**Emotionality, Identity and Social Presence in the Use of Facebook Profiles with Age Set Examples**

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**Abstract**

This paper (i) sets out a growing problem in digital sociology concerning the inability of current theoretical frameworks to enable us to decide about whether Web technologies create a context for radical social change; (ii) a corpus of the literature on Social Network Sites (SNSs) is critically reviewed with a view to evaluating the evidence that suggests links can be made between human emotionality and identity experience, key socio-demographic profiling and Facebook use; (iii) we examine two frameworks (Goffman’s impression management and Foucault’s self-surveillance) and apply them to the examination of data from two Facebook projects linking age sets to Facebook usage. The first project, based on an online survey (n=255) shows significant relationships between envy, age and aspects of Facebook use. The second project based on qualitative interview and Facebook user diaries of two generational age sets strongly indicates age differences in the meanings attached to Facebook profiles and usage.**1.0 Introduction**

**1.1 Empirical problems in Web research**

Digital sociology is redolent with undecideability. Sociologists working in the field ‘feel’ that web technologies are transforming social life. But when they develop theoretical understanding the conclusions are indecisive (e.g. Orton-Johnson and Prior, 2013). Hine’s study of online science forum discussions (Hine, 2002) explored the role of e-forum discourse in reconfiguring relationships between geographically spread laboratories and social boundaries between classes of contributor in scientific laboratory talk. Hine’s analysis demonstrated that the online environment was recruited by professionals essentially to re-establish offline social boundaries between lay and professional users: the practical benefits of linking distally situated labs had little effect on the structure of science as an institution. The online environment does not ostensibly change anything as grasped by traditional categories of power and status. In a recent discussion on intimacy and human relationships in the digital age Jamieson (2013) acknowledges the impact of ICTs on relationships and their facilitation of new types of social bond such as ‘living apart together’ and as an ‘aid’ in the maintenance of social ties. Jamieson cannot see this, however, as supplanting the need for primary co-presence in relationships with its accompanying physicality in human intimacy.

By contrast, Beusch (2007) contradicts these positions in his research on online sexual interactions. Despite our traditional insistence on co-presence for ‘real social interaction’ Beusch’s study of non-normative sexual groups operating online shows that communication can lead to the development of new avenues of sexual activity. The confessional space, afforded by online communication of non-normative sexual practices, was found to be erotically charged. This enabled new interactive resources for users to construct fantasies and provided a new sexual outlet for participants with some unusual consequences for the participant research process. Beusch’s study seems to say more than that SNSs are merely new media for practices whose shapes and contours are traditionally known to us. But it is not easy to see how the insights derived from such studies can help us *decide* whether Social Network Sites (SNSs) are simply new media for practices or whether they *fundamentally transform* them. This makes it difficult to suggest anything more than a very provisional assessment of Facebook 10 years on in our view.

**1.2 Theoretical problems in Webscience research**

Theoretical approaches to the Web presence of (SNSs) such as Facebook, so far, have led to much ambiguity too. SNSs, such as Facebook, jointly form, with both offline and other online social networks, a nexus of human and ICT ‘activities’ comprising: interpretative labour, embodied activity, informational flows, organic live and digitally recorded memory resources. Understanding the nature of this emergent ‘social machine’ resource (Vass, 2013) is proving elusive when we try to examine it using traditional categories such as network, community, social interaction, identity, power etc. (Gane and Beer, 2008). Such categories were developed and theorised in a period before the ubiquity of World Wide Web (WWW) based communication and networking. The ubiquity and penetration of ICTs into the minutiae of everyday life and activities have led us back to re-assessing standard theoretical resources with regard to understanding how technologies and socialities co-constitute each other (Vass, 2008; Halford *et al*, 2013). As Halford *et al* make clear the issues we now face as interdisciplinary issues in Webscience cut across social and computer sciences.

Current theoretical frameworks oriented to social networking phenomena lack the formal capacity to assess patterns of agency and effect among Facebook users and are unable to decide, for example, how changes to subjectivity and identity are to be framed (Vass, 2012, 2013a). Social theory has long relied on a ‘reflexivity’ model to understand the dynamics of human behaviour (Vass, 2012) in which the elaboration of social activity is viewed in relation to an accompanying reflexive capacity. This model has worked across theoretical paradigms and was adopted by functionalism, structuration theory, dramaturgy and symbolic interactionism as well as in underlying social psychological research in the study of attitudes and behaviour (cf Bilig, 1996). The reflexivity model poses the human-ICT connection as that of a cognitively self-aware interpreting actor interfacing with a media resource. Traditional theory does not permit us easily to understand the resulting system as an emotional-subjective-electronic networked one which may have emergent characteristics different from the scope of traditional categories. The problem now facing us with regard to understanding the human-Web relation is equivalent to one of *undecideability*. When we move into empirical contexts how are we to make decisions about whether or not the implementation of the Web as a resource has had impact, say, amounting to a ‘social change’?

**1.3 Sociality, emotionality and the Web**

It would be tempting to scrap everything and to re-start social theory from ground zero. Such a task would be immense given the growth and rate of change we see in the development of the Web. Certainly more baseline descriptive research is called for that enables us to test the limits of our existing theoretical categories and methods. Fowler and Christakis (2008) examined the spread of ‘happiness’ through large social networks showing, apparently, that social networking can ‘transmit happiness’. They used the Framington offspring cohort of 5200+ persons in the US. The results seem impressive at scale, but importing the methodology to a Facebook context would be problematic. The Framington network is concentrated in Massachusetts, USA where we might reasonably expect some semantic alignment with definitions of ‘happiness’ (they used the US Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale CES-D) among cohort members as constituted by scaled test questions derived for clinical depression. The distribution of emotion-semantics across the Facebook network would make a similar project rather inconclusive. The CES-D scale would quickly move beyond its areas of linguistic and cultural competence (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 1997). Therefore this scale it works for a limited demographic as research which tells us about the transmission of happiness. This kind of research works better as baseline research that tells us not so much about the transmission of happiness through a network, but about the clinically defined emotion of happiness within a localised social network whose characteristics we can further explore ethnographically.

We are more interested in how defined and local groups relate to specific SNSs and what we can say about current practices. Despitethe growth of SNSs, little is known about their impact or the implications of their use for the future. Even less researched is what motivates a user to maintain SNSs profiles, especially from personal perspectives. Part of this study attempts to investigate this under-developed area as SNSs use becomes increasingly integral to everyday life.

Any social group needs to have strategies for allowing individuals to reflexively monitor themselves with reference to a ‘we’ from which they might derive a sense of regularity and the normative rules for elaborating social life (Gilbert, 2000). In modern societies where we have a sense of the breakdown of such normative regularities (Bauman, 2002) we are placed in a new set of relationships to a less stable ‘we’. This may create problems for social identity construction as Bauman would argue, or alternatively we might pragmatically use the fluidity of the situation creatively to reconstruct identities (Vass, 2013b). Some (e.g. Bay-Cheng, 2003) have examined the way in which fluid social networks are used by school-age teens to explore their own non-normative sexual identities. In such cases we need to be very sensitive to the issues of putative self-esteem of teens and young adults, their evolving senses of identity and their use of sexuality to explore self-definition. We might assume that the use of SNSs in such situations will show a range of emergent characteristics as well and the key will be to have some baseline research data. Taking a pragmatic approach that privileges the creativity and strategy involved in contemporary social life we might assume that we should look for different strategies in different age groups.

Focussing on youth, the image that emerges from the literature is negative, portraying SNSs as a youth phenomenon which is creating a generation of narcissists obsessed with identity management. Scholars such as Turkle (2011) and Lovink (2007; 2011) raise concerns about the future emotional and moral capacities of a generation believed to be forever mindlessly updating, and Mayer-Schönberger (2009) questions the ability to forgive and forget amongst a generation who appear to have no boundaries for sharing personal information publicly. On the other hand, Facebook entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg proclaims that SNSs make the world a more open place as authentic online identity increases trust.

In the context of rapid social change we need to situate these observations of the changing spectra of emotional experience in both discussions of understanding social change and the forms of situated human experience that accompany them. The relationship between patterns of social organization, change and emotionality has gained ground on the sociological agenda over recent years (Burkitt, 2014). While we are confident of studies that establish observed correlations between social structure and experience we still lack sufficient baseline empirical work on Websites such as Facebook that would allow us to examine new types of online social relation and the experiences they generate. This is part of the rationale of this present discussion.

