



THE INCIDENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CREATING FAKE PERSONA AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the impact of Social Media Networks (SMNs) in creating a new generation of young adults (YA) who are inclined to present their ideal image thereby widening the gulf between reality and their newly acquired online portrayals. The study uses the *dramaturgical model* proposed by Erving Goffman (1959) for establishing the framework for social identity of YA. Secondary method of data collection was employed by conducting Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of one newspaper report, one report, one book and three research articles for exploring the influence of SMN on young adults. The findings of the content revealed that along with the benefits (grooming, self care) of SMNs some adverse effects like loss of personal identity, frustration, and narcissistic behaviours are common among teenagers. The findings also indicate the need for intervention by the stakeholders to minimise the damage caused by SMNs on their impressionable minds. Due to the practical implication of accessibility, the study analysed only secondary data. However, primary data may offer deeper insight into its effect on YA. The study provides direction for future by exploring its impact on males and females separately and the long-term effects of SMN on personal identity.

Keywords: Social Media; Personal identity; fake persona; young adults

INTRODUCTION



The emergence of SMN like Snapchat, Facebook, Google Meet/ Hangouts, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and Twitter has largely transformed the perception of personal identity for the users (Westerman et al, 2014). Although images shared on these sites provoke disbelief among the users but due to the peculiar interest of the advertising agencies to use these sites for targeting their prospective clientele, such networks not only offer the provision of changing content but also using filters, to present the best image of oneself (kasra et al, 2018; Sundar, 2008).

The provision of such transformation instils a lack of satisfaction with one's real image. Individuals, in particular teenagers do not seem to be satisfied with their real identities eventually resulting in fabricated surreal profiles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that Fake images portrayed through social media have the capacity to affect self-worth of individuals by creating emotional distress, as they attempt to influence public opinions and actions.

Previous Studies by numerous renowned researchers have indicated a strong inclination by the users to treat SMNs as platforms for self-promotion. Although these images are intended to create a positive side of YAs overall personality the process results in distorting their memory (Wade et al, 2012). However, the research conducted by Farid and Bravo (2010) more than a decade ago indicated skepticism about believing in fake images.

However, due to the concept of a perfect image, YAs and adolescents feel the need for projecting their best image that leads to dissatisfaction with their current attributes. According to Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) Social buttons present cognitive heuristics for credibility assessment.

The Dramaturgical Model

The study employs model to assess young adults Erving Goffman (1959) in his book "*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*" devised the "*dramaturgical model*" to analyze social interaction which he refers to as "performance". He concedes that the "performance" is used to create "impressions" which define the

desired goals of individuals (p.17). According to Goffman during social interactions, individuals construct persona or identity that is eventually instrumental in conveying a socially more desirable impression.

In view of the above model, the study applies “*impression Management*” principle presented by *Goffman* to analyse teenagers’ conscious or unconscious desire to meet the criteria laid down by the users of these SMNs (p. 208). The current study is significant in highlighting the detrimental effects of fakery in the projection of profiles by the YAs. The study also emphasizes the need for taking countermeasures to help teenagers accept their real image and then gradually progress towards achieving the desired/ideal persona in all aspects of their lives.

Research Question:

1. Are young adults content with their real persona?

Methodology

A systematic literature review is a used to review relevant literature in the relevant domain through a 'systematic' process undertaking not only content found in literature but also the methods employed in literature. SLR also focuses on the criteria of inclusion and exclusion of literature (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). Similarly, principles of transparency, clarity, integration, equality, focus, accessibility create sound foundation for SRL (Pittway, 2008).

Moreover, SLR formulates a generalized statement about the topic area to indicate research direction and the methods used. SRL also indicates research gaps to be considered for future research. There are several considerations involved in conducting SLR: identify research question; avoiding selection bias and an over-reliance on a particular database for the selection of material.

Consistent with Booth, Papaionannou and Sutton (2012) “the clarity of research question and explicit search strategies” helped to clarify considerations and scope of the study (p. 23). A systematic review of one book, one newspaper report, one report and three research articles was employed to explore the effect of SMNs on YA with regards to creating fake impressions. The findings of the books, newspaper report and research articles were used to answer the research question.

Results

According to Vlachopoulou, Boutsouki, and Chatzithomas, (2012) YAs are considered as the most prospective clientele of SMNs who “only share information but they produce it in the way they desire” (p. 1). While using SMNs, while visiting other users’ profiles YAs and teenagers tend to disregard the use of colour, shadows and lighting. However, they are alarmingly critical of the impression created by their own profiles on others (Kasra et al., 2018).

In second study conducted by Gupta et al. (2013) used machine learning models compared fake and real images on SMNs. The study also identified 10,000 tweets, which portrayed fake display photos (The damage done by manipulated imagery is real, substantial, and persistent. YAs are in the quest for personal and social for identity.

In the third study Wade et al. (2002) also suggest that manipulated images by the users can have drastic effect on memory that can create a wide gap between the reality and fake persona. The findings are also replicated by Lee (2009).

In the report by Digital Trends in Flanders (2019) it is demonstrated that YAs prefer selective exposure that eventually corresponds with their momentary attitude and behavior.

In the book, *The Dark Side of Social Media*, authored by Sheldon, Rauschnabel, and Honeycutt (2019) one chapter is dedicated to *Narcissism as a Predictor of Self-Presentation*. The chapter indicates the negative impact of SMNs by inculcating self-love and narcissistic behaviour especially among adolescents.

Finally, The Guardian report authored by Udorie (2015) emphasizes on the disproportionate effect of SMNs on teenage girls by stating the “*pressure to be perfect*” to be their active cult. If they fail to comply with the standard they tend to fall in a trap of “*self-loathing*” (p.1).

IV- Discussion

The SLR critically contributed to fake image credibility in research. The findings based on SLR indicate the potential impact of SMNs in creating fake or manipulated images among YAs. It is interesting to note that that despite impersonating a fake image such users of SMNs seem to trust content and online images

without any suspicion (Wineburg & McGrew, 2016). The results are also replicated by another study conducted by United States School researchers. The study revealed that adolescents trust the perfect visual images displayed on the SMNs site (Kasra et al., 2018).

The major drawbacks of such beliefs pressurize them to achieve the same level of perfection otherwise their belief about their personal identity becomes distorted. Similarly, another research finding suggests that SMNs may be “misused by malicious users” for extracting personal information (Krombholz, Merkl, & Weippl, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that despite the wide scale popularity of SMNs for providing opportunities for social interactions, adolescents especially in their early teens, need to be not only monitored but also guided about the potential risks of SMNs in particular, about accepting their real identities.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations. For instance, the secondary data has been used to address a peculiar problem identified in the current research which may not satisfactorily answer the questions raised as the main objective. Thus, primary data could encompass the problem more accurately. This limitation of the research, however, indicates the direction for future research by using interview/ surveys to find answer the pertinent question. Further research may examine the difference between male and female persona with regards to SMNs to assess the variation between both groups.

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