users lack the necessary interest in or skills to control their privacy settings the way they want them to (Leon et al., 2011). Since Facebook's default settings force users to 'opt out' when it comes to keeping information private, user profiles are likely to have become more public than before the feature was implemented.[2]

Companies, like users, were also expected to switch their presentation strategies from 'sending messages' to 'telling stories'. Narratives are supposedly the lubricant for connecting people to products and products to people. For companies, the idea of driving traffic to a page through ads is *passé*; rather, they were prompted to turn products or companies into stories that can be shared with 'friends'. Social advertising means having ads blend in with the platform's narrative structure. For instance, the insertion of so-called Sponsored Stories into a user's Timeline – posts from 'friends' to your Facebook page that are paid for by business or organizations – is a strategy the company claims to be three to ten times more effective than placed advertisements (Socialite Media, 2012). Companies were thus urged to adjust their ad strategies to Facebook's insidious but rather effective architectural principles.

Making everything social – from ads to apps and from people to companies – means making everything *narrative* as well as *connective*: Facebook's new interface smoothly integrates the two principles. The more people buy into a story, the better the brand is promoted. And yet, the narrative structure of interfaces has not diminished the importance of an architecture based on data and data management. On the contrary, another feature Facebook released simultaneously with Timeline, which received much less attention, was its real-time Page Insight Data. The feature enables marketers to access real-time analytics that measure the effectiveness of their ads moment by moment. Leveraging these insights, companies can make decisions about what works and what does not, subsequently tweaking content in order to optimize their strategies.

The linear, narrative structure dominating the visible user interface not only cajoles more information out of the user but also channels data input into a more uniform format. The introduction of standardized presentation formats on users' homepages benefits the development of apps. Moreover, algorithms work better if input is uniform; by forcing users to encode their information homogeneously, it is easier to automatically detect patterns of behavior and manipulate them. Platform owners are interested in standardization as well as in customization: if personal data are inserted and presented uniformly, it is easier for advertisers to mass-customize and personalize their marketing strategies, while real-time statistics help them keep track of their success.

What holds for products also applies to people's online self-promotion. Besides presenting themselves on a variety of social media platforms, users increasingly revert to data analytics to measure and evaluate their online visibility and effectiveness. Services like Klout, one of numerous start-ups in online analytics, offer to measure a user's influence across social networks. Taking data from Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and a number of other sites, they measure the size of a user's network, the content created, and how often other users interact with that content, resulting in a 'Klout score' between 1 and 100. Individuals with high Klout scores are sought out by companies who offer them free merchandise or money to spread positive publicity. Services like Klout tap into people's desire for connectedness as well as their status anxiety; they also assist a company's exploitation of connectivity by recruiting influencers to sell products. Narrative self-presentation is hence intimately related to data analytics: whereas algorithms define a quantitative validation of someone's influence, the quality of a person's narrative is what makes her or him a persuasive wheeler and dealer.

The similarities between the online presentation of people and products, individuals and brands, are striking: the same interfaces and tactics apply to both, making them even more exchangeable than before. Facebook's new interface is an attempt at smoothly integrating self-expression and self-promotion, connectedness and connectivity, and narrative and database logics into its uniform interface strategy. Facebook has crept deeper into the texture of life, its narrative principles imitating proven conventions of storytelling, thus binding users even more tightly to the fabric that keeps it connected. At the same time, the site's database logic has everything but vanished; in fact, database and narrative appear to be complementary ordering structures. Connectivity and narrative are two important principles by which platforms and companies galvanize their economic and symbolic currency. Before expanding on the broader implications of the connective turn, let us first look at a platform in which functionality is premised on *professional* rather than personal self-presentation: LinkedIn.

LinkedIn and the professional self

Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn, when asked in a 2010 interview to compare the platform to his biggest competitor, replied:

> Facebook is largely a social utility platform. LinkedIn is a professional network.… The key distinction is that as a professional you want people to want to know who you are. People are searching for you or people like you whether you like it or not. (in Lapin, 2011)

In contrast to Facebook, LinkedIn's user base is mostly male, comprising generally middle-aged (corporate) professionals in the higher income bracket who are employed by a (large) firm. Of course the site also caters to other users, but the ideal image of a LinkedIn professional immediately stands out when looking at sample profiles. Whereas the site initially facilitated professionals wanting to connect to each other, its founding principle rests on offering recruitment and advertising services to corporations and agencies. With over 130 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is the largest professional matchmaker site in the world.