**2.0 Facebook and SNSs selfhood and social relations**

The behaviours that constitute status and social structure offline have chronicity and durability tied to the institutions that generate them. Online there seems to be more variance between different kinds of sites that have different patterns of usage. Twitter has a growing youth following, Facebook has a growing ageing population of users. The youth population of Twitter overlaps extensively with Facebook where users have accounts on both SNSs, but the same is not so of older cohorts. The rate of growth and change on SNSs suggests that we cannot view them as institutions in the chronic sense where the durability of practices and social relations sustains stable structures and patterns of user experience and emotionality. Here we firstly characterise authenticity in Facebook profiling as an identity practice, then we look at the implications of two theoretical paradigms often invoked in discussions of SNSs and Facebook: Foucault and Goffman.

According to Jarvis (2011) authentic online identity has improved interaction and developed an age of forgiveness, as Facebook is built upon relationships with real people in real life. Essentially, SNSs are redefining how users understand mistakes (Jarvis, 2008). When presented with a theme they may disagree with, Jarvis (2011) believes, as SNSs use grows, users are increasingly tolerant, offering empathy and understanding differences. Jarvis (2011) states he trusts in Zuckerberg’s notion of a pure, singular identity in which all identities come together and are accepted, increasing the difficulty of maintaining separate individualities. This is considered desirable for many Americans and others around the world post-9/11, in which a mistrust of anonymity has been created. Arguably, this is directly opposed to the original ethos of cyberculture in which liberation from physical life and the surpassing of boundaries was exciting and attractive.

Mayer-Schönberger (2009:1) is less optimistic about the development of singular online identity, proposing a comprehensive digital memory of the past is inherently oppositional to human memory. Undeniably, human recollection of an event mutates but the digital memory of SNSs allows moments in time to be frozen forever - neither is an accurate and complete depiction of who a user truly is (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009:106). Mayer-Schönberger (ibid:108) thus concludes that digital remembering leads to a loss of information control, restricting the freedom of individuals to shape their own identity, and forget mistakes, as they age. This, of course, has implications for the future of power dynamics.

Identity control is thus a key area of investigation. Bakshy et al (2011:65) note Twitter is devoted to publicising personal information for followers to read. Unlike most Facebook users those on Twitter, and Instagram, do not usually know the majority of their followers personally, enabled by the default public profile settings, spawning a number of publicly made, recorded mistakes. Are users complacent or anxious about this legacy?

Researching forums, Bakardjieva (2007:251) found that users combined privacy and publicness in different proportions online – users projected no singular identity. Is this possible with the presence of Facebook? Do other SNSs, namely Twitter and Instagram, intersect with the conformity that Facebook can be seen to demand? Zuckerberg’s Facebook vision seems reminiscent of Baudrillard’s (2006) notion of Disneyland as the ultimate imaginary ‘real’ place.

Rebutting Zuckerberg, Bakardjieva (2007:240) found that many older users reacted negatively to the idea of intimacy online, possessing rationalist ideas of information exchange that amounted to an ‘expert-knowledge-or-nothing’ attitude. Alternatively, Miller (2011:83) found that his young participants who used Facebook dedicated much time to profile cultivation to give a visual representation of their Self. Miller (2011:173) saw this as participatory surveillance arising out of a new self-consciousness about one’s appearance developing from SNSs use, amplifying the insecurities already felt by most teenagers that become less evident with age (Miller, 2011:178).

*SNSs Phenomena and Age*

Could age therefore be an important variable in considering the differing attitudes and behaviour of SNSs users?

Primarily, it is important to have an idea of age distributions across SNSs. Age statistics are not provided by Facebook, Twitter or Instagram but are easily found elsewhere. Socialbakers is a global social media and digital analytics company assisting companies in measuring the success of their social marketing campaigns across Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Google+. Socialbakers (2012) demographics reported that 18-24 year olds made up 24% of overall Facebook users in the UK, while 45-54 year olds made up 12%. Additionally, Macmillan (2012), writing for The Wall, displays that two thirds of UK Twitter users are under 35. Instagram demographics can be accessed through AppData, an application traffic leaderboard hub; however, there are no UK-specific statistics. Demographics for Instagram are less common, perhaps due to Instagram’s very recent growth. Statistics produced are only a reflection of users overall; however, it was displayed that 88.6% of users worldwide were under 35 and only 3.1% were over 45.

Consequently, figures gathered show that SNSs are predominantly inhabited by the younger generation – however, age distributions vary across SNSs. Further enquiry found no evidence of research that provided meta-analysis of age and SNSs use. Research focus either centres on the young or the old, rarely both concurrently. Yet multiple age cohorts appear essential in comparing how SNSs use impacts everyday life, and how age distribution thus shape SNSs experiences.

A consensus was unearthed that research focused primarily on the young as a barometer for change in measuring the impact of SNSs on social life because those under 35 make up the majority of SNSs users – however, this is not to say that SNSs do not impact the lives of those who do not use them. It is important to investigate the lives of the parents of this generation, whose lives have also been impacted by SNSs phenomena, as they do not remain untouched by SNSs growth. Arguably, such youth-focused research reflects an anxiety and the political agendas regarding successful generational transitions, present with every generation (Cohen, 1997).

For example, Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe (2008:434-435) conducted two surveys alongside in-depth interviews with 18 undergraduate Facebook users to investigate the link between intensity of Facebook use, psychological well being and social capital, finding that Facebook offered new sets of tools to develop and maintain relationships in emerging adulthood. They found that Facebook allowed students with low-self esteem to avoid face-to-face confrontation and thus aided their bridging social capital (Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe 2008:443). Bicen and Cavus (2011:946) also found that Facebook enabled students to maintain and strengthen social ties. Miller (2011:171) however, conducted ethnographic work and concluded that ultimately Facebook, and by implication other SNSs membership, simply addresses the problem of teenage boredom.

However, Miller (2011:30) also found that Facebook did impact the lives of the elderly. Through a participant named Dr Karamath, an elderly scholar who became wheelchair-bound after a serious illness, that Facebook became his ‘white horse’ giving Dr Karamath the potential to replicate the networks he had before his illness (Miller, 2011:32). Dr Karamath took great pleasure in the possibility of seeing the personal news of his immediate and extended family on his News Feed since he could no longer visit them physically (Miller, ibid:37). Dr Karamath also used Facebook for the pursuit of deep dialogue, maintaining his academic interests through Groups and Pages. Thus, while Miller demonstrates an admirable depth of qualitative analysis with two generations, he makes one-dimensional conclusions.

**2.1 SNSs and Selfhood: Foucault and surveillance**

Projection of the Self online began with the blogging phenomena in 2003/4 (Lovink, 2007), in which blogs became the catalysts for the democratisation of the Internet. However, Lovink (2007) does not interpret this development positively, labelling the growth of blogging as ‘the nihilist moment’, asserting that since 2000 the illusion of change has been lost and blogging assisted users to cross from ‘truth into nothingness’. Lovink (ibid) also observes that blogs enabled users movements and activities to be monitored and stored not by an invisible or abstract authority, but contributed by the users willingly in their desire to be noticed by others.

With the development of network-orientated social media, Lovink (2011:13-39) observes that the skills of self-management and techno-sculpturing have become paramount as the ideals of early cyberculture have disappeared. The development of SNSs, Facebook especially, has therefore led to an integrity crisis if a user does not maintain one authentic online identity. Lovink (ibid:41-42) thus claims that as users become aware they are creating an artificial, made-up image of their Self online a perpetual sense of failure is created. Users hence continue on their quest to make their online Self more authentic under the illusion that such a Self could exist because figures like Zuckerberg tells them it is so, digging up a debate long discussed by scholars such as Goffman (1959) and Baudrillard (1988) about what constitutes selfhood and identity.

Opposing the notion of singular self, Keen (2012:15) proposes that SNSs profiles actually splinter identities as users gradually exist outside of their bodies, left unable to concentrate on physical life. Subsequently, Turkle (2011:178) believes that emotions are now not fully experienced by users until they are publicly broadcast – how can a user feel something if no one knows they are feeling it? (If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?).

