Identity through language on the Internet

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The presentation of the self normally incorporates different characteristics; the own discursive features according to the speech community, race or sex a person belongs to, the social groups in which they are linked to and finally, the self itself or its own personal identity differed from the rest of the people’s.

However, these characteristics are re-inverted once we talk about the identity presentation on the Internet. In this way, these characteristics previously enumerated are placed differently on the red. In fact, the individual discursive features which are related with their speech community may result trivial if they are related on the Web because the individuals’ field to establish contact with is really wide and varied and they do not have to look like the ones of their cultural or geographic environment. Likewise, concepts like race or sex may seem dispensable in virtual communications based on written text.

On the other hand, social groups would be one of the maintained characteristics, but modified on its application to the Internet because grouping ways here are centred for example, in debate forums where a same idea, topic of conversation... is shared. Here, special features in the way of talking such as the slang, abbreviations, acronyms or taboo words are highly considered and used because within the debate forum this kind of specific language is understood.

As a consequence of the individual’s contact with the virtual world, we have to mention that the latter multiplies the only personal identity the individual has of themselves in real life. For that reason, a multiplicity of entities all held to the same person that uses them out of their virtual environment, is produced.

Once we have analysed all this, we should ask ourselves if the fact of not having a physical medium on the net and therefore, that the latter serve as a breaking of physical barriers for the social inter-relation among web surfers, is linked with the fact of being able to obtain a certain recognition of any kind. According to Adrian “We can
use the graphical, networked screen to create vibrant, visual representations of personal identity separate from an independent of our offline characteristics while simultaneously creating context-specific reputations in online communities separate from and independent of our social identity in real space”. In this sense, concepts like identity and reputation are connected.

Similarly, there are some analysts like Newitz who suggest that people create different versions of themselves to experiment and play in different realities dividing their physical and virtual identities. Then, an amalgam of physical and virtual interactions is created in the same being. According to the psychologist Sherry Turkle, “the ability of the agent to represent herself as a different person in different online communities, without anyone being able to trace one identity to another, effectively creates multiple ways of knowing, which can be thought of as multiple selves” (Turkle, 1995).

The identity on the Web is manifested, nowadays, through text (chats, comments, posts within blogs, e-mails...), but also, we can observe its presentation through other visual formats such as fotologs, web cam or even, with sound like YouTube. In the same way, multimodal combinations of text and image together, and even the use of avatars are rising. All this is used by the individual within virtual communities which may be synchronic (through chat when the interlocutors are connected simultaneously to the Internet) or asynchronic (debate forums).

According to all this, we may say that the written text is paramount in this kind of relations among individuals and that identity is modelled from this communicative format. On the other hand, other aspect to have into account as a consequence, is the possible idealization, but also the person’s insecurity of not counting with general or total information of an individual on the Internet. However, according to Adrian’s article: “In any medium, social cooperation relies on trust (Axelrod, 1984). Signals of commitment are needed to support cooperative behaviour. [...] (Moringiello, 2005)”.

In short, the individual, nowadays, uses all the technology that is at their disposition to communicate and present themselves to others. Therefore, they present one or several identities which are modelled not only by them but also, by the community or the environment they use. Equally, they do not discern between the existing difference
between a physical world and a virtual one in the sense that they use both environments without being a conflict for them. What it is traditionally virtual turns out to be more material and what it is traditionally physical, more virtual.

For that reason, we are going to analyse two specific cases about the individual's presentation on the Web and also, about a certain specific community within the virtual environment. We will analyze, then, every aspect in which this topic is related counting with examples which support our theory.
The Discursive Construction of Identity in an Internet Hip-Hop Community

Any individual speaker is not completely autonomous in terms of his or her own discursive construction of identity as identities are rather co-constructed, negotiated and even imposed through interaction. In their sociocultural linguistic approach to identity and interaction, Bucholtz and Hall (2005:585) define identity as the “social positioning of self and other” which “is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existent source of linguistic and other semiotic practices, and, therefore, as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon” (p. 588). Deppermann also adopts the “emergence principle” of identity focused on “how participants in an interaction identify themselves and others in their talk, which means the focus is on interactional and linguistic organization they use for this and on which occasions and for which ends so that identity becomes an issue for speakers”. In other words, in the context of interaction, the identity of self emerges as a function of the other through negotiation and agreement which presupposes the use of language as a communicative tool.

