

Differential Self-Presentation Across Multiple Social Network Sites

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the ways in which users of multiple social network sites (SNSs) differ their self-presentation across the various SNSs that they use; as well as analyzes how SNS users alter their self-presentation on SNSs based on their perceived audience. This study was granted permission by participants to follow their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat accounts and to perform content analysis on the artifacts that they generated during the phase of observation. A grounded theory approach was implemented and was effective in coding and analyzing both the ephemeral and non-ephemeral content observed in this study. Results indicate that participants have distinct self-presentation styles that they construct for SNSs. Several differences among the user-generated content observed on each SNS demonstrates the ways in which self-presentation differs between platforms. Results also indicate that differential self-presentation across SNSs may be determined by the platform's technological affordances instead of the user's perceived audience.

## Introduction

Social network sites (SNSs) are a new and popular means of communicating around the world via online platforms. SNSs are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.211). Essentially, SNSs are online platforms in which users create and manage a profile. This profile is an extension of the user and how they wish themselves to be perceived online (Liu, 2008). Users can interact and network with people all over the globe, managing their offline relationships or forging new ones online (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Glur & Lohaus, 2016). The networking comes in the form of sending messages, sharing videos and music, and “liking” posts. Research also suggests that SNSs are used as entertainment; a sort of pass-time activity. (Dogruer, Menevis, & Eyyam, 2011).

Among the most popular SNSs are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, & Snapchat (Smith & Anderson, 2018). This study will examine the ways in which users of multiple SNSs differ their self-presentation across multiple SNSs; as well as analyze how SNS users alter their self-presentation on SNSs based on their perceived audience. Each SNS has its own culture, features, and intricacies which can lead to varying degrees of self-presentation. These specific features of each SNS may attract different users, which might result in one individual having a different audience for each of the SNSs that they use. This study will attempt to identify the ways in which a user’s perceived audience influences the content that they generate.

Most of the current research on SNSs has been quantitative, relying on surveys to gather information. This is problematic because users do not seem to have an accurate understanding of their online activities (Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008) therefore, self-reported data isn't as reliable as direct observation. Conducting content analysis on participants' user-generated content will attempt to address this issue. Current studies have also been largely focused on non-ephemeral SNS content. Ephemeral content on SNSs is content that is posted for one's followers to see and interact with, but disappears after a set amount of time. Some SNSs, like Snapchat, are entirely ephemeral, while Facebook and Instagram have "story" features where users can post ephemeral content separate from their non-ephemeral main feed. This study is unique in conducting content analysis on ephemeral content. So far, to the knowledge of the researcher, no other study has attempted content analysis on ephemeral content; likely because of the difficulty of analyzing content which disappears shortly after being posted. Previous research on ephemeral SNS content have been surveys (Rauzzino & Correa, 2014; Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid) and interviews (Kelly, 2018; Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2015), both of which are user-report methodologies, not actual content observations.

### **Literature Review**

The emergence of the Internet has revolutionized social interaction, necessitating new areas of research in social interaction over the Internet. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), one field of research that emerged to address this new form of interaction, refers to human communication, either synchronous or asynchronous, that occurs from the use two or more electronic devices (Abrams, 2003). Walther (1996) concluded that CMC provided users the opportunity to engage in selective self-presentation. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CMC has evolved and has become widely popularized; due in no small part to the rise of SNSs.

According to Statista.com, there are well over 2 billion social media users in the world (“Number of social media users...”, 2018). SNSs serve to connect and manage individuals’ social networks as their main purpose, but they also can have an effect on a wide range of topics. For example, they can affect one’s health behavior (Fu, et al., 2017), influence consumer behavior and activity (Bartosik-Purgat, Filipchuck, & Hinner, 2017), affect the mental state of those suffering from anxiety and other psychological disorders (Calancie, Ewing, Narducci, Horgan, & Khalid-Khan, 2017) and have even been shown to affect students’ academic performance (Aljabry et al., 2017).