Such a continuous display of emotion, Turkle (2011:184) believes, leads to a desensitisation of others feelings and eventually users ignore them altogether. This demonstrates an anxiety about the future emotional capacities of the generation perceived to spend so much time on SNSs by researchers, and their motivation in focusing on young users. While the above concerns may appear legitimate, Cohen (1997) reminds us that every new generation receives moral evaluation.

Like Turkle, Lovink (2011:38) proposes that SNSs have unleashed a collective obsession with identity management. Gare (2006 cited in Lovink, 2011:45) believes this is primarily a youth phenomena amongst ‘children of the real-time revolution’, who are only interested in the events of ‘the next five minutes’ in which they have been taught it is appropriate to voice their opinion continuously, constantly browsing, checking and updating ‘without purpose or commitment’. Lovink (2011:53) identifies amongst this generation a performance of a desperate attempt to be noticed. Keen (2012:23) also believes that SNSs allows young narcissists to fall in love with themselves repeatedly through profile cultivation, epitomised in the quote ‘Facebook is becoming Man’s own image’ (Keen, 2012:28).

Similarly, Turkle (2011:xi), through online ethnography and interviews, proposes that ‘people reflect on who they are in the mirror of the machine’ focusing, like Lovink, on those who are ‘digital natives’. Turkle (2011:xii) asserts that youth are insecure and anxious about intimacy, looking to technology to be constantly close but distant and protected simultaneously. This is an expansion on the concept of risk society (Beck, 1992), in which individuals become dependent on relationships to find security in a volatile world. Turkle (2011:153) thus observes that users present who they think they are on SNSs but actually construct a fantasy ideal image. Like Mayer-Schönberger, Turkle (2011:169) also ominously observes that mistakes are harder to leave behind online because ‘the Internet is forever’.

Therefore, are SNSs users on a journey to a Zuckerbergian utopia of authentic identities or are they ever anxious, ever self-surveying and increasingly insensitive? Where do the boundaries between ‘real life’ identities and SNSs lie, do they even exist? Such a debate exists amongst a larger contemplation of the individualisation thesis (Giddens, 1991).

**2.2 SNSs Selfhood and Performance: Goffman’s dramaturgy- Facebook and Face Work**

At this point we should pose the question of how to develop further a theoretical account of the relation of emotional experience to the kinds of practices we see developing on Facebook. Clearly, both Foucault and Goffman as theorists of selfhood and reflexivity in the contexts of power and performance respectively are good candidates.

Self-presentation is a sine qua non of both Facebook and identity construction. Goffman was one of the first theorists to argue that social interactions serve a desire connected to presenting an image of the self as well as orchestrating social order and structure through actors’ attention to *impression management*: indeed the connection between Goffman’s understanding of face and online profiles cannot be coincidental on Facebook. The self for Goffman is a managed impression of outwardly presented and constructed *face*; it refers to the verbal and nonverbal practices we employ in an attempt to present an acceptable image of our self to others who co-operate in the maintenance of identities as faces through disciplining procedures and audience tact. Goffman (1959) implies a duality to the self: the ‘self-as-performer’ and the ‘self-as-character’. The performer is the thinking, desiring human being whose basic motivational core is to engage in performances for others to achieve selfhood (Branaman and Lemert, 1997). The socialised self is the self-as-character, which is equated with self in our society but, according to Goffman, is just a social product:

“A correctly staged and performed character leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it” (Goffman, 1959, p. 245).

These ground Goffman’s dramaturgical theory such that we can construe our performative lives as organized into performative ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions. The front stages public performance, intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual (Goffman, 1959). The back is where the performer prepares and steps out of character. For Goffman, the essence of self is found in interaction and in others participating in the dynamic of impressions that flow through joint performances. In face-to-face encounters people validate identities and establish the meanings of encounters. These encounters also come with rules and knowledge of how to construct interactions (Goffman, 1971)

In face-to-face interactions, identity is limited to situated constraints. People cannot easily perform identities that are inconsistent with their physical appearance e.g. sex, race, looks. However, the advent of the internet and SNSs means that the corporeal body can be detached from social encounters, creating anonymous spaces where individuals can hide their undesirable features or ‘play act’ as someone else (Zhao et al, 2008). The internet has raised many new questions about interpersonal impressions, complicating how we now form and manage them. Can Goffman’s concept of impression management be transferred to the internet?

Facebook is particularly interesting to research in relation to impression management as each individual’s online profile exudes an image they must maintain. Facebook is not entirely anonymous as most of the online relationships are also anchored in offline communities (Zhao et al, 2008). Therefore Facebook is a ‘nonymous’ online environment that places constraints on the freedom of identity claims, yet still with some room for self-presentation (Zhao et al, 2008). The majority of the population use self-presentation strategies in order to maximise positive perceptions from others (Alpizar et al, 2012). Zhao et al (2008) coded 63 Facebook profiles and found a continuum of self-presentation modes, from implicit to explicit identity claims. The most implicit claims are visual, involving pictures the users have uploaded themselves and also comments made on their walls by others. The middle of the continuum is the ‘cultural self’ where users can list their interests and hobbies. The third mode of identity is the most explicit verbal description of self in the ‘About Me’ section. Zhao *et al.,*(2008) found that Facebook users tended to prefer the most implicit identity strategy. Popular among friends, well-rounded and thoughtful were all socially desirable characteristics that people wanted to possess and show on Facebook. Zhao *et al.,* (2008) concluded that the identities on Facebook were not the ‘real selves’ established in the offline world, nor the ‘true selves’ commonly seen in anonymous online environments, but the ‘hoped-for possible selves’ that individuals aspire to have offline but are not able to fully embody for one reason or another. It is also constructive to consider the aspects of identity that are not stressed on Facebook. Zhao et al (2008) found that negative and pessimistic personas are not claimed online, therefore possibly strengthening the ‘self-promotion – envy spiral’ (Buxmann et al, 2013). Why is negativity not shown on Facebook? Livingstone (2008) looked at teenagers using MySpace, an older social networking site, and one respondent explained; “when you’re moody, MySpace isn’t really the best thing to go on… you can’t really get across emotions on there because you’re writing” (p. 14). This is a possible reason; another being that others simply may not like to see negativity. Facebook profiles are almost a third type of self, the socially desirable and norm conforming self. This suggests that identity is not an individual characteristic but a social product that individuals present and perform differently in varying contexts - very similar to Goffman’s dramaturgy.

We turn now to the link between emotion and social structure conceived in the dramaturgical paradigm with a view to examining impression management, self-understanding of status and, later, its connection with envy. Miller (1995) looked at electronic communication through homepages, the ancestors of Facebook, and argued that interaction is more limited and less in-depth than face-to-face interaction. Yet, as Facebook grows older more ‘netiquettes’ (etiquette on the internet) are developing and information can be ‘given’ and ‘given off’ online through the way people use the medium, as in face-to-face that Goffman suggests. Hogan (2010) extends this further by suggesting that Goffman focuses on situations, whereas social media employs exhibitions such as status updates and sets of photos, alongside situational activities such as talking. The important thing is who manages the exhibitions and how. Goffman’s concept of impression management is undergoing transformation on the internet, especially as impression management is achieved through SNS profile management.

Strano (2008) conducted an online survey about profile image posting practices and interpretations as she argued that the profile picture is the most pointed attempt of photographic self-presentation on Facebook. She found that men changed their profile picture less than women and women were more likely to have a picture with their friends. It is interesting that Zhao et al (2008) also found that the majority of their participants had profile pictures of them with friends – indicating an effort to construct a group-orientated identity. Yet Strano (2008) found that older users were constructing more unique and individual identities on Facebook; is this due to possibly having higher self-esteem? Perhaps an emphasis on group identity is a temporary phase or perhaps it is because older users are more likely to be newer users of Facebook, thus are less affected by the need for self-presentation.