Since starting its services in 2003, LinkedIn has regularly modified its interface features to enhance its efficacy. Between 2003 and 2012, users' homepages underwent a complete overhaul from a spatially oriented visible interface to a more narrative one. In the early years, the site's interface centered on facilitating user groups, contacts and discussions between professionals; the homepage looked like a random organization of features such as 'contacts', 'sharing' and 'answers'. Partly in response to Facebook's success, LinkedIn added features like 'newsfeeds' and 'network updates' to boost the site's social networking functions. After 2009, the site noticeably revamped its interface to present professional identities more uniformly and chronologically. With a stronger focus on (personal) content and profile information ordered in a chronological fashion, LinkedIn homepages began to look more homogeneous. In comparison to Facebook's Timeline, LinkedIn's profiles look cleaner and more factual, with only one (formal) picture as eye-catcher and text arranged mostly in the form of lists. Online presentations resemble formatted CVs containing only the most relevant facts on education, current and past positions, as well as former experience. The site explicitly discourages any forms of self-expression or emotional attachments, as these signals might be detrimental to someone's professional image.

Yet, despite its obvious preference for a clean-slated presentation of the professional self, LinkedIn deploys strategies of narrative and connectivity that are similar to Facebook's. Profiles on LinkedIn are a lot more than CVs posted for potential recruiters. It may not be an exaggeration to argue that LinkedIn profiles function as inscriptions of *normative* professional behavior: each profile shapes an idealized portrait of one's professional identity by showing off skills to peers and anonymous evaluators. Not coincidentally, LinkedIn is often nicknamed 'Facebook in a suit', referring to people's typical job interview attire. The narrative nature of self-presentation on LinkedIn, however, is subtler than the style used by Facebook. What features precisely contribute to this narrative professional profile?

LinkedIn asks users not to provide their life story but prompts them to highlight specific skills, thus promoting their strengths. Members are also urged to complete their profile by including two recommendations – statements from people who praise your knowledge and skills. Not providing any statements leaves this feature blank, which makes it seem like you cannot find anyone to endorse you. Parallel to this feature, your professional identity receives a boost from contributing to the Question and Answer space provided by the platform. Every answer provided to questions posed by people in your profession becomes part of your profile, unless you decide to opt out of this feature, which requires a conscious adjustment of privacy settings. However, complying with the Q and A prompt boosts your public image as a skilled worker and a sociable person. As the LinkedIn Learning Center website explains, expertise is measured quantitatively:

> Every time the questioner picks your answer as the best, you gain a point of expertise in the category of the question. The best way you can gain expertise is to answer questions in the areas you know. Experts in each area are recognized on LinkedIn: the more points of expertise you gain, the higher you appear on lists of experts. (LinkedIn Learning Center, 2012)

By showing off social as well as professional skills, LinkedIn users not only increase their professional value on the job market but may also improve the image of their company. Many companies encourage the use of LinkedIn for communication between colleagues and with outside contacts, sometimes rendering the platform a mandatory in-company communication tool. Enforced use of the tool enhances the public image of a workplace or corporation showcasing ideal employee behavior while simultaneously providing an instrument for employee monitoring.

LinkedIn's management is acutely aware of the mutual shaping of their site's technical architecture and users' behavior. In a 2011 *Wall Street Journal* interview, LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner said:

> More important are the behavioral changes taking place as a result of that infrastructure, the way in which people represent their identity, the way in which people are connecting with others, and the way in which they're sharing information, knowledge, opinions, ideas, everything. (Raice, 2011)

The presentation of the professional self is fashioned by the platform at the same time and by the same means as the platform shapes professional and corporate images. LinkedIn benefits from both types of accumulated social capital; it smoothly integrates connectedness with connectivity and narrative logic with database analytics. Since its latest overhaul, LinkedIn allows its users to gauge their own professional value by looking at their 'profile stats' – the names, titles and companies of people who look at your profile. According to the site's homepage, profile stats indicate the 'state of your professional brand' and 'let you understand how influential you are by examining the popularity of your profile'. Not unlike Klout scores, profile stats are aimed at upping a user's personal scores; continuous performance data inform the story of the ideally performing employee who is well connected, sociable and skilled – personality traits that go well beyond the straightforward facts of a CV.

The actual value of connectivity for the platform as well as its corporate clients is crystal clear: employee profiles provide essential demographic and professional information for personalized targeted advertising. Moreover, certified influential professionals with excellent stats may be recruited to help promote expert services to selected customers. Recommendations (promoted stories) that come from specialists have more value than recommendations stemming from strangers or non-specialists. LinkedIn's eagerness to push this personalized narrative strategy led to a highly publicized case of user backlash. In August 2011, the platform came under fire for including users' names and pictures of LinkedIn members who were 'following' a company in advertisements for that company, without these users' knowledge. In response to the criticism, LinkedIn anonymized the followers, changing their names into links, e.g. 'three people in your network follow company X', but still used them as recommenders in ads. The platform owners defended their strategy by saying that members approve of social ads, as these are called, as long as their names and pictures are not used without prior consent (Niccolai, 2011).