Language as the primary means of discursively constructing an identity is the focal point of identity in the social context of interaction which implies particular linguistic conventions. Over this theoretical background, communities with common interests build their practice “ways of doing things, beliefs, values, power relations” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet; 1992:464) and acquire “particular kinds of knowledge, expertise, and forms of participation which become part of individuals’ identities and places in the community” (Eckert; 2000:35).

➤ Message boards as communities of practice

As the term “community” concerns things held in common which may be, on one hand, tangible (for ex.: common property of a family, common pasture lands held by a tribe) or, on the other hand, intangible (ex.: common ideas, beliefs, values, common customs and norms, common or joint action of a group as a whole), Internet message boards can be considered communities of practice whose linguistic interaction is mediated through the use of computer and, therefore, is referred to as computer mediated communication (CMC), a “third medium” which denotes a variety of language that constitutes a new genre of discourse, similar to spoken language, but in written form” (Crystal, 2001:48; cf. Ong, 1982). Thus, the CMC become both “the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space”
(Jones, 1995:11). As a tool for social interaction, CMC includes message board postings, chats and e-mails.

On the other hand, message board posting can reflect a tendency among contributors to write as they speak and can, therefore, be considered a variant of spoken language, but written by the “speakers” themselves as they choose to represent their “speech”.

The Internet message board forum is proposed as an example of a community of practice where contributors (submitters of messages) exhibit common linguistic conventions and forms of participation. A concrete example of the emergence of individual and group identities through discourse in a community of practice is the specific context of hip-hop Internet message boards which reveals an exploitation of both the written and spoken qualities of Internet discourse, establishing the medium as the ideal forum for members of the hip-hop community to interact and share the same values and beliefs. Individual hip-hop identities are constructed within message board postings by using distinct strategies of discourse:

- Positioning of self
- Positioning of other
- Performing identity through verbal art

➢ Methodology

The reliable identification of linguistic conventions within the hip-hop message board community of practice requires both a quantitative and qualitative approach to the data. A corpus of hip-hop message board postings of 102,343 words (tokens) with 10,124 distinct types composed from five different Internet message boards was investigated in order to recognize potential systematic patterns of the use of language. WordSmith4 was used to analyze the corpus in term of keywords, word frequency and sorted lists. The results of the analysis reveal that the referential content of hip-hop message board postings reveal strategies of the positioning of self and other, while their form represents performance strategies, each contributing to discursive constructions of hip-hop identities.

➢ The discourse of hip-hop message boards

The medium of Internet message boards associated with the anonymity does not make possible the identification or recognition of contributors. It is basically through linguistic means that contributors can identify themselves and each other. The discursive construction of a hip-hop identity is as much a function of what is posted as how it is composed. The content and the form of hip-hop message board postings reflect a sociol ect, used by individuals to collectively represent community practices.
Hip-hop not only refers to a style of music, but also to “dance, painting, fashion, video, crime and commerce” (George, 1999: viii) and postings that do not concern a topic relevant to hip-hop culture risk being ignored or mocked, requiring a familiarity with cultural practices, events and issues:

“The question is what is rap going to turn into wildness and no realness? Where is the realness? Its all about clubs and partyin and fuckin and bling bling etc. everydamn thing is the same. Nothing creative, just the same ass thing....It pisses me off. Fuck everyone for their opinions on rap when they don’t even know what rap is! What hip-hop is! And what it has revolutionized into! This is SHIT!”

A content analysis of the postings of the hip-hop message board corpus reveals that the main focus is listening to or performing hip-hop music or texts:

“is it me, or are niggas on RB writing verses when they battle? =/... cause when im thinking of spittin, im thinking you actually sayign the shit out loud, matching syllables, having a flow to it..not sitting there writing a diss essay lol..maybe its just me and I need to change my style, but when I spit I spit so have people head movin wit mine na mean? I should prolly stick to ciphers haha.”