One of the limitations of studying SNSs is that it is a field that is always changing. There are vast numbers of SNSs that each offer a different user experience and more people join SNSs every day. An inspection of the Wikipedia “List of Social Networking Sites” identifies 196 unique and currently active SNSs (“List of social networking sites,” n.d). This list is not exhaustive and does not include defunct SNSs. Meng, Martinez, Holmstrom, Chungm and Cox (2017) stated that in the academic field of SNSs “Additional research is needed outside of Facebook to provide a more complete understanding of the uses and effects of SNSs” (p. 48). The increasing popularity of ephemeral content on SNSs provides an additional context of social interaction on SNSs to be studied.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman examines human interaction with a “dramaturgical approach”, a sociological perspective that describes and likens human interaction to a theatrical performance. The dramaturgical approach considers each individual as a performer who acts as a character and whomever they are interacting with is their audience. When in character, a performer uses “impression management” to influence the audience’s opinion in a way that suits the performer’s own interests at the time. The interests that

motivate a performer to act out a character are numerous and vary based on the environment and audience, but Goffman states that “regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him.” (1959, p. 2). Being in character can be stressful to many and social anxiety can manifest in situations where people attempt impression management (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

Additionally, self-presentation has been studied in various other contexts. Loewenthal analyzed the altering of self-presentation in handwriting (1975). Lewittes and Simmons (1975) studied how impression management is used to reduce the potential for negative reinforcement related to sexually motivated behavior. Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Tedeschi (1983) found that an individual’s response to humorous stimuli is increased while in the presence of others. They theorize that this occurred because the subject wanted to come across as a “friendly and cooperative person” (p. 62). The necessity for Asian sociologists to utilize impression management to be accepted among their peers and students was also studied (Unnithan, 1988).

Human interaction on SNSs and other CMC adds two dynamics that are most often not present in face-to-face interactions. The first is that online there is a degree of anonymity, or at least there is a physical separation between the parties interacting. If you’re interacting with people you’re not likely to meet again you’re able to take more risks in the way that you present yourself (Goffman, 1967). Second, given the wide, almost infinite, range of audiences able to see content posted on SNSs, impression management becomes more difficult. “Performers tend to give the impression, or tend not to contradict the impression, that the role they are playing at the time is their most important role and that the attributes claimed by or imputed to them are their most essential and characteristic attributes.” (Goffman, 1959, p.83).

Users of SNSs may have multiple roles they portray in different social environments and simply cannot give the impression that a single role is most important without deemphasizing another role, thus disparaging a particular audience. If Goffman's theory on how and why we generate our self-presentation is accurate, then it stands to reason that SNS users meticulously craft differing personas that are each used to appeal to the various audiences that they ascribe to the multiple SNSs that they use. Various studies have proposed different rationales for how SNS users construct their imagined audiences. This audience construction is integral in understanding the motivations SNS users have in altering their self-presentation online.

On SNSs, users generate content that can be consumed by a potentially limitless audience. Users therefore conceptualize an imagined audience to assist them in determining how to stylistically present the content that they post (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Marwick and boyd use the term "context collapse" to refer to online audiences and how people are not able to control which audience they are interacting with online like they can do in face-to-face interactions. Context collapse occurs on SNSs because user generated content can be viewed by multiple diverse groups of people. This makes it difficult for a user to present their ideal self to each group within a particular post. Marwick & boyd theorized that therefore, users alter their self-presentation to appeal to the most sensitive audience so there is no offense to any audience (2010). The most sensitive reader is described by Marwick and boyd as the "nightmare reader," one who is likely to be judgmental and to scrutinize user generated content, thus limiting one's personal disclosure on SNSs.

Marder, Joinson, Shankar, and Thirlaway's (2016) research on audience construction on SNSs reaches similar conclusions to Marwick and boyd's, but they differ in which audience they believe has the greatest effect on a users' self-presentation. Marder et al. theorized that it is not

the most sensitive or the “strictest” audience that users appeal to on SNSs, rather, it’s the “strongest audience” (2016). Their theory states that the strongest audience effect (SAE) constrains one’s online behavior based on the values of their audience. “Such value is largely determined by the perceived social and economic losses and gains that an audience has the power to inflict.” (Marder et al., 2016, pg. 56).