The way users are viewed on Facebook is also partly due to what is written on their Facebook ‘wall’ (Walther et al, 2008). Facebook is entirely controllable, except for what other people may put on one’s profile. Therefore what others write may affect how an individual is viewed as it will warrant the value of the information put across by the profile owner. People usually write messages that express sentiments or reflect common activities between the profile owner and friend. Walther et al (2008) found that participants rated the profile owner significantly more attractive if they saw attractive photos of the profile owner’s friends. They also found that participants exposed to positive wall posts rated the profile owner as more qualified and socially attractive than the participants who read negative wall statements, highlighting the impression-bearing value of comments about the profile owner. This shows that our online identities are greatly defined by how others communicate with us online and therefore, affects how believable this identity is – reinforcing Goffman’s theory of performance and belief in this performance being vital. Facebook profiles seem to be a performance for others to observe, leading impression formation to also be based on interactions with others, which Walter et al (2008) have shown can be done via electronic means.

**3.0 Status, profile and envy**

We turn now to a review of work that makes theoretical and empirical links between social structure (qua status), selfhood and emotional experience. The issues generated by this review are further explored in some of our own empirical work detailed in sections 4 and 5.

Envy is a universally translated term generally regarded as strong in most ethnographic accounts that recognise it as a distinctive human experience. While the strong feelings with which envy is associated may be socially constructed variably across cultures and social settings nevertheless it is regarded as central to the experience of being social and belonging to a group. For research purposes distinctive and consistent features can be established (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2007). A general definition of envy has been made whereby feelings of inferiority, hostility and resentment produced by an awareness of another person or group of persons who enjoy a possession, social position, attribute or quality of being that is desired (Smith and Kim, 2007, Parrot and Smith, 1993). Envy and jealousy are emotions that are commonly interchanged but need to be distinguished for empirical purposes. Envy typically involves a group member lacking something enjoyed another. Jealousy typically occurs when one fears losing someone or something to someone else (characterised by distrust, anxiety and anger) (Smith and Kim, 2007; Parrot and Smith, 1993). Again for observational purposes we can identify two types of envy: ‘malicious’ and ‘benign’. Malicious envy, sometimes known as negative envy, is defined as painful feelings of helplessness and ill will against the envied. This type of envy can lead to a ‘pulling-down’ motivation aimed at damaging the position of the ‘envied’ and in extreme forms can induce a variety of malevolent behaviours such as derogation (Smith and Kim, 2007).

By contrast, benign envy, sometimes known as positive envy, is free of the ill will and can be similar to admiration and longing. Benign envy can lead to a ‘moving-up’ motivation aimed at reaching the same level of the envied (Pieters et al, 2009). Kim and Smith (2007) argue that envy should be recognised as containing hostile feelings that can lead to hostile actions. With regard to Facebook research our work seeks to address the following: (i) benign envy could, over time, lead to malicious envy and create negative well-being. And (ii) in some cases envy may grow just from seeing someone derive satisfaction or prestige from something that was not considered to be desirable previously (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2007). Sullivan (1953, cited in Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2007) claimed that envy is typical for a person with low self-esteem.

Smith and Kim (2007) claim that people avoid admitting feelings of envy to others and to themselves as it is not a socially accepted emotion. Therefore envy can be “suppressed, pre-empted or transmuted to some other emotion” (Elster, 1998, cited in Smith and Kim, 2007, p. 168) in order to turn it into an emotion that is not as socially stigmatised. People may also convince themselves over time that they have legitimate reasons for feeling hostile and so negative outcomes such as gossiping can ensue (Smith and Kim, 2007). Although benign envy has been found to motivate people to improve themselves, this only occurs if they think self-improvement is attainable (Pieters et al, 2011). Upward social comparison triggers benign envy and this self-improvement motivation (Pieters et al, 2011) but does this apply online? In the virtual world of Facebook, seeing what other people are doing and feeling envious of them may not motivate people due to it seeming unattainable. Instead other ways of coping may be required. Individuals often exaggerate their own activities, abilities, achievements and/or possessions (online and offline) to regain the same level as others, creating a ‘self-promotion – envy spiral’ as Buxmann *et al* (2013) name it. This constant social comparison is key to both envy and Facebook discussed below.

**3.1 Creating online arenas for self comparison**

The unprecedented scale of information sharing on social networking sites, specifically Facebook, provides grounds for envy and an easy means to compare oneself against peers (Buxmann et al, 2013). People tend to underestimate the negative experiences of others and overestimate the positive experiences (Jordan et al, 2011). As it is not a norm to show negativity on Facebook (Zhao et al, 2008), these estimations are often exaggerated further and cause negative emotions to proliferate. As Miceli and Castelfranchi (2007, p. 450) state, “social comparison processes are typically at the core of envy”. The perceived inferiority, resulting from social comparison, is the basic route to envy. For the envious person it is not only important to gain superiority, or at least non-inferiority, but also making others believe this to be the case. Facebook allows possibilities for expanding impression management and creating a socially desirable self-image to gain feelings of non-inferiority. Buxmann et al (2013) found envy to be the main cause of frustration on Facebook, with travel and leisure, social interaction and happiness being the main triggers of envy. Posting photos on Facebook has been a long established norm, therefore users do not risk being accused of self-promotion, yet are in fact doing so. Buxmann et al (2013) also find that the intensity of passive following of others is likely to reduce user’s life satisfaction in the long run, highlighting just how significantly social comparison promotes envy. They suggest that there is a continuous spiral of ‘self-promotion – envy’, with users engaging in increased self-promotion in order to combat envious feelings, hence it becomes more pronounced. The self-presentation actions that this may cause must now be examined, and whether these effects differ between gender and sexual orientation.

Kross et al (2013) conducted a study in which they texted participants 5 times a day for 14 days with links to a survey that asked how they were feeling, how much they had used Facebook since the previous text and how much they had had either direct or phone interaction since the last text. They found that the more people used Facebook the worse they felt, but the reverse pathway was not significant – people do not use Facebook more or less depending on how they feel. They also found that direct interactions led people to feel better over time but Facebook was the opposite; therefore it is a unique social network that predicts declines in well-being. Although human beings need social connection, it is direct interaction that makes us feel better. Kross et al (2013) suggest that these results may be due to the damaging social comparisons that occur on Facebook. They only looked at young adults as these are the core Facebook user demographic, but it will be interesting to discover if this negative well-being also occurs for older users.

Feinstein et al (2013) obtained very similar results when studying negative social comparison on Facebook. The results supported their hypothesis – negative social comparison on Facebook leads to an increase in self-rumination, which in turn leads to an increase in depressive symptoms. Rumination is the repeated focus on one’s distress, including the potential causes and consequences. Facebook provides ample opportunity to compare oneself with others on characteristics such as appearance, popularity and success, providing plenty of opportunity to mull over the causes and consequences of one’s perceived inferiority (Feinstein et al, 2013). This negative social comparison can also exacerbate negative self-appraisals. Chou and Edge (2012) found that users who had Facebook longer, as did those who used it more regularly, agreed more that others were happier and had better lives than them (Chou and Edge, 2012). This is reinforced by the fact that it is not so common to state something negative on Facebook (Zhao et al, 2008) and also that people tend to overestimate the positive experiences of others outside of Facebook.

Further supporting the argument that Facebook causes negative social comparison, Alhabash et al (2010) studied the 2 prominent Facebook activities of social browsing (surfing the general information that is made available on Facebook) and social searching (looking for specific information with the goal of getting to know a person better). Alhabash et al (2010) recorded 29 participants on Facebook for 5 minutes and found that the most total time was spent on social searching, followed closely by social browsing. Pempek et al (2009) also found that students spent more time observing content than actually posting content, but had not distinguished between social browsing and social searching. Alhabash et al (2010) also found that social searching gave more pleasant feelings than social browsing which may be because social searching fulfils our need for connectivity whereas during social browsing social comparison can occur. More time was spent on these 2 activities than on communication and impression management respectively; showing it is important to discover what the most common activity is for individuals when they are on Facebook, as this may have an impact on how they feel and vice versa.

**3.2 Gender, sexual orientation and narcissism online**

Alpizar et al (2012) coded 350 random Facebook user profiles to examine for differences in impression management on Facebook between gender, sexual orientation and relationship status. This dissertation is specifically looking at gender and sexual orientation but will also take account of relationship status, ethnicity and age. Interestingly, it was found that those who described themselves as either bisexual or homosexual had higher rates of changing their profile picture and greater frequency of altering their personal profile information (Alpizar et al, 2012). Fewer studies have looked at why this is – perhaps it is due to differences in sexuality, or differences in self-esteem or envy.

