

Impression management and self-presentation techniques allow profile owners to present a professional identity on LinkedIn improving the perception of their professional character

This essay explores the construction of identity in the online environment with a focus on professional identity on social networking sites such as LinkedIn. It does so by discussing the notion of identity being fluid, ever changing in nature and adaptable to its environment allowing individuals to present a certain identity depending on the context and audience. It further explores the use of social networking site LinkedIn and the ways in which profile owners in the network employ impression management and self-presentation techniques to construct their profile to represent a professional identity to improve or better the perception of their professional character in the online environment.

LinkedIn was founded in 2003 and is a professional social networking site that allows profile owners to present and promote their professional identities. The platform differs from other social networking sites such as Facebook that focusses more on social relations rather than expanding one's network of professional connections (Rapanta & Cantoni, 2017). As 92% of recruiters use the social networking site LinkedIn to screen potential job applicants and infer personality characteristics (Van de Ven, Bogaert, Serlie, Brandt & Denissen, 2017), it is considered the most influential social networking platform for professional use (Rapanta & Cantoni, 2017). As such, profile owners must understand the need to present a profile that reflects a competent professional identity, rather than a social identity that would be more appropriate on an alternative social networking site such as Facebook. Constructing a profile that promotes an authentic, competent and professional identity requires a concerted effort and can be achieved through self-presentation and impression management tactics. Such tactics include using a profile picture that promotes professionalism, presenting information that highlights a profile owner's skills and achievements, encouraging the endorsement of skills and achievements by other users in the network and connecting with other professionals in relevant fields. Employing effective self-presentation and impression management techniques ensures that a profile owner presents a positive professional identity, controls their professional brand and maintains their professional reputation. It also has the potential to increase employment opportunities for profile owners when used effectively as recruiters are able to locate the right candidate and connect job seekers with their sought after employment (Rapanta & Cantoni, 2017).

Before discussing the use of self-presentation and impression management techniques and the platform LinkedIn, it is first relevant to discuss the concept of identity and the ability to present multiple identities depending on the context. Yunn-Yu Sun argues that identity is

flexible, ever changing in nature and can be constructed by an individual based on their needs to respond to different demands and expectations (Yunn-Yu Sun, 2012). As a result, people consciously and unconsciously represent themselves in a variety of ways and forms (Fitzpatrick, Lange and Radosh, 2016). The reason for this being that our identity often affects and determines how we understand and represent ourselves and is also often the basis of how we are recognised and subsequently treated by others (Yunn-Yu Sun, 2012). Kulich, de Lemus, Kosakowska-Berezecka and Lorenzi-Ciolodi argue that we have multiple identities that operate simultaneously. Such identities may be inherited identities based on factors like gender and race, achieved identities based on professional achievements or social identities based on interests and groups that we belong too (Kulich, de Lemus, Kosakowska-Berezecka and Lorenzi-Ciolodi, 2017). This is relevant to identity in real life as well as in the online mediated environment and people do not only seek to manage the perception of oneself face to face but also online, especially on social networking sites such as LinkedIn (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). The most significant difference in real life and online identity may lay in the level of control one has in their presentation online (Yunn-Yu Sun, 2012). Identity online tends to be more carefully crafted and is often constructed by choice to represent a specific identity providing a user with a greater degree of control over how they are projecting and being recognised by others (Yunn-Yu, 2012). This identity is proactively formed, standardised and presented voluntarily for social or professional purposes (Yunn-Yu Sun, 2012). The online identity has therefore become more fluid with different online identities being presented and established depending on the online community or network the user is participating in (Yunn-Yu Sun, 2012).

Social networking site LinkedIn is a platform focused on building business relationships and fostering interaction between professionals in similar industries and job seekers with recruiters. The platform is used to search for jobs, recommend other professionals using the platform and receive recommendations or endorsements from users in the network (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). It has more than 363 million members in over 200 countries earning its popularity among recruitment professionals and job seekers (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). It is a platform for both employers to promote themselves and job applicants to promote their work history and skills to leave a positive impression (Liu, 2018). LinkedIn has differentiated itself with profile owners being encouraged to tailor their profile to represent their professional selves (Kuo-Huie Chiang & Hung-Yue Suen, 2015). Liu considers LinkedIn to be similar to a comprehensive interview with no set time or place causing profile owners with no choice but to tailor their profile to perform professionally at all times with the audience being outside of their control (Liu, 2018). Recruiters are increasingly looking to job seekers' profiles on social networking sites like

LinkedIn to examine experience and skills and to infer personality characteristics from profile owners (Van de Ven, Bogaert, Serlie, Brandt & Denissen, 2017). Personality assessment is a commonly used tool in recruitment processes in the online and offline environment and recruiters are not only analysing a profile owners' work history and skills to gauge potential job performance, but also personality characteristics presented online to ensure a person fits the job as well as the organisation. With LinkedIn being an influential recruitment tool, self-presentation and impression management online has therefore become vital and the need to maintain a positive and competent professional identity on the social networking site is essential to impress other professionals in similar fields as well as potential employers (Liu, 2018).