Kim and Lee examined the notion of online social network heterogeneity (2016). Results indicated that the diversity of a user’s online social network is linked to one’s motivation for using a particular SNS. The motivations that users have are broken down into two categories, relational motivation and informational motivation. Those with relational motivation use SNSs to maintain, improve and build relationships and those with informational motivation use SNS to share and consume information. They found that relational motivation is positively related to online social network heterogeneity and that conversely, informational motivation was not related to it. If relationally motivated people have such a diverse network, they may be limiting their self-presentation to appeal to either their most sensitive or strongest audience more so than their informationally motivated counterparts. Kim and Lee’s research provides additional evidence that the mechanism for audience conceptualization isn’t well understood.

Given the reviewed literature, the following research questions were proposed.

- 1) How do users of multiple SNSs differ their self-presentation across multiple SNSs?
- 2) How does a user’s perceived audience influence the content that they generate?

Additionally, this study will address the conflict observed in the reviewed literature regarding the mechanism by which users construct their SNS audience. Marwick and boyd (2010) believe that the values of the strictest audience is the primary determinant of why a user alters their self-presentation on SNSs, but Marder et al. (2017) argue that it is the strongest audience. This thesis



will attempt to address this conflict in the research by answering whether SNS users primarily construct their self-presentation to adhere to the values of the strictest audience, the strongest audience, or possibly a currently uncategorized audience.

### **Methodology**

Based upon the reviewed literature, the following research questions were designed: How do people who use multiple SNSs differ their self-presentation across the various SNSs that they use? How do SNS users alter their self-presentation based on their perception of their audience? Additionally, do users alter their self-presentation to appeal to their strongest or strictest audience? The last research question is based on context collapse and conflicting research on how context collapse occurs. A mixed method approach was used by this study to answer the research questions. A brief survey was conducted to gather demographic information and users SNS handles as well as to gather data on two quantitative questions on the frequency of their SNS usage. This survey was constructed and deployed using the data analysis software Qualtrics. The informed consent document was designed at the landing page for the survey, and participants were required to provide consent before they proceeded to the actual instrument.

The SNSs studied included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Each of the studied SNSs have a specific term used to describe user-generated content and this study will use each term accordingly. The term “Post” is both a general term for a unit of published user-generated content on SNSs, and is also the specific term used on Facebook and Instagram for the content that appears in a user’s content feed. Facebook and Instagram both also have “story” features which are ephemeral content that exist for only a maximum duration of 24 hours. The act of a user publishing content onto their “story” is also known as posting. The collection of posts to a story is what makes a story. On Twitter, the term “tweet” is the conventional term for

user-generated content posted to a user's content feed. On Snapchat, user-generated content is known as a "snap". Snaps are always ephemeral and can be uploaded to the user's story (where they have a 24-hour lifespan) or they can be sent directly to an individual or predetermined group of individuals, much like a private message. Because access to a user's private snaps is limited to the designated recipient, and cannot be assigned to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party, all observed snaps in this study came from participant's stories.

Snowball sampling was used across the SNSs being studied to gather participants. The link to the study was posted on the author's personal Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat accounts alongside a brief amount of information on the study and a plea for others to share the artifact. Since snowball sampling was conducted online via SNS, the sample was not limited by geographical boundaries. Anyone who spoke English from anywhere in the world was able to join, provided they were at least 18 years old and had at least one account on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat. Because the sample was gathered using promotion on the SNSs being studied, it was a near guarantee that potential participants possessed and actively used at least one of the studied SNSs.

This study included 60 participants in total. 174 participants signed up and filled out the initial survey but 114 of the completed surveys had to be deleted. 102 participants filled out the survey questions but did not provide any SNS handles for the researcher to follow. Eight other participants provided handles that were non-existent or their names were too common for the researcher to discern which account to add. Three participants did not accept the friend requests that they were sent. There was also one minor who signed up despite the study stating that participants must be 18 years old. Due to a clerical error, this participant was not discovered to be a minor until data analysis. Once their age was discovered their data was immediately deleted.

Fortunately, this had no effect on the results of the qualitative portion of this study because this participant did not generate any observable content.