The lexical items “battle”, “spit” and “flow” which appear in the text above are examples of hip-hop slang and their use functions as an in-group marker while the terms “nigga” and “shit” are taboo words used particularly frequent in hip-hop discourse. On the other hand, the repeated use of first-person pronouns is characteristic of a discursive construction of identity by positioning the self. All these words are keywords in the hip-hop corpus “whose frequency is unusually high in comparison with some norm” (the reference corpus: Text G from the FROWN files) and, therefore, characterize the investigated text. Although these words are not the most frequent terms in the corpus, a keyword list makes them salient as keywords in the above text. As slang words, that means words used with a specific hip-hop semantic meaning, the term “battle” is used as a freestyle lyrical challenge with another contributor, “spit” as the verb to rap while “flow” has the meaning of lyrical rhythm in hip-hop discourse. As a general rule, the use of slang in the message board posting reflects a familiarity with both linguistic and non-linguistic practices which helps to identify each contributor as an in-group or community member.

On the other hand, the high occurrence of the taboo words such as “nigga”, “shit”, “fuck”, “ass” establish them too as keywords among the most frequent lexical items which characterize the hip-hop discourse. Unlike the slang terms above, the function of the taboo words is to marginalize hip-hop culture and the hip-hop community of practice from the general rules of the large society.
Both slang and taboo words are hip-hop terms, as alternative to mainstream language, which have an almost anti-language function (Halliday, 1960) and serve to represent the hip-hop individual and the hip-hop community.

- **Positioning of the self**

Besides slang and taboo words, the content of hip-hop message board postings is also characterized by the frequent use of the first-person pronouns. The word “I” asserts the contributors’ identities, expresses opinions and states self-serving purposes but, in the anonymous environment of the message board postings, its use is a mere product of linguistic presentation in regard to the content and/or form of the postings to discursively construct the hip-hop identity. One example in which both form and content are exploited to express self-serving goals is:

“ey foo......show meeh sum pic of yall nikka’s  breakin iight  homie........do dat fo ur boi ..........i b jo  

The contributor focuses on his wants “show meeh sum pic” and names twice himself: first, in relation to the reader “ur boi” and secondly as an independent entity “i be joe frum Under Rated Breakaz”. But the content of the message us dominated by the form. To some uninitiated or out-group members, this posting is quite difficult to understand and even when the content is decoded (“Hey fool. Show me some pictures of your niggers break dancing, alright, homie? Do that for your boy. I am Joe from Under Rated Breakers”), it is the form which emphasizes as an expression of the contributor’s hip-hop identity. Nevertheless, both form and content serve for the communicative purposes of the contributor who tries to negotiate and claim his/her own hip-hop identity through interaction with other community members. The positioning of self in message board discourse implies acknowledgement of the “other” as the contributor not only wants to identify himself/herself as individual but also wants to be recognized as in-group members and, in this way, he/she seeks to position the other interlocutor.

- **Positioning of the other**

In the same way as the use of the first-person pronoun in the hip-hop message board corpus corresponds to a positioning of the self, the frequent use of second-person pronouns reflects a positioning of the other. The pronoun “you” ranks as the second most frequent functional keyword of hip-hop corpus with 444 links to other keyword clusters. Although “you” occurs 1,411 times in the corpus, and such variants as “ya”, “y’all”, “your”, “you’re”, “u” and “ur” also appear, the number of keywords increases
to 3, 715 making the use of the second-person pronoun the most frequent corpus-wide type. In other words, there is a clear tendency among contributors to explicitly acknowledge and appeal to interlocutors through the use of the second-person pronoun. A keyword cluster analysis revealed that the most frequent cluster in the hip-hop corpus is “hip-hop”, with 274 entries and the second most frequent cluster is “if you”, with 190 occurrences. This cluster illustrates the positioning of the other and occurs in contexts where the contributor is usually seeking interaction in order to appeal for assistance as in the example:

“also my friend told e that it’s better to just buy a couple of break dancing tapes instead of going off to a school to learn. I’d like to know if you agree or if you have another opinion.”