It has been found that women tend to rely on Facebook to maintain existing relationships whereas men typically use it to start new relationships (Sheldon, 2009, Mazman and Usluel, 2011). Mazman and Usluel’s (2011) possible reason for this is that females tend to hide their personal information and keep their profiles more private than men. Differences in motivational use may also provide differences in emotions and behaviours on Facebook.

The rise of social media has brought much debate about the issue of narcissism. It is argued that Facebook provides a fertile ground for narcissists as users can have hundreds of virtual friends and emotionally detached communication. Mehdizadeh (2010) found that individuals with the offline personality trait of narcissism do engage in more Facebook activity and some self-promotional content. She looked at the ‘About Me’ section, the way the profile picture was taken (i.e. in a pose, if editing software been used), the status update section and the first 20 photos. Those with lower self-esteem showed a negative correlation with the profile picture but not with the other features for self-promotion. Those with lower self-esteem also engaged in more Facebook activity (Mehdizadeh, 2010). However, Kramer and Winter (2008) found no association between self-presentation and self-esteem, showing the need for more research and similar methods to eliminate contradictory results.

**3.3 Conclusion and questions for empirical studies**

The review of literature suggests that the use of survey and qualitative data would be productive in the development of baseline data where we could be confident of using tools adapted to limited demographic jurisdictions. We pose the following groups of questions with a specific interest in age groups:

*Goffman’s Face Work paradigm*

What are the patterns of Facebook profile resource usage in the management of impressions and Face Work?

Are there demographic differences (age, gender, sexual orientation) in the nature of impression management?

*Foucault’s self-surveillance and confessional paradigm by age group*

What motivates users to reveal and confess information about themselves on SNSs?

**4.0 Methods**

To generate baseline data that would assist the development of a new paradigm framework we have employed a collection of methods to address specifically the questions raised in 3.3. These methods consist of an online survey on Facebook; interviews; and Facebook user diaries.

**4.1 Quantitative Survey Study**

The survey was distributed on Facebook through links on one researcher’s own friends network (n= 300 +); it was distributed to a number of open and closed groups on Facebook. The link to the survey and a request for voluntary participation was shared. The researcher posted the link to groups local Amnesty International and Skunks Ultimate. Links were posted to three UK universities LGBT societies. This was to gain more access to LGBT people in order to represent them more fully and gain insights into any differences between sexual orientation as well as gender. The expected sample size was based on other studies (Rugg and Petre, 2007). Some studies had less than 100 participants, for example Livingstone (2008) only interviewed 16 students and Zhao et al (2008) coded 63 Facebook accounts. However, using an online survey can reach many people. Studies that used surveys reached over 100, for instance Buxmann et al (2013) received 357 survey responses. The survey was available for four weeks. There were 255 respondents.

**4.2 Survey Design**

**4.2.1 Age and Socio-demographic profiles**

Age was taken as a continuous variable but was then categorised into 18 – 21, 22 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 – 60 and 61+. This was based on Strano’s (2008) study, as it was one of the few studies that focused on a range of ages. Strano (2008) later collapsed her youth age variable into 18 – 21 (those most likely to be presently at university), 22 – 30 (young professionals that may have been introduced to Facebook whilst still in school/university) and 31+ (those who were most likely out of university when Facebook became popular).

To avoid priming the survey was titled ‘Emotions and Behaviours on Facebook’. The survey began by discovering the respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics. Gender, age and sexual orientation were analysed as independent variables to explore whether the relationship between envy, Facebook use and impression management differ between these variables.

**4.2.2 Self Image**

To measure levels of self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (a 10 item Likert scale) was used. Each respondent was given a total score for self-esteem and this was analysed as an independent variable. The Rosenberg SES is widely recognised within the social sciences as a reliable and valid quantitative tool - its ease for administration, scoring and brevity create a straightforward estimate of positive or negative feelings about the self (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1993). The questions also have large semantic scope and enable participants to respond in ways that are consistent with the local meanings they give to the terms. The SES is useful for generating baseline data.

**4.2.3 Assessing Emotionality**

The next questions regarded reasons for using Facebook and most frequent activities on Facebook. Distinguishing between activities on Facebook has not been looked at before, yet it may have an impact. Buxmann et al (2013) suggested that different types of user behaviour should be integrated as independent constructs. Buxmann et al (2013) asked in their study which emotions were felt the last time Facebook was used and found five positive and eight negative emotional outcomes – these emotions (**happy, satisfied, informed, relaxed, excited, bored, angry, frustrated, guilty, tired, sad, lonely, envious)** were used as the options in this survey. As Smith and Kim (2007) note, people are reluctant to admitting feelings of envy and therefore it can be very hard to measure. Our survey was anonymous and an option for skipping questions was included.

Four different ways were used to measure the concept and levels of envy. ‘Envious’ was an option to tick as one of the emotions usually felt whilst on Facebook, ‘When on Facebook I feel envious when I look at other people’s profiles’ was a five-level Likert item from strongly disagree to strongly agree, ‘Looking at what other people are doing and feeling envious of them’ was an option to rank in the reasons for feeling negative emotions after using Facebook, and finally, ‘on a scale of 1 to 5 how envious do you usually feel on Facebook?’. These levels of envy were used to make planned comparisons with self-esteem and impression management actions. To investigate social comparison the survey asks how often they looked at other profiles, other photos and their own profiles. Finally, to measure impression management it asks how often they change their profile picture, update their status, upload photos and tag themselves in photos.

All quantitative data was analysed via SPSS as planned comparisons, using chi-squared tests, t-tests and Pearson’s correlation coefficient to test for the strength of associations.

**4.3 Qualitative Study: Diaries and Interviews**

Drawing on the literature review, an eclectic qualitative methodology was developed; as Cavanagh (2007:7) advises the best way to study the Web is through a collection of methods. Turkle (2011) also developed a successful mixed methodology over fifteen years to investigate the attitudes of her participants. We investigated participants in two age sets aged 20-25 years old and 45-50 years old. Pseudonyms are used throughout the research to protect the identities of the participants and assure good research practice, respecting the social realities of cyberspace (Rutter and Smith 2005:90). Here we favoured grounded theory in uncovering the meaning of the lived experiences of participants, best achieved through a small sample to develop patterns of meaning (Dale Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012:32, Johson and Weller, 2001:499).

Recruitment of participants thirteen participants aged 20-25, and nine aged 45-50 were from our second researcher’s network: I intended to interview four participants from each age cohort and approach another ten participants to keep 24-hour structured diaries. Corti (1993) states that a 24-hour diary is sufficient to understand a typical day in the life of participants, as structure and examples of a completed diary with clear instructions ensures valid results. An established relationship with participants also ensured successful diary keeping to the end as advocated by Corti (1993). Similarly, Corti (ibid) advises adding a comments page for additional information participants feel is relevant. The diary method was more appropriate than online ethnography, as carried out by Turkle (2011) and Miller (2011), which would only investigate the visible activity of users.

A structured diary asking participants to record their interactions with SNSs by the hour was created. Diary keeping was largely successful though some participants reported little detail and one participant acknowledged under-reporting. The interview schedule was developed to ask open-ended questions about motivations for use of SNSs and appropriate behaviour, surveillance, profile maintenance and age and gender differences apparent on SNSs. The sample was gender balanced; yet class and race may have intersected at points I was not able to measure. Arguably, issues of class and race provide another research question altogether and highlights potential areas for future investigation. The data from the open-ended interview and the diaries were amalgamated to give an overall impression of SNSs activity across the two cohorts. Interview and questionnaire data were combined and coded thematically. Some codes were created a priori, such as surveillance, self-surveillance and confession, and others emerged as other common themes appeared in the data set. This, as Taylor and Gibbs (2010) note, is a key feature of grounded theory.

**5.0 Results**

**5.1 Survey**

255 questionnaires were completed; of these 67.8% were female and 32.2% were male. The age range was from 18 – 64 years, with the mean age being 26.97 years (*SD* = 12.24).Table 1 shows the percentages and counts of the participants demographics sexual orientation and gender (*n* = 255).