The dual principles of connectivity and narrative underpin virtually every strategy of the professional network, not only to facilitate people who have already signed up to

LinkedIn but also to recruit new subscribers to the service. One poignant use of the con-
nectivity principle is LinkedIn's feature People You May Know (PYMK), a tab promi-
nently featured on each personal page. Like Facebook, LinkedIn wields this feature to
automatically connect users to weak ties (friends of friends) and latent ties: people you
may want to know or need to know. In the latest update, this feature has been adjusted to
include more and bigger pictures, in response to Facebook's photo-heavy profiles.
LinkedIn also deploys the PYMK algorithm to recruit new members for its services: the
platform constantly sends out invitations to nonmembers, prompting them to sign up for
the service and hook up with the people already part of 'your extended network'. Regular
invites and reminders make the addressee feel he or she is the missing link in a profes-
sional network of colleagues, former classmates or professional influencers. PYMK
reveals the normative nature of platform strategies; the mechanism is closely associated
with the offline mechanism of peer pressure, which works among teenagers and young
adults as well as among professionals with specific skills and expertise (Quan-Haase and
Young, 2010). The feature's algorithmic precision is a poignant reminder of CEO's
Weiner's description of LinkedIn as a network where 'you want people to want to know
who you are'.

In sum, while LinkedIn's interface features are aimed at a more professional audience
than Facebook, both platforms use the same architectural principles of connectivity and
narrative to channel users' self-presentations. They also aim at conflating users' need for
self-expression with their need for self-promotion. Although Facebook's algorithms and
protocols exploit users' self-presentations more openly as a promotional tool for accu-
mulating social capital, LinkedIn's functionality goes beyond its self-claimed ambition
as a professional matchmaker and ventures into behavioral monitoring, even if its inter-
face features are subtler in directing the user. Social media profiles, as we can derive
from these sites' interface adjustments, are powerful mechanisms to steer and validate
personal and professional lives, both inside and outside the workplace. Such observa-
tions elicit important questions concerning their ramifications. How are people's online
presentations of past performance used to assess their (potential, future) functioning?
And what converging and diverging interests – of users, employers, platform owners and
advertisers – are at stake in the battle to control people's public online profiles?

Facebook and LinkedIn: self-expression, self-promotion or personality assessment?

Platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn have pushed the art and science of 'mass self-
communication' to a new level. Their interfaces cajole users into releasing information
about themselves, both consciously and unconsciously. Users, for their part, have become
increasingly skilled at playing the game of self-promotion, while advertisers and other
interested parties, such as (prospective) employers, are getting leverage out of these tools
for their own purposes. The power over interfaces naturally resides with platform own-
ers, but they constantly have to balance users' demands with business interests – a strug-
gle that reveals the deeper ideological and economic interest at stake in online identity
formation. At the core of this tussle we find three stakeholders: users want to build con-
nections and preferably deploy multiple modes of self-performance aimed at different

audiences; employers seek 'true' information about a prospective employee's behavior and also need SNSs to monitor their employees' online behavior; and, finally, platform owners have a vested interest in uniform narratives to maximize connectivity. All three stakes are rooted in strategic paradoxes: each act of self-performance or personality assessment requires tactical maneuvering and awareness of the power plays involved in the game.

Much in line with Goffman's theory of self-performance, users have various socio-discursive needs – expressive, communicative or promotional – reflecting the need for different personas and necessitating different addressees. If users' strategic aim is self-promotion, they shape a consistent picture of their 'uniform public self' across platforms. By keeping up profiles on both platforms, users can deploy Facebook and LinkedIn to present their 'social' and 'professional' selves respectively. Obviously, when looking for a job or building up a career, constructing a consistent personal-professional image is quite important. Many users will try to synchronize their profiles on both sites, even if the interfaces on Facebook and LinkedIn force them to perform different strategies. Facebook engineered its interface as to stimulate self-expression first and self-promotion second, while LinkedIn explicitly focuses on professional performance and experience. But users may also exploit the availability of various interfaces to create partial identities. While using one's Facebook profile to create a leisure-persona (e.g. someone whose personal narrative revolves around vintage cars) one may keep up a completely separate professional profile on LinkedIn (e.g. a high-school teacher in English). A user who posts little (personal) information on Facebook but who keeps up an active profile on LinkedIn makes a statement that he or she cares about keeping his or her personal life private. In their poignant analyses of academics presenting themselves using different platform strategies, Barbour and Marshall (2012) distinguish five main presentation styles each of which caters to a specific form of identity display, illustrating each type with specific examples.

Users arguably have a need for multiple 'stories' about themselves, each story concerning different parts of their identities and addressing a limited audience. Facebook's new layout scrupulously combines the various needs for self-expression, self-communication and self-promotion through one and the same interface. With the imposed Timeline format, users may release more 'social' and personal data than they would like, but it also gives them an instrument to carefully craft their public profile. The fine line between what has also been called 'authentic' and 'idealized' (or inauthentic) self-promotion requires a precarious balancing act (Hernez-Broome et al., 2009), which users are not always aware of or are not always good at. Contrastingly, keeping up multiple personas across platforms may be a powerful strategy for users to 'perform' their identity in a Goffmanesque manner. The intentional strategic use of single versus multiple platforms for self-presentation has scarcely been addressed in empirical research and warrants more investigation.

The second concern – the diverging interests between users, employers and site owners – calls into question how social media sites push for users' 'uniform' online identity while unconsciously steering their behavior. Employers utilize social media sites for recruitment purposes as well as for in-company communication. As recruiters, they want to screen prospective employees – besides scrutinizing a polished CV – for

signs of self-expression rather than self-promotion. Not surprisingly, employers are well served by a user's multifarious presentation of the self when assessing (prospective) job candidates. A 2011 Reppler survey among 300 hiring professionals showed that 91% of employers somehow screened prospective employees through social networks sites – 76% by looking at Facebook and 48% at LinkedIn profiles (see Swallow, 2011). Even though LinkedIn serves the professional job market with online CVs, employers appear to be more interested in their candidate's 'personal' information released through Facebook. Almost 70% of these recruiters, according to the same Reppler survey, admitted they had rejected candidates on the basis of what they saw on social network sites, mostly because of what they perceived as unlikeable character traits or inappropriate behavior.[3] Employers appear particularly interested in personal information even if users intend to keep this private, going as far as to force job seekers to let them access to their Facebook passwords during interviews.[4] However, once job seekers turn into personnel, employers are keenly aware of the importance of self-promotion through social media. Platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook can be used to monitor an employee's social behavior and assess his or her professional value – a disciplining strategy that employees are not always aware of and, once alerted to it, may not always like.

Finally, platform owners are keen to commit users to present uniform personas instead of splitting up their online identities through various platforms, which messes up the clarity and coherence of their data. Through a variety of interface strategies, they promote the ideology of having one transparent self or one identity. Protocols like Facebook's 'real name policy' – users are barred from the site if they 'misrepresent' themselves – are justified by the ideology of people having only one 'authentic' identity that is transparent and does not hold secrets. Paradoxically, Facebook's interface recognizes the need for various levels of self-representation addressed at audiences corresponding to different levels of intimacy in its privacy settings. And yet the site's interface effaces this differentiated need for self-expression, promotion and communication by conflating these discourses into one narrative structure. The mantra of people having one authentic or 'true' identity not only bespeaks a conspicuous ideology, playing into the hands of agencies and governments who want to control individuals' conduct, but also betrays a fundamental misjudgment of people's everyday behavior. Ever since Goffman, it is commonly accepted that people put on their daily lives as staged performances where they deliberately use the differentiation between private and public discursive acts to shape their identity. Each construction of self entails a strategy aimed at *performing* a social act or achieving a particular social goal (Van House, 2009).

Both Facebook and LinkedIn appear to be powerful players in the shaping of *normative* behavior. The subtle adjustments of interface strategies over the years show how platforms deploy users' needs for connectedness to stimulate lucrative connectivity, and how they push narrative forms to enhance the traceability of social behavior. Social media profiles, in other words, are not a *reflection* of one's identity, as Facebook's Marc Zuckerberg wants us to believe, but are part and parcel of a power struggle between users, employers/employees and platform owners to steer online information and behavior. Interfaces are important instruments of identity formation whose steering mechanisms (algorithms, protocols and default settings) are inscribed in deceptively simple buttons and innocuous calls for transparency and authenticity (Beer,

2009). The conflation of self-expression, self-communication and self-promotion into one tool, which is subsequently used for personality assessment and manipulating behavior, should raise the awareness of users in their different roles as citizens, friends, employees, employers and so on. After all, social media are not neutral stages of self-performance – they are the very tools for shaping identities. This comparative interface study is only a modest step towards raising users' awareness and subsequently changing users' attitudes concerning their habitual wielding of these tools.

Funding

Notes

1. Some psychologists (Mehdizadeh, 2010) have argued that young adults with low self-esteem can be correlated with a greater amount of self-promotional content on their Facebook pages, yet my point is not to prove the psychological effects of social media use.
2. According to a user poll by Digital Strategy Consulting in February 2012, Timeline's coercive effect in getting users to provide more personal details caused over 50% of all subscribers to worry about their data; yet few of them are likely to sign off.
3. Social psychologists found that online information available on SNSs may be indicators of formal character traits commonly screened in job seeking processes (Kluemper et al., 2012).
4. According to a story with interviewed job seekers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2012), employers even asked them to reveal their Facebook password during the interview so they could get access to information labeled as 'private'.

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