The “if you” clusters seems to position the contributor at one end of a knowledge scale in relation to the other, represented by “you”, and it suggests that the contributor is lacking and /or seeking knowledge or support of an opinion which he/she believe the other can provide. On the contrary with the previous example, the “if you” cluster may also position the contributor on the opposite end of the expert-scale in relation to the other in a more aggressive manner due to the “if you” cluster which functions as a challenge to the other:

“You’re fucked up on ecstacy. U must be druggin’ IF U F**KIN’ THINK U CAN MESS WITH ME.”

Similar to threats, this type of challenges implies that the contributor has the ability, social power or social status to question the beliefs or practices of the other. By positioning the self as an expert, the contributor also positions the other as non-expert. Part of the hip-hop culture is, therefore, the practice of asserting your identity in terms of knowledge of hip-hop or talent in battling or rapping. As an example of verbal art, the alternative form “u” for “you” helps the contributor to perform a hip-hop identity and position the self as knowledgable within the hip-hop community. The hip-hop message board corpus reveals postings characterized both through their content in the use of first and second person pronouns as well as keywords and through their form, in particular through the use of non-standard orthography.

- **Performance of identity**

In addition to the content-based strategies, hip-hop identities are constructed through the form-based strategies of performance via verbal art, which means conventions of conversation (openings, closings, adjacency pairs, turn-taking and discourse makers).
The Internet medium affords the interlocutors the time to produce and process language and, consequently, the hip-hop message board postings reveal a deliberate exploitation of the written and spoken language qualities of this medium. The main characteristics of hip-hop message board postings is the *codification* of non-standard pronunciation and grammar of informal, spoken language, and the use of non-standard orthography (Sebba, 2003), which demands a written forum to be appreciated, as it is neutralized and unremarkable in speech.

The example posting “ey foo……show meeh sum pic of yall nikka’s breakin iight homie……..do dat fo ur boi ..........i b joe frum Under Rated Breakaz” gives indications of the linguistic manipulation involved in performing a hip-hop identity: almost every word is either specific to the hip-hop genre (e.g.: “nikka’s breakin iight”) or written in an alternative way (e.g.: “do dat fo ur boi”). The corpus data suggest that the verbal art of hip-hop discourse is reflected mainly through a community wide and systematic use of alternative, non standard varieties of orthography: “da” for “the”, “n” for “and”, “a” for “of” and “dat” for “that”, which are orthographic representations of the standard forms as they would be phonetically realized in speech and, at the same time, typical practices for the hip-hop culture. The frequency of some other alternative forms such as “2” for “to”, “u” for “you” and “iz” for “is” is determined by the principle of economy in the use of special characters or acronyms in CMC and is another feature of using words form in constructing hip-hop identity.

On the other hand, the frequency list compiled by WordSmith revealed a high frequency of numbers as alternatives to letters, phonological strings, and morphemes in the hip-hop message board postings. The physical similarity of some keyboards used as symbols and letters can be exploited as following:

- “9” for “g” : “ this cat wasn’t even a street ni99a’s he just new street ni99a’s and told their stories, which is cool but don’t front like that’s yo live”
- “0” for “o”: “w0rd I went 2 dat concert wit reina & some othuh homegirlz she did do ill, but she still a beast lol”
- “5” for “s”, “4” for “a”: “54F£: Well done ma nigga, holla. Seen……PE4CE!”

These number substitutions do not represent non-standard pronunciations and, as alternative forms for replacing letters, they are quite easily to understand. In some other cases, however, numbers’ pronunciation is not always immediately recognizable from the altered form:

- “1” for “one”: “i think that sooner or later it will die out coz the stuff rap will get old n no1 will buy it”
- “2” for “to-“, “to” or “too”: “i run da streets 2DAY –get on ur knees 2 pray- u trainin’ 2 be hard, but it doesn’t increase da rage”
- “4” for morpheme “for”: “yeh g u shud ive never seen any of ur battles I look 4ward to seein ur battles n maybe if im feelin luckyi myt battle u”
The investigation of the large amount of words ending in the letters “a” and “z” also revealed a systematic usage of non-standard orthography for specific (morpho-)phonology.