Accounts were created on each of the studied SNSs and they were each named either “Comm DSP” or “CommDSP1”. They each had a generic profile image that featured the Rhode Island College logo as well as the name of the study. Once the sample was gathered, each of the participants SNS accounts were “friended” by the researching SNS accounts. Participants were made aware that they could drop out of the study at any point in time with no consequences. All data has been kept confidential to protect the privacy of participants and to preserve the integrity of the study. No further contact with participants was initiated by the researcher after the initial “friend” link had been established.

Observation and coding of data lasted for 20 consecutive days. This study employed grounded theory (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) as the primary method of content analysis. Other studies that have conducted content analysis on SNS have used a similar method of coding (Huang, Kai-Wah Chu, & Yu-Ting Chen, 2015; Souleles, 2012). In grounded theory, “the analyst is comparing each incident to other incidents in order to decide in which categories they belong. Thus, when considering any new incident, the analyst compares it with incidents that have already been coded into categories.” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 219).

Grounded theory is a particularly valuable approach for this study for two main reasons. The first reason being the ephemeral nature of SNS content. Ephemeral content disappears shortly after it is posted, therefore necessitating quick, and informative coding that can be referred to later on. Even non-ephemeral content on SNSs can be deleted by the user at any point. The second reason why grounded theory is a valuable approach for this study is that previously recorded data might make more sense after gaining an understanding of how a user

normally generates content. This is most valuable in interpreting the meaning of artifacts that were posted within the first few days of observation. After days of observing a user's generated content, you begin to understand what forms of content they typically post. Using a grounded theory approach allows the researcher to look back on previously coded data after gaining an understanding of the typical content that a particular user posts or general trends in the content of a specific SNS

Through the process of open-coding, 37 specific categories of user-generated content were established and coded for. Axial-coding was then used to integrate the 37 categories by combining and reducing them down into 13 more broad categories. These final 13 categories were then separated into two classifications. The first classification is the *primary classification* which contains 7 *primary categories* that represent the purpose of each individually analyzed artifact and identifies and expresses the motivations that SNS users have for generating content. The *secondary classification* is a bit more diversified in its categorical make-up and contains remnants of the original 37 unique categories. There are 6 *secondary categories* which account for highly specified user-generated content that act as the means through which SNS users present their primary motivations for generating content. While these categories represent various characteristics of user-generated content, they are not mutually exclusive. Often times throughout this study one artifact may have been found to fit into multiple primary and secondary categories.

## **Results**

### **Survey Results**

Participants were asked to fill out a survey as a precursor to the observational phase of research. The survey's main purpose was to obtain participants' informed consent, in addition to

their SNS handles, and gather demographic information such as age, gender, and education. The survey also asked two questions about the nature of their SNS usage. The first question asked “On a typical day, which of the following social network sites do you use? (Please select all that apply)”. The second question asked, “How often do you use the following social network sites?” Users report that Instagram had the highest rate of daily usage with 55 participants reporting that they use it on a typical day. Facebook had 46 daily users, Snapchat had 40, and Twitter had the least amount of daily users with only 27 participants.

Comparing the reported survey data on daily SNS usage to the number of accounts that were provided to be studied shows that not all users who reported using a SNS provided their handle for that SNS to be studied. Although this could have been oversight by some participants, it more likely represents the fact that some participants were comfortable with being followed on some of their SNS accounts but not others. Instagram ( $n = 46$ ) and Snapchat ( $n = 34$ ) both saw a modest reduction in the number of accounts provided to the reported number of daily users. On Facebook ( $n = 26$ ) there was a large (43.48%) reduction in the number of accounts provided. Twitter had only one participant who used it daily but did not sign up. However, Twitter ( $n = 28$ ) actually had more accounts provided to be studied than there were reported daily users. This is because participant 21 & 41 did not list Twitter as a SNS that they use on a daily basis but they did provide their Twitter handles to be studied at the conclusion of the survey.