As the online environment enables profile owners to promote different identities depending on the context, profile owners have great opportunity and choice on how they project and bearing on how they are recognised by others. This has led to profile owners developing processes and tactics in impression management to promote their professional selves on platforms like LinkedIn. Impression management is considered to be a conscious process in which people attempt to influence the perception of oneself and this is done by controlling and managing the information presented online, especially on social networking sites given the frequency in which users are engaging in social media (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). On social networking sites, the aim of impression management is to control the impression of others with the information, photos and videos you present and in the way in which you present this in social media (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). Profile owners thereby employ different impression management tactics to manage how they are being presented online depending on the platform and its audience. As LinkedIn is designed for professional use, the identity presented on this platform is targeted at other professionals and job recruiters and are careful as to how their profile is presented.

A LinkedIn profile includes information about the profile owner's job title, detailed employment history, professional accomplishments and education (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016) and acts as an online resume. Therefore, the more information a profile owner includes, the more likely a recruitment professional will gain an understanding of the individual's personality, behaviour and authenticity (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). Including your relevant skills within your profile on the social networking site and including a detailed description of your skills, strengthens your professional identity and allows others within the network to "endorse" your skills. Endorsement of a profile owner's skills is a public or official statement of support or approval with a profile owner's reputation being built on the endorsement of others (Rapata & Cantoni, 2017). This virtual endorsement of your skills is considered a way of self-presentation through which professionals can brand themselves to other professionals in

similar fields or to potential recruiters (Rapata & Cantoni, 2017). An additional function of the platform is its ability to connect with others within the network actively encouraging users to connect with colleagues or other professionals in a similar field. Connecting with others on the platform is also considered an act of self-presentation and is critical to impression management as the more users you connect with, the more you establish an authentic identity in the online environment (Rapata & Cantoni, 2017). The presentation of identity on social networking sites such as LinkedIn can therefore be the key to success or failure in terms of job seekers and potential recruiters (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016).

Additionally, due to the virtuality of the online platform, all information that is presented by a profile owner is symbolic and meaningful and designed to cast the profile owner in a positive and professional light (Liu, 2018). Profile owners engage in self-presentation practices carefully selecting the information presented to not only present their professional self but to also increase employment opportunities, conduct business, establish professional relationships, express and promote their professional selves or to correct inaccurate impressions that colleagues or past employers may have of them (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). This includes the choice of profile pictures with research indicating that users who post a profile picture along with their LinkedIn profile are perceived as more socially attractive and more competent than users who do not post a picture (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). The picture selected for user's profile on LinkedIn therefore tends to convey a message of professionalism and reliability (Liu, 2018) as personality characteristics can be inferred from the choice of clothing, style or pose from the image selected (Van de Ven, Bogaert, Serlie, Brandt & Denissen, 2017). Additionally, poor grammar or typographical errors can create a negative impression and lead to the assumption that the profile owner is incompetent or has poor attention to detail (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). With 92% of recruiters using the social networking site LinkedIn to screen potential job applicants, managing this self-presentation in online networks is an integral part of our professional lives and profile owners must strategically present characteristics that they believe others will approve of while promoting an authentic and competent self (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016).

As the notion of identity is flexible, ever changing in nature and can be constructed depending on the context and audience, different social networking sites enable us to present different identities such as our social identity or our professional identity. Self-presentation and impression management practices on social networking sites therefore have become a significant part of our online practice crafting our online identity in response to different demands, needs and audience. Platforms such as LinkedIn that are designed and dedicated to professionals and is focused on business relationships and interactions, offer people greater

opportunity to present a professional identity and appeal to potential recruiters. Having the ability to manage your online identity to promote a professional image, include a detailed work history and skills and having endorsements from other professional within your field not only gives you the opportunity to self-brand and strengthen your professional identity, it establishes credibility and authenticity for your professional identity. Employing impression management and self-presentation practices can as a result assist users with employment opportunities presenting a competent profile for potential positions. In turn, it can assist recruiters to find the right candidates for positions by reviewing a profile, determining suitability and competence as well as inferring personality characteristics to assess whether the candidate is qualified for the position and is a nice fit for the company.

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