The non-standard orthography featuring a final –a was categorized according to the word it substitutes for (e.g. a for “of”: “i kno a buncha y’all faggots, ur so hungry, u act BIGGA”) or sound string it is meant to represent in speech (e.g. a for “to”: “if u wanna speak yo raise ya hand cuz u don’t wanna see the buckin if u disrupt the man”).

The use of both the “u” and “ya” forms in “stab u in ya bladder, and drown u in Piss Puddles” is illustrative of the different phonetics they are each intended to represent and reflect part of the rap lyrics posted on the message board as part of a battle.

Additional final –a tokens include three different examples of elision, “hella”, “ima” and “ma”, where syllables or, in the case of multi-word expressions, entire words are omitted:

“hella” for “hell of a” (which functions as an intensifying adverb, such as “really” or very”): “Yeah he seems hella hungry on that joint”

‘ima’ for “I am going to”: “Thinkin u a thug, why don’t u bust slugs and Humor Me/ Cuz ima think u a poser till bullets thru my Computer screen”

‘ma’ for ‘mother’ or ‘motherfucker’: “stick to the music ma fuckas”

In the majority of cases, the final –a is a direct substitution for the letters “-er”, corresponding to a nominal marker “i thought it wuz hilarious dat a rappa would write about sum gawd dayum no tooth bitches…”, a verbal marker “n another thing, black dudes don’t wanna holla at white girls when are around, but as soon as the black girls leave, they try hollerin”, the comparative adjectival marker “listen to this shit, all of his shit…then listen to er’one else’s shit and tell me whos betta…”, or miscellaneous adjectives or adverbs “I was neva really feelin Obie lyrically but if itz anything like got some teeth itz cool to thro on when you goin out n shit”.

In contrast with final –a, final –z does not seem to elicit an alternative pronunciation. Like the morpheme /s/, -z is used to mark plurals, third person singular inflections, and possessives. The data suggest that final –z is used as a non-standard orthographic feature to reflect standard phonology.

Plural: “I got two kids. I want them to go to private school and have CPU skillz, and to talk proper English”

Third person singular: “scarface iz real…one of the realest & most respected…he sayz 50 snitched I take hiz word fo it”

Possessive: “I ain’t feelin obie’z shyt……his songz waz whack n I wasn’t feelin hiz cd…dat nicca iz jus on ‘AD’…jus getting ppl’z attention 4 a sec.”

Yet, the use of final –z has been extended to words with no motivating phonology and it indicates a trend towards word final usage:

“Crooked I is heavy but know 1 wants to know, Ras Kass is on another level. If they all move in unison! The west can be what it can be ‘GFunkedcrazymuthafuckers’
PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH FACEBOOK USE

The modern Internet is capable of simultaneously broadcasting vast amounts of information to a large number of individuals. Besides, it can also provide an intimate site for interpersonal conversation. In fact, a fundamental shift in how people communicate is taking place due to the Internet.

The introduction of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) is one of the consequences of the change in communication practices. These SNSs allow their users to find others with similar interests and to maintain pre-existing social connections. The research by McKenna and colleagues (2002) suggests that the interactions which are made possible through an SNS may result in a stronger relationship than might be possible through face-to-face methods. One reason for this is that a different set of rules govern online interactions. For example, they generate more self-disclosures and promote deeper personal questions than do face-to-face conversations, as it was observed by Tidwell and Walther (2002). Thus, online conversations are not governed by the restrictions that are characteristic features of face-to-face interactions.

Many relationships formed online result in real-world contact. However, Facebook tends to demonstrate the opposite progression. It demonstrates an offline-to-online trend.

Launched in 2004, the initial purpose of Facebook was to allow university students to create and maintain social ties which were relevant to the university experience. It was not used as a tool to meet new people online. In other words, most of these “Facebook Friends” were individuals known from the offline world. Besides, the majority of these Facebook contacts do not appear to be primarily concerned with privacy. Thus, most users of this SNS provide information in their profile which encourages previously known friends and acquaintances to find them.

More than identity presentation influences the use of Facebook. For example, personality characteristics have been found to play a significant role in other online communication experiences. The Five-Factor Model is a way of categorizing personality influences. It divides personality into a series of five dimensional traits: Neuroticism (a person’s tendency to experience psychological distress and high levels of the trait are associated with a sensitivity to threat); Extraversion (a person’s tendency to sociable and able to experience positive emotions); Openness to Experience (an individual’s willingness to consider alternative approaches, be
intellectually curious and enjoy artistic pursuits); Agreeableness (a tendency to be trusting, sympathetic and cooperative); Conscientiousness (the degree to which an individual is organized, diligent and scrupulous).

As well as the prediction of general online behaviors, these five traits have also been found to be associated with certain Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) activities. For example, Butt and Philips (2008) described how those who were high on the trait of Neuroticism were likely to use the Internet to avoid loneliness. In anonymous forms of online communication such as chat rooms, it has been observed that this kind of individuals were more likely to post accurate personal information on their profiles. This style of posting information is likely intended to reinforce psychological support that is otherwise missing for these psychologically vulnerable individuals.

Extraversion is another trait that is associated with online use. Individual who are introverted have a tendency to view their real self as being located online, while more extraverted individuals locate their true identity offline. In fact, those who are low on the trait of Extraversion are more likely to use technology such as an SNS for their communication needs. Individuals who are low in both Extraversion and Agreeableness are likely to have significant difficulties in forming offline friendships and, therefore, are likely to have fewer friends who can be added to an SNS like Facebook. Another personality factor, Openness to Experience, is most likely to be associated with trying out new methods of communication, or using a SNS to seek out new and novel experiences. Those who are high on the trait of Conscientiousness are more likely to avoid CMC devices which may serve as distraction tools from their daily tasks.

Competency is another determinant of technology use apart from the personality of the user. Over time, individuals with appropriate experience may eventually view communication technology as invisible. In other words, they communicate without thinking about how they are communicating.

According to this study, individuals who were high on the trait of Extraversion reported membership in significantly more groups than individuals who were low on Extraversion. However, Extraversion was not significantly related to the number of “Facebook friends”, time spent online or use of the communicative Facebook features. These results suggest that although those high on this trait may use Facebook as a social tool, they do not use it as an alternative to social activities. Neuroticism was unrelated to the posting of personally-identifying information such as mailing address or phone number, nor was it related to the use of communicative features of Facebook. Those high in this trait reported that the Wall was their favourite component rather than photos. They can convey information about emotional states or geographical location, which may seem threatening to an individual’s well being. Higher levels of Openness to Experience were associated with greater online sociability.
function use. Contrary to earlier hypotheses, lower levels of this factor were associated with greater knowledge about CMC. In fact, it may be that those who have high levels of this trait are more interested in trying new things than they are in trying to figure out how things work.

Motivation is one of the most important precursors to CMC use. Thus, it would appear that motivational factors (such as desire for communication, seeking of social support and entertainment value) and competence can have an important bearing on online activities, independently of broader personality structures.

**Identity, social status, privacy and face-keeping in digital society**

As it has been mentioned before, users post personal information on their profiles. They seem so careless about their personal data because social life needs private details to be publicized. Successful interaction requires that others act in accordance with our own goals, what kind of behavior can be expected from us and what type of behavior they are expected to adopt with us.

In social life, we usually give others a representation of the entity they are dealing with; we provide a definition of ourselves by giving an identity. The idea of “identity” is complex because it refers both to how we consider ourselves from a subjective point of view and how we define ourselves to others. There are different ways of defining identity: physical (identification based on physical characteristics), social (what a person “is” to others, a combination of role and status) and biographical (subject as the product of past experiences and desires).

In relation to status, people want it because it gives some power and control over one’s environment. Status is often claimed by showing proof of past activity. In other words, to claim status the subject has some interest in having his or her actions traced, the record kept, and displayed to those with whom he or she has transactions. In view of this, there is a contradiction with keeping past actions private. Besides, some records may be used against the subject’s own interest. The dilemma is this: in order to perform interaction successfully we must provide the others with some identity, but in doing so we reveal personal data. Once disclosed these data may be used for other purposes than the present interaction, beyond our awareness and will.

Subjects naturally want to protect themselves. Thus, individuals want to keep their privacy, their “right to be left alone” and to keep control over their personal data. In
order to preserve their privacy, subjects keep appearances coherent with the current activity towards others, in other words, keep face in this activity.

“Faces” are a combination of roles and status. Face is a social construct which includes both a representation of what the subject is supposed to do and of what others are supposed to do with him or her. These representations of social roles and statuses are shared in a given population and therefore smooth interaction is possible. Such conventions enable interaction, cooperation and minor problem resolution. One given subject may put on different faces according to time and place. An individual wears only one face in a given situation, and all participants ignore the other faces. This makes possible appropriate communication. Politeness controls interaction between faces. In fact, its main goal is to respect the other faces and enable their performance. The very fabric of social life is woven with a million subtle “inter-face” rules for managing transactions. Incidentally, some subjects may use the face system deceptively in order to get more that what society would normally allow them.

A privacy breach is a case of “losing face”. One does not “play” a face; one “lives” a face. As the individual is emotionally involved, he or she can be hurt, so disrupting the face provokes disorientation, stress and discomfort or pain. Privacy violation always implies some “Other”. In fact, it does not depend on what is done or disclosed but to whom it is disclosed.

**Playing with masks**

**Fragmentation and continuity in the presentation of self in an occupational online forum**

*Playing with masks* is a study conducted by the Long Island University School of Business and the Public Administration and Information Sciences of New York, US in order to investigate the presentation of the *self* among participants in occupational online forums. Hence, a number of randomly selected participant’s profiles from a banking-related occupational online forum were monitored, analyzed and categorized during six years. Ethical rules concerning the participant’s privacy were thoughtfully observed, consequently neither personal nor working information were considered.

Since only a user ID was compulsory in order to take part in the project what arose certain patterns of behavior was the given information from the fields filled by the participants; such as the level of mystification, the number of posts per year, the preferred issues, etc. These patterns of behavior would be summarized in four well differenced categories:
(1) the Protagonist (the leading character);

(2) the Deuteragonist (a secondary character);

(3) the Tritagonist (a minor character whose specific background the audience is not made aware of)

(4) the Fool (a character who uses humor to convey messages).

The following figure shows examples of profiles from each category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example user profile:</th>
<th>Protagonist</th>
<th>Deuteragonist</th>
<th>Tritagonist</th>
<th>Fool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LenS</td>
<td>kvb</td>
<td>MaryKayLady1</td>
<td>MurphysGirl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Image</strong></td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Profile Image" /></td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Baseball" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name / E-mail</strong></td>
<td>Len Sunzio homepage provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
<td>Bank consulting</td>
<td>Loan Auditor</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birthday</strong></td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Oct. 21st</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hobbies</strong></td>
<td>Golf and sailing</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Professional clown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bio</strong></td>
<td>CRA and HMDA consultant providing banks CRA exam preparation services and CRA Performance Evaluation support as well as market data Expertise in CRA, HMDA and computerized mapping</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>I did not want to grow up to be in compliance, I wanted to be a rock star.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The “Protagonist” category represents the category of profiles where most fields were filled and, most of all, where users seemed willing to provide information that could identify them in their “offline” world.

According to the author, Emmanuelle Vaast Ph. D. in Management Information Systems, what drove the survey was the growing trend among employers of scouting job applicants in the Internet. The results concluded that different people are likely to present themselves in many different ways when interacting on social online networks due to the freedom these
technologies provide in order to conceal some aspects of their selves while emphasizing others that they consider more suitable.

The epistemological approach of the study complied with the hermeneutic principles (interpretive phenomenology) of contextualization, abstraction, generalization, etc.

The study, regardless of how freely the Associate Professor Ms. Vaast, tends to use Philosophical “lingo”, proved nothing more than a vast time consuming and a wasting of the collage’s resources to reach a conclusion that a first year student with pigtails and a Facebook account would find out: People distort themselves online. We must be noticed that the Long Island University School of Business and the Public Administration and Information Sciences does not even rank among the first two hundred in the States.

Studying the representations of the self on the online social networks began almost as soon as the first online social network was launched. But, what is the “self” anyway? Since beginning of rational thinking Thales of Miletus and other well known philosophers have been dueling with the elusive question “what am I?” and giving an answer remains an intrinsically private endeavor. It may be very difficult if not impossible to comprehend and describe the self in a rational way: “Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.”

In ancient times rich and powerful people used to present their selves through painted portraits as a symbol of status whereas artists were very careful hiding either any physical defect or sign of weakness of their clients. Sometimes they appeared on a Bucephalus look-alike rampant horse, even though they wouldn’t dare to ride a pony in the real life. Nowadays portraits are more democratic, everyone can afford a photo-shop manipulated photograph made out of pixels on a social networking website like MySpace or Facebook. In the fashion of artists retouching their work endlessly, social networks users alter and update their profiles trying to show something new to get people to keep on visiting. The fact of the human being permanent desire for attention arises as the main issue of these virtual galleries.

To summarize, a corpus composed of hip-hop Internet message board postings was proposed to investigate identity as discursively constructed and emergent in interaction while contributors exploited the language of the message board forum based on conventions of language use, the so called “third medium”, which has properties of both speech and writing, to identify themselves as members of the hip-hop community of practice. The corpus approach had enabled the identification of such linguistic conventions in terms of content and form and demonstrated that contributors can only identify themselves through linguistic means as anonymity does not allow identification and recognition. Therefore, identity is primarily negotiated and asserted, and thus emergent in interaction, via the positioning of the self and other, reflected by a frequent use of first and second person pronouns. Contributors’ identities as experts or in-group members in the hip-hop community of practice are corroborated or established by the codification not only of non-standard pronunciations and grammar
characteristics of speech, but also of non-standard orthography, which demands a written forum to be appreciated, as it is neutralized and unremarkable in speech. Because of the written and spoken qualities of message board discourse, both the content and the form of postings can be manipulated to showcase familiarity with hip-hop discursive practices. Thus, Internet message boards represent the ideal forum for members of the hip-hop community to discursively construct their identities in interaction.

In just over the past 5 years, social networking sites (SNSs) have grown popular among Internet users around the world, with literally millions of users on any given site. One of the most important SNSs is Facebook.

In relation to the Five-Factor approach (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) as a means to define personality of Facebook users, it may be too broad and not the best way to understand specific Internet behaviors. Motivation may be more useful in understanding Facebook use. In fact, motivating factors appear to be independent of the Five-Factor approach, yet are influential in the decision to use forms of CMC such Facebook.

Social interaction in SNSs requires the disclosure of personal data. This situation creates a privacy dilemma: we need to make our private data public in order to interact with other subjects. This can lead to a situation where a breach of privacy could take place. In order to protect our personal data we use different faces in accordance with the situation. The face is what a subject “is” at a given moment and any breach in it is seen as an intrusion into his or her personal sphere.

Sharing personal information on social networks can be seen as a narcissistic lapse of judgment. Yet, these self-portraits may be very instructive by showing both how we perceive ourselves and how we wish to be perceived: “We learn who and what we are by how people respond to our attempts at portraying ourselves to the world, regardless of the accuracy of those selves.” Dr. Larry Rosen, Professor of Psychology at California State University.

It is also worth mentioning that recent researches on Cyberpsychology stand that females to a very large extent are more prone to share more photos online and maintain larger networks than men. The old contention that women care about their appearance and use it in competition is still alive in the digital age; just by emphasizing favorable attributes, manipulating a photo or fabricating an insightful status update, reality has become editable.


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