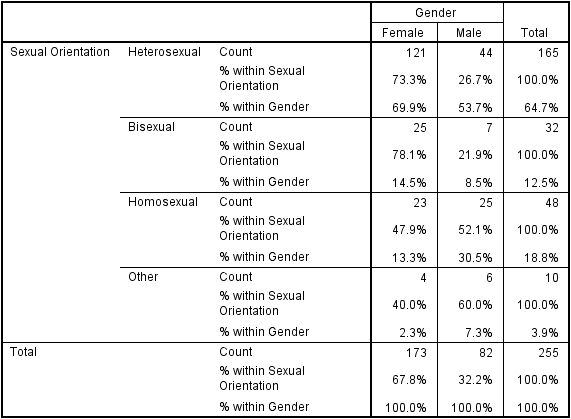
****

Table 1. Percentages and counts of sexual orientation and gender.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the sample, with percentage and counts. As can be seen, the high proportion of 18 – 21 year olds reflects the core Facebook user demographic.

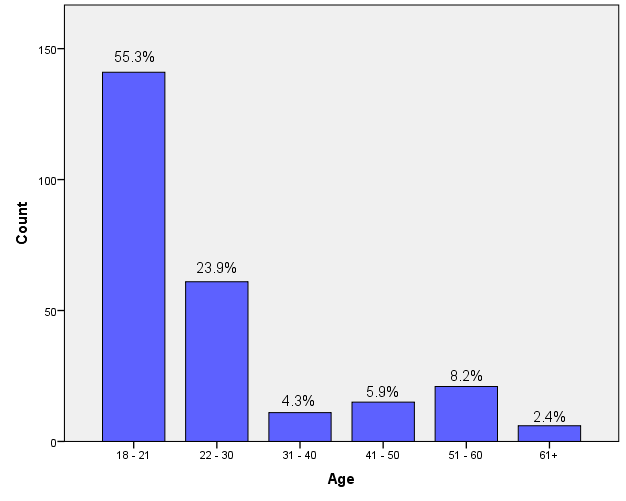


Fig.1. Age distribution of sample.

The means of the 4 separate ways to measure envy were first compared and found to be interrelated. The majority of those who had a higher score (3 and upwards) on the scale from 1 to 5 tended to tick ‘envious’ as an emotion they usually feel and tended to rank ‘looking at what other people are doing and feeling envious of them’ quite high in the reasons for feeling negative. They also tended to agree or strongly agree with ‘feeling envious when I look at other people’s Facebook profile’. As they are interrelated, only one of the measures needed to be used when looking at envy against other variables. All SPSS outputs of calculations and/or frequencies can be found in the appendices.

For 38% of people, wasting time on Facebook was the most significant reason for causing negative emotions. The next top choice was looking at what other people are doing on Facebook and feeling envious of them; 14.5% of people chose this as their most significant reason. Boredom was the most frequently ticked emotion, with 70.6% of people choosing it. Out of the 8 negative emotions, after boredom, envious was the next most frequently chosen by 35.3% of total respondents. On a scale of 1 to 5, the majority of the respondents (31.4%) chose 3. The highest triggers of this envy were seeing photos of others having a good time with friends, seeing others in a good relationship and seeing photos of others on holiday.

**5.1.1 Self-esteem and Envy**

To test for the first objective, establishing whether envy on Facebook is related to self-esteem, an independent samples t-test was conducted. A significant effect was found, *t*(253) = 2.87, *p* = 0.004. This means that there is a significant difference of < 0.01 in self-esteem between those who are envious and those who are not, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis was then conducted and showed a mild negative correlation between self-esteem and envy: *r*(251) = -0.331, *p* < 0.01.

**5.1.2 Envy and Impression Management**

The second objective, to determine if an association between envy and higher levels of impression management exists, chi squared tests were conducted. For the following impression management questions the answers were collapsed into ‘almost never or less than once every 3 months’, ‘less than once a month’, ‘once a month or twice a month’, ‘once a week or 2 – 4 times a week’ and ‘every day’. Table 2 displays the chi squared values for feeling envious and how often different aspects of the profile were edited and/or changed.

Table 2. Chi squared values for envy and impression management.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How often do you…** | **χ2** |
| Update your status | 4.845 |
| Change your profile picture | 13.069\*\*\* |
| Upload photos | 3.298 |
| Get tagged in photos | 8.538 |
| Tag yourself in photos | 14.940\*\* |

Standardised residuals were also calculated for each cell. Being envious and tagging yourself once a week or 2 – 4 times a week showed a significant correlation of *r* = 2.1 > 1.96. No association was found between envy and updating one’s status, uploading photos or being tagged in photos by others.

*Note.* \*\* = *p* < 0.01.  
\*\*\* = p < 0.01, but cells had expected values below 5 so the association cannot be said to be valid without more data.

For the statements towards the end of the survey (see appendix 2 for printed version of survey) the categories were regrouped into either agree or strongly agree, neutral, and disagree or strongly disagree. Table 3.3 shows the chi-squared values for feeling envious and the statements that also measured impression management.

Table 3. Chi squared values for envy and impression management statements.

*Note.* \*\* = *p* < 0.01.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **When on Facebook I…** | **χ2** |
| Dislike when someone has tagged me in a photo I think looks bad | 16.991\*\* |
| Feel the need to share what I have done recently | 2.595 |
| Like looking at updates from people | 2.410 |
| Compare how many friends I have with other people | 1.491 |
| Feel disappointed if I don’t receive any likes or comments on something I post | 8.122 |
| Feel the need to look interesting | 9.655\*\* |

For being envious and either agreeing or strongly agreeing to disliking a ‘bad’ photo of them, a standardised residual was calculated (*r* = 2.3 > 1.96). This shows that those who are envious are significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree with disliking being tagged in a bad photo.

There was no association between envy and the other statements. Nevertheless, 36.9% of people agreed to feeling disappointed if no comments or likes were given on a post, compared with only 18.4% that disagreed. Therefore, envy does determine higher levels in certain, but not all, areas of impression management of the Facebook profile - specifically the photos individuals are tagged in and feeling the need to appear socially desirable and interesting.

**5.1.3 Envy and Age**

An association between age and envy was found. An independent samples t-test was conducted and yielded *t*(248) = 3.214, *p* ≤ 0.001, meaning there is a significant difference in age and levels of envy from Facebook use. The most envious groups were 18 – 21 year olds (39% felt envious) and 22 – 30 year olds (39.3% felt envious). In contrast, just 16.7% of 61+ year olds felt envious. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis suggested a mild negative correlation between age and envy with *r*(251) = -0.297, *p* < 0.01.

A further chi-squared test then analysed these age categories and self-esteem levels. The analysis yielded c2 (135, *N* = 255) = 170.99, *p* = 0.02, meaning there is an association between age and self-esteem. However, there were some expected values below 5. With more data this would validly suggest that the older an individual is, the higher their self-esteem and the less envious they feel. However older people were shown to spend the least time on Facebook. 19% of 51 – 60 year olds spent less than 10 minutes on Facebook per day compared to only 2.1% of 18 – 21 year olds. 31.9% of 18 – 21 year olds also spent up to 2 hours per day compared to 14.3% of 51 – 60 year olds.

Associations were also found between age and how often photos were uploaded (c2 = (20, *N* = 255) = 35.127, *p* = 0.019), how often they were tagged in photos (c2 = (15, *N* = 255) = 70.265, *p* = < 0.001) and how often they tagged themselves in photos (c2 = (15, *N* = 255) = 39.879, *p* = <0.001).

**5.1.4 Envy and Social Comparison on Facebook**

For the block of questions regarding social comparison on Facebook,the categories were also grouped. They became ‘almost never or rarely (less than once a month)’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘frequently (more than once a week) or every day’. Table 3.4 shows the chi squared values for feeling envious and social comparison.

Table.4. Chi squared values for envy and social comparison.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How often do you….** | **χ2** |
| Browse someone else’s profile | 9.230\*\* |
| View someone else’s photos | 6.268\* |
| Look at your own profile | 5.771 |
| Make it known on Facebook you are feeling negative | 1.505 |
| Make it known on Facebook you are feeling positive | 0.530 |

*Note*. \*\* = p ≤ 0.01.  
\* = p ≤ 0.05

A Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis suggested a weak positive correlation between envy and viewing someone else’s photos with *r*(253) = 0.096, *p* = 0.128. For envy and browsing someone else’s profile a Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis suggested a stronger positive correlation with *r*(253) = 0.189, *p* = 0.002. Therefore, the more frequently other profiles are looked at, the more envy is felt.

Table 5 shows the chi squared values for age and social comparison on Facebook.

Table 5. Chi squared values for age and social comparison.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How often do you…** | **χ2** |
| Browse someone else’s profile | 33.364\*\*\* |
| View someone else’s photos | 16.072 |
| Look at your own profile | 33.935\*\*\* |
| Make it known on Facebook you are feeling negative | 21.796 |
| Make it known on Facebook you are feeling positive | 36.085\*\*\* |

*Note.* \*\*\* = p ≤ 0.01 but cells had expected values below 5 so the association cannot be said to be valid without more data.

**6.0 Discussion**

**6.1 Survey Findings**

The analyses indicated four main things: people with lower self-esteem tend to be more envious, younger people tend to be more envious, social comparison creates more envy and feeling envious leads to more concern about photos and how one is perceived by others on Facebook.

Gender and sexuality were being specifically focused on in this study and no association was found between them and feelings of envy. This indicates that regardless of gender or sexual orientation, Facebook affects us all in similar ways. Although other authors have not looked at differences in envy between these demographics, these findings disagree with Strano (2008) who found that women change their profile picture more often than men and with Alpizar et al (2012) who found that bisexuals and homosexuals had higher rates of changing their profile picture. These differences in findings could be due to the fact that in 2008 Facebook was still relatively new. Now, Facebook has become so embedded in social practices that any differences between genders may have been eradicated. Differences in sample size may also be a factor – Alpizar et al (2012) used participants who were ‘Facebook friends’ of the researchers and so were subject to biases.

Age was found to be a key factor in impacting upon levels of envy. This study focussed on a range of ages from 18 – 64, which extends beyond the samples used in other studies. Facebook is accessed more and more by older age groups and so examining all age groups on Facebook is important. The findings indicated that older people (31+) felt less envious. This may be due to the fact that older people had higher levels of self-esteem. This study found a connection between having low self-esteem and envy and then a connection from envy to higher levels of impression management, which contrasts with Kramer and Winter (2008). Self-esteem has been found to steadily increase from adolescence, reaching a peak at about 60 years of age (Orth et al, 2010). Older people may have created a Facebook profile at an older age; a time characterised by peaks in achievement and control over the self (Orth et al, 2010). Having this higher self-esteem would help enable them to not feel envious of others as they feel satisfied with their own lives. In contrast, a young person can have conflicting role demands and increasingly complex romantic and peer relationships (Orth et al, 2010). Therefore self-esteem can be lower, making these users more susceptible to feeling envious.

**6.2 Qualitative study: Interview and questionnaire findings and discussion**

A consensus existed amongst the 45-50 cohort that participants had little time or desire to maintain multiple SNSs profiles. For example, Capella felt that having multiple SNSs profile would be ‘overwhelming’, Kale) referred to Twitter as ‘a complete waste of time’. Ankaa however, had trialled Twitter but found he lacked time to maintain a Twitter presence. Many participants of this cohort also offered no opinion on Instagram as they had never used it or did not know what it was, highlighted by ‘what the hell is Instagram?’ from Kale, 50.

Thus, Facebook was the most accepted and used network, as almost all participants stated they liked the tools Facebook provided for them to stay in touch with family and friends who were not present in physical life. This mirrors the findings of Bakardjieva (2007), in which older participants expressed rationalist ideas of information exchange that did not encompass sharing or communication online with no stated purpose. This also resonates Miller’s (2011) account of Dr Karamath, who used Facebook for practical purposes once his physical movement was limited. Considering the age distribution statistics of the three SNSs, these results were not unexpected.

However, such results stand directly opposed to SNSs attitudes amongst the age 20-25 cohort. Many also highlighted peer pressure and a desire to keep up as a reason for joining SNSs. Gemma, 20, cited that she desired to join Instagram after observing it was ‘the popular thing to be doing’, it looked ‘cool and quite attractive’ and a friend had told her she ‘*needed*’ Instagram after buying an iPhone Almost all participants in this cohort also reported the influence of peers, and occasionally older siblings, in joining SNSs.

Pandora, 23, expressed that she felt her generation used SNSs to seek attention and that use of SNSs, especially Facebook, resulted from addiction caused by the easy access provided by smartphones. All participants who were interviewed in this cohort felt they witnessed attention seeking on SNSs, many citied Facebook as the main field for this. Similarly, smartphones were seen as contributing to the entitlement this generation felt to share constantly, something that Hegemone, 20, and Pandora, 23 resented for many opinions were often misinformed or extreme. Similarly, Rastaban and Subra underlined the distasteful phenomena of ‘trolling’ in which users post inflammatory messages to provoke an emotional response from others.

The conclusions of Lovink and Turkle were also reaffirmed as participants spoke about the shared emotional information of others with detachment and even resentment. For example, Rastaban, 21, and Ferdinand, 20, respectively refer to Facebook as containing ‘fabricated dramas’ and as ‘a place to watch people be boring’. Ferdinand also expressed having ‘mixed feelings’ towards another users declaration of success. Disregarding the above, Subra, 21, however, simply saw SNSs as ‘Life 2.0’ accepting all SNSs behaviour as an extension of physical life in which the same boundaries and codes of behaviour applied. This was unusual, as while many young participants believed SNSs to be important and part of their lives, these participants tended to talk of SNSs as a separate arena of interaction where transition between SNSs and physical life was not so seamless.

Notably, the predominant recorded emotion within the younger cohort when accessing SNSs was boredom, providing support for Miller’s conclusion that boredom is all SNSs addresses for the young; I maintain this is too prosaic.

Diary results show almost all young participants checked their SNSs generally after any moderate period spent away from SNSs. An anxiety was present to be updated for the younger cohort and a high majority of these participants expressed negative emotions when accessing SNSs. For example, Subra, 21, twice expressed that when he was unable to check SNSs the desire to access Facebook was pressing. Young participants often took to SNSs to share their negative feelings; for example, Ferdinand, 20, tweeted his ‘deepest fears’ between two and three in the morning when recording angst.

It was found through the additional comments boxes in the diary tables that many participants aged 20-25 considered their SNSs usage ‘habit’ while those aged 45-50 accessed Facebook purposively and much less often. Charon and Nix, both 50, for example stated that they used Facebook for business purposes and communication with clients. Also a member of LinkedIn, Nix portrayed a very pragmatic approach to SNSs, stating in his questionnaire SNSs had ‘no real negatives or positives’ and that they were used for ‘revision’ (Appendix 3C:239-241).

However, other older participants described a novel approach to Facebook; Ankaa, 50, remarked **‘**everybody loves a bit of gossip and Facebook certainly fulfils that need’. Older participants recorded much less negative emotions and appeared to associate accessing SNSs with relaxation, with more participants logging onto Facebook after seven in the evening. Despite this, many older participants were very critical of the way they saw younger generations using SNSs. Mira, 49, simply refers to those sharing personal details and arguing with other users as ‘obviously stupid’.

Despite this contrast between the two cohorts, an acknowledgement of voyeurism was made by Ankaa, 50, who also reported feeling inquisitive when logging onto Facebook something seen much less in, or maybe just not admitted by, the older generation who tended to dismiss any SNSs without clear practical purpose as a waste of time.

**6.2.1 Surveillance**

Diary results revealed a high amount of surveillance amongst participants in the age 20-25 cohort and moderate amount between those aged 45-50. Surveillance of others and the Self on Facebook was discussed at length in interviews. Intriguingly identified by Puck, 20, was a stigma associated with too much visible activity, ‘especially on Facebook’, and many participants were also reserved in interviews in admitting how much time they spent surveying. Many referred to ‘Facebook stalking’ as something that was disturbing or superfluous. However, Hegemone,20, declared ‘people pretend that it is something to be embarrassed about but everyone knows that everyone does it’. Calypso, 45, the only participant not a member of any SNSs, stated she did not agree with how a users profile could be accessed at any time and that ‘even simple information can turn out really bad for you’ and this was why she would not join any SNSs. Therefore membership of Facebook was highly associated with surveillance.

Though all participants expressed the practicalities of Facebook as a broadcasting tool this was conveyed as both negative and positive. Broadcasting was generally considered attention seeking but both cohorts commonly saw SNSs as a means of easy means of ‘keeping-in-touch’. Yet many participants aged 20-25 used ‘keeping-in-touch’ synonymously with a desire to keep track of everyone they were acquainted with and often the profiles of celebrities and public figures on Twitter and Instagram.

The exception in her cohort, Mira, 49, was an active member of Twitter and also reported joining MySpace and Bebo previously to keep an eye on her children – perhaps a safety measure but surveillance nonetheless. Those who were also parents in the sample reported similar accounts, such as Kale, 50, and Capella, 47 who both used Facebook to uncover details about their children not shared with them in physical life.

The presence of parents and other family members on SNSs was something resented by many younger participants. Puck, 20, identified that many young users flee to Twitter and Instagram to escape surveillance from parents on Facebook, and Pandora, 23, stated she would not be friends with her parents on Facebook as this would be like ‘letting them read your diary’. Gemma, 20, also reported hiding elements of her Facebook profile from members of her family as they ‘shouldn’t need’ to see certain ‘sides’ of her life. Despite this, both Pandora and Gemma were tolerant of acquaintances witnessing the details they wanted to hide from their families, and there was a consensus amongst the young participants that acquaintances ignored information that was irrelevant to them and thus had no repercussions for either party.

Therefore, the majority of participants noted that they felt uneasy about surveillance from others though many also claimed they were unfazed as they had nothing to hide – however, many of the same participants also spoke about restricting certain elements of their profiles. A level of contradiction arose with many participants who were simultaneously unnerved *and* unfazed, who categorised those suitable to view certain information and sculpted their profiles in ways they saw as appropriately desirable. Information shared was both consequential and inconsequential. Alternatively, a few participants suggested that users could just be ignorant altogether, merely ‘lazy’ or ‘easily manipulated’ or believing they existed ‘in a bubble’. User ignorance, wilful or not, was certainly evident in the words of participants such as Gemma, Pandora, Subra and Rastaban who recalled instances of those who over-shared personal details, cyber-bullying, trolling and arguments between users who had not considered the ‘real-life’ consequences of their actions. This appears to reaffirm the fears of Mayer-Schönberger (2009) as many users have a perspective on the long-term consequences of their actions online but this centres on how data intersects with those they know physically – not whether this data is recorded on servers.

**6.2.2 Self-surveillance and profile maintenance on Facebook**

Undeniably, an amount of self-surveillance is fundamental in maintaining a SNSs profile. Yet levels of self-reflection and anxiety differed between and within cohorts. Every participant in the age 20-25 cohort admitted to selecting only flattering photos to be displayed on their profile, though participants had differing opinions about the impact of this and why they had done it.

Gemma, 20, spoke of how she changed her profile picture on a regular basis and untagged unflattering photos because she wanted to portray her life through Facebook in a way that was positive and as if she was constantly enjoying herself. Gemma never wanted her profile to appear ‘out-of-date’, an anxiety also expressed by Hegemone, 20, who stated that in older photos she did not look like herself anymore and did not want those to be the most recent images representing her publicly. Therefore she needed more recent photos to update her image. Gemma spoke at length about many expectations, especially for women, existing on Facebook as she felt women were judged especially hard on their appearance of themselves and their family. On top of continually being up-to-date with physical life, Gemma also noted that any satisfaction a Facebook user received from attention was short-lived and led to a further quest to be noticed, adding legitimacy to the conclusions of Keen (2012), Lovink (2007, 2011) and Turkle (2011) and the perhaps narcissistic obsession with identity management.

Conscious of profile sculpting, Hegemone expressed that she felt she had witnessed other users shape an image of themselves on Facebook that was not akin to the personalities Hegemone knew in physical life. She knew her friends to be ‘pick’n’mixing’ the best, most interesting parts of their lives to fit in with the perceived norms of presentation on Facebook.

In accordance, many participants also reported that they felt behaviour on Facebook was engineered to receive Likes from others, providing more support for Lovink (2007, 2011) and Keen’s (2012) hypotheses about the narcissistic nature of young users. Gemma, 20, exemplified this in stating that she had witnessed Facebook friends deleting status updates and photos that had not received a desirable amount of Likes as the users did not want to appear as if something they posted had not been popular or gone unnoticed.

Pandora, 23, and Rastaban, 21, also recognised the carefully constructed nature of a Facebook profile and made clear they believed Facebook profiles were not true representations but an idealistic portrait containing remnants of the ‘real’ person.

Interestingly, many participants simultaneously recognised this and still believed their profiles were accurate portrayals of themselves and their lives.

**6.2.3 Reputation**

Two participants raised the issue of reputation maintenance. Hegemone, 20, recurrently mentioned the importance of upholding the reputation of her family, especially her parents, and disliked witnessing those she saw as deliberately, and unintentionally, embarrassing themselves and thus defaming their families. As a Christian, Hegemone also noted the importance of reputation within her local church, which was increasingly intersecting with Facebook and Twitter usage. Hegemone felt that her sister’s Twitter profile, which often featured ‘venting’ and behaviour that was not typically Christian, had caused a level of embarrassment for her mother within the Church in the past. This demonstrates how physical life identities can intersect with the idealistic projections of identity online.

Such self-surveillance was also apparent amongst the older generation; Capella, 47, a Catholic of Italian heritage, spoke of the importance of the reputation her family has earned over time which she now felt responsibility to conserve. Hegemone also mentioned how her mother experienced anxiety when adding people as friends on Facebook that she ‘used to know’ as her mother wanted to portray her appearance and her family life as at a certain standard in the time that had passed, something Hegemone saw as being problematic for many older women, agreeing with Gemma and many other young participants that women are more harshly scrutinised through their SNSs profiles. Calypso, 45, for example, repeatedly stated she did not want to join SNSs and take the risk of embarrassing herself under such heavy surveillance, especially in photos. However, many participants appeared to interpret the gender division they saw on SNSs as nothing that was not atypical to physical life and thus mostly unproblematic, even Calypso despite her grievances with surveillance of image.

Therefore, despite their primary beliefs in Facebook as a tool, those aged 45-50 were very conscious of what constituted acceptable behaviour in presentation of their own and family identity and in judging others, often recalling with more conviction then their younger counterparts about what they thought was unacceptable to express on SNSs. Those aged 20-25 were extremely conscious of what was expected and inappropriate for them.

**6.2.4 Conformity**

Amongst some young participants, Facebook was believed to instil an individualised conformity that was countered by Twitter and Instagram, which accommodated a greater deal of freedom in presentation of the Self.

Rastaban, 21, for example, felt that users on Facebook conformed to a perceived individuality that existed within set boundaries – arguably not unlike how the Self acts in physical life when presented with situations containing restrictions on aspects of personality (Goffman, 1959). However, Rastaban expanded upon this to report that the threat of surveillance caused users to continually and carefully monitor their SNSs Self to check that if they were viewed at any time they would appear perfect – especially in Facebook photos. Once more, this reaffirms Lovink’s claims of an obsession with identity management and is a perfect illustration of the Facebook Panopticon. Thus, no longer can individuals project different identities in different contexts, because one context is forever present and chronicling a history of Self – Facebook. Identity control is lost when a timeline of Self is documented making users are hyper-conscious of what they leave behind, displayed throughout this dissertation and reaffirming Mayer-Schönberger’s (2009) conclusions. When other individuals can also upload and contribute to personal data at any time, this anxiety is two-fold. For example, many participants recorded the anxiety and jealously caused and felt by the SNSs activity of their peers, such as Hegemone, 20 and Pandora, 23

What varies between users, however, is the level of the information documented and shared. Every participant from both cohorts had a differing list of what was acceptable and not acceptable on SNSs, signalling that while a consensus exists enough to install conformity and likeliness between profiles, no users were in agreement of codes of conduct.

**6.2.5 Summary**  
In conclusion, and using two different research paradigms involving models of surveillance and performativity we find significant differences between age sets and parallels of emotional experience and meaning.  This suggests a strong interaction between generational structures, the cultures that accrue to them and the ways in which selves embed with Web technologies.

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