The question asking participants how often they used SNSs was presented to participants using a Likert-type scale with answer options ranging from 1 “Multiple times an hour” to 5 “Less than once a day”. Not all participants answered for each SNS. Figure 1 conceptualizes the results of this question. Instagram usage appears quite high with 25.86% (response count 15) using it multiple times per hour, 17.24% (response count 10) using it every hour, and 41.38% (response

count 24) using it a few times a day. Instagram had the fewest number of participants that reported using it once a day or less (response count 5). Among the participants of this study, Snapchat usage seems quite polarized. 29.09% (response count 16) of participants reported using Snapchat multiple times an hour and an additional 29.09% reported using Snapchat less than once a day. Facebook exhibited the highest percentage of any SNS in any category with 47.16% (response count 25) of participants reporting that they use Facebook a few times a day. A moderate number of participants used Facebook multiple times an hour (response count 7) as well as less than once a day (response count 9). Twitter’s results indicate that it is used more infrequently than the other SNS. A total of 44.18% (response count 19) of participants reported using Twitter once a day or less, while only 20.93% (response count 9) reported using it once an hour or more.

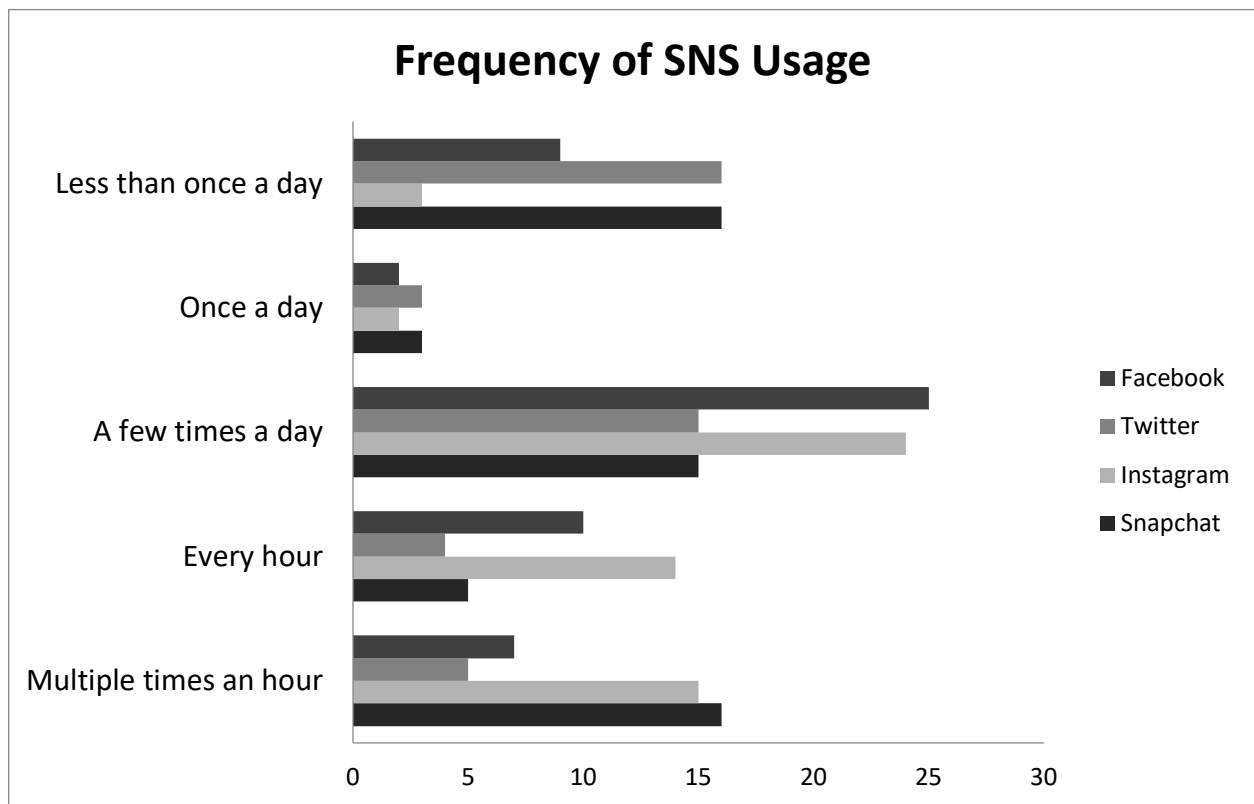


Figure 1: Frequency of SNS Usage.

## Content Analysis

There were 2,358 individual artifacts coded and analyzed from a total of 134 participant accounts; however, there were more artifacts that were observed over the course of the observation phase but they were omitted from analysis on the grounds of data saturation. It was determined that a total of 5 accounts (2 Facebook accounts and 3 Twitter accounts) reached data saturation at the benchmark of 100 posted artifacts. On Facebook, Participant 10 shared many humorous memes, creative decorations and intriguing invention videos. Participant 15 similarly posted many humorous memes but more frequently used vulgarities and regularly posted about romantic relationships. On Twitter, Participant 44 was almost exclusively dedicated to disseminating information. Participants 54 & 58 were shockingly alike in their patterns of posting about their own specific interests in pop culture.

The primary categories are *self-images*, *lifestyle*, *entertainment*, *information*, *complaints*, *heartfelt*, and *relationships*. They represent the various, primal motivations and rationales that dictate what a user posts on SNSs. **Self-images** categorize artifacts that contain pictures or videos that feature the user that has published the artifact. **Lifestyle** content is that which perpetuates a users' particularly crafted way of life and communicates it with their audience. Typical posts in this category include travel, food, life updates, school, work, and fall-themed posts (because data was collected during the month of September). **Entertainment** encompasses content that provides enjoyment to the user and their audience. This includes humorous content, and content about hobbies and personal interests such as television, movies, sports, video games, music, and art as well as pop culture and cute posts about animals and babies. The **information** category consists of content that disseminates general information, news stories, and promotes political opinions and ideologies. **Complaints**, as the name implies, includes complaints but it

also accounts for sarcastic artifacts and content that conveys the user's life struggles. **Heartfelt** content contains emotionally uplifting content including inspirational posts, memorials, and tributes. The final primary category, **relationships**, contains posts that feature or are about the users' friends and family, their romantic relationships, and nostalgic content.

Categories	Indicative Posts
1) Self-Images	A selfie in front of a popular monument.
2) Lifestyle	A photograph of an alcoholic beverage and the crashing waves at the beach.
3) Entertainment	Sharing a humorous clip from the television show "The Office".
4) Information	Sharing a news story about Brett Kavanaugh's SCOTUS confirmation hearing.
5) Complaint	Posting about how one's own life is "trash".
6) Heartfelt	Commemorating the first responders of 9/11.
7) Relationship	Posting photos of a friend and wishing them a happy birthday.

Table 1: Primary Classification Examples

The secondary categories are *memes*, *selfies*, *alcohol & drugs*, *profanity*, *filters*, and *humor*. They are some of the specific types of activities that act as the means through which SNS users present their primary motivations for generating content. **Memes** are "digital items with common characteristics that are imitated and reiterated around the web... that have become an integral part of digital culture in the past few years, attracting both popular and academic attention" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017). A **selfie**, as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* is "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and



shared via social media.” **Alcohol & Drugs** account for any artifact that features and/or promotes the recreational usage of alcohol and drugs. **Profanity** categorizes any artifact that contains obscene language, images, or explicitly stated sexual content. **Filters** graphically alter an image by inserting an overlay that adds a frame, geographical tag, event-themed cartoons, and they can even distort facial proportions. While third party applications can apply filters to an image, Snapchat and Instagram offer numerous filters that users can apply with a simple swipe of their finger. **Humor** is content that is perceived by the user to be humorous either to themselves or to their audience. Humor is already accounted for under the primary category of entertainment, but it warrants its own category due to the observed popularity of humorous content on SNSs.

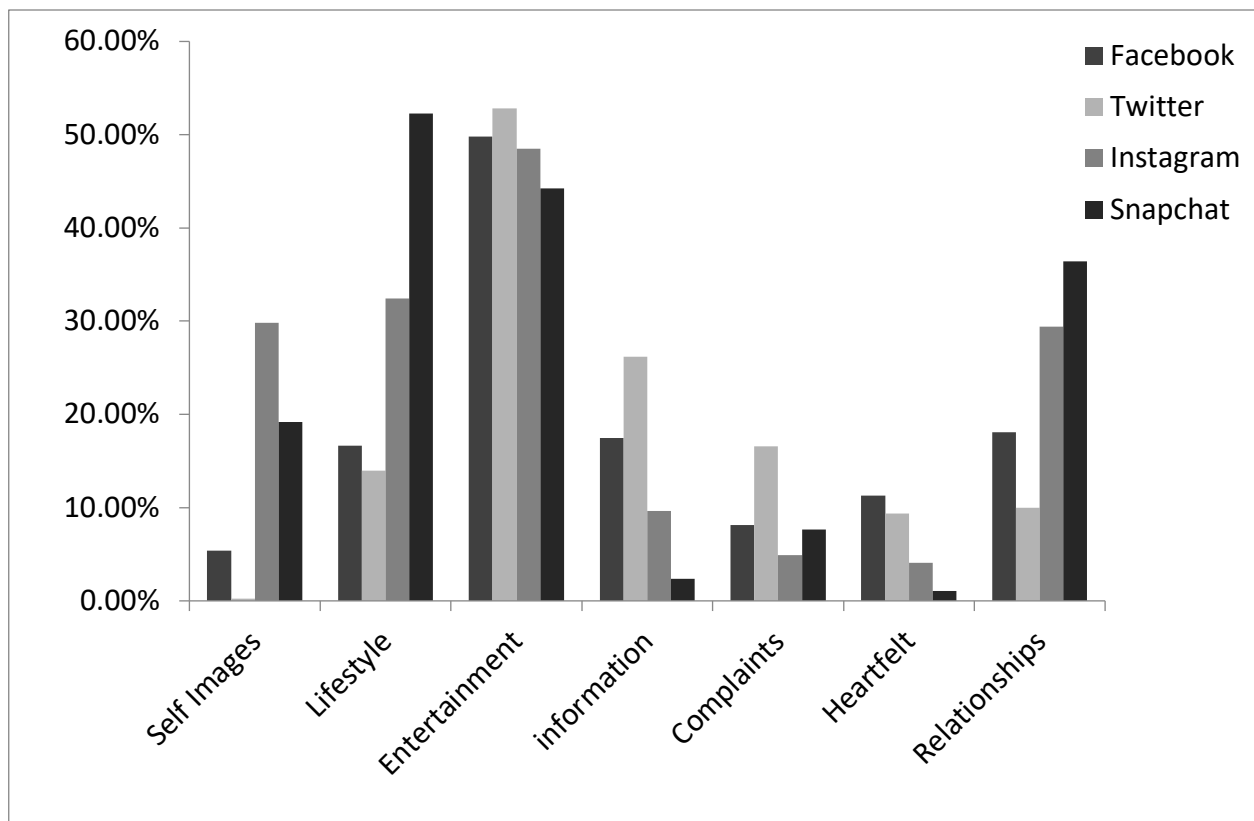


Figure 2: Percentages of content that derives from primary categories

**Facebook Results**

A total of 504 Facebook posts were analyzed from 26 different participants. As previously mentioned, data saturation was reached on Facebook by Participant 10 & 15. The average amount of Facebook posts observed is 19.38 posts per person, while the median value is 9. Participant 10 & 15 contributed 100 posts each, equaling 39.68% of the total number of analyzed Facebook posts. Conversely, there were 6 participants that didn't post at all during the timeframe of data collection.

Figure 2 demonstrates and compares the percentages of content that each primary category made-up of each of the studied SNSs. It is to be emphasized once more that an individual post can, and often is, classified under two or more primary categories. Therefore, the sum of the percentages in figure 2 will exceed one-hundred percent for each of the SNSs. On Facebook, entertainment (49.80%) was the most frequently coded primary category by more than double the amount of all other primary categories. Entertainment content on Facebook included the largest amount of humor (28.37%) and the largest amount of memes (19.25%) on any SNS. This is likely a direct correlation because online memes are most often created and posted to be humorous. Facebook, like Instagram and Snapchat has a "story" feature but it was used by only 2 participants, and only infrequently so.

Overall, Facebook appears to hold a middle ground among almost all categories. Its high entertainment percentage is not unique, its information percentage (17.46%) is close to the average, its relationship percentage (18.06%) is close to the average, and its complaint percentage (8.13%) is also quite average. Facebook does have the highest percentage in the heartfelt category (11.31%), and its self-image percentage (5.36%) is noteworthy because it displays how Facebook contains qualities of both ephemeral and non-ephemeral SNSs. The average percentage of self-images among all SNSs is 10.86%. There were only 2 self-images

published on Twitter, while Snapchat and Instagram generated a combined 91 self-images. Facebook may be on the lower end of this category but it holds a statistical middle ground, not only in self-images but in other categories as well. Essentially, content on Facebook is a little bit of everything.

### **Twitter Results**

Across 28 different participants, 929 tweets were analyzed; which is the largest number of artifacts analyzed in this study on any SNS. Facebook had the second highest amount of analyzed artifacts with 504 posts. This is despite Facebook having the least amount of participants ( $n = 26$ ) and Twitter being a close second ( $n = 28$ ). However, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are all within a 55 artifact difference of each other. Twitter has more than 400 artifacts than each of the other SNSs. This unusually large number of tweets was garnered in part by data saturation being reached by Participant 44, 54, & 58. Each participant contributed 100 tweets or 32.29% of the total number of analyzed Tweets. Four of the observed Twitter accounts did not post any content during the timeframe of data collection. The average amount of tweets observed is 33.17 tweets per person, while the median value is 27.5.

Not only does Twitter boast the greatest number of artifacts, it also has the highest percentage of content in any single category. 52.85% percent of tweets were coded into the entertainment category. Entertainment content on Twitter seems to be more about the users' hobbies than other SNS that use humor to entertain. For example, participant 9 tweeted about sports, participant 13 tweeted about music, participant 37 tweeted about video games, participant 54 tweeted about pop culture, and participant 58 tweeted about movies. A total of 80.80% of tweets by men contained entertainment content, while only 48.51% of tweets by women contained entertainment content.

Twitter also ranked highest in informational content (26.16%) and complaints (16.58%). Conversely, it ranks as the lowest SNS in lifestyle content (13.99%) and only 2 tweets contained self-images. These 2 self-images were tweeted by participant 58, who reached data saturation. Although only 100 of participant 58's tweets were analyzed, she did not post any other self-images during the timeframe of data collection.

### **Instagram Results**

There was a total on 466 Instagram posts analyzed; 85 posts from its main feed and 381 posts from Instagram stories. 13 participants did not post on Instagram's main feed, 23 participants did not post on their Instagram story, and eight of those participants did not post any content on either their main feed or their story. Instagram had the greatest number of participant accounts with 46 participants, and it exhibited the lowest amount of average posts. The average number of posts observed on the main feed is an extremely low 1.84 posts per person. For Instagram stories, the average number of posts observed is 8.27 posts per person.

The segregation of coding Instagram data into "main feed" and "story" grants a unique insight into the differences of user generated content on ephemeral and non-ephemeral SNS. Figure 3 illustrates these differences by directly comparing the percentages of content that each primary category made-up of participants main feed and their stories. The main feed exemplifies traditional, non-ephemeral Instagram. Participants maintain a well-regulated and refined account. Humor was seldom used, occurring in only 3.53% of posts. There were no complaints, no memes, no profanity, and no drugs featured on the main feed. This is the only SNS, including Instagram stories, that had no instances of any of those categories. Keeping true to itself as a photograph-oriented SNS, it also had the highest percentage of self-image content (58.82%), and selfies (14.12%). Participants also published several promotional posts (16.47%).

Because Instagram stories are ephemeral content, content posted through this channel is different than the non-ephemeral main feed. Entertainment content was quite high (49.34%) on Instagram stories. Participants often posted videos of themselves doing almost nothing, or of them doing mundane activities like driving. While the main feed had the largest number selfies (14.12%) on any SNS, stories featured the largest number of self-videos (12.86%).

Music was featured in a large number of Instagram stories (19.42%). Typically, music would be playing in the background of the aforementioned mundane videos. Participant 63 nearly posted everyday a video of herself driving and listening to music. Humor, complaints, memes, profanity, and alcohol & drugs, were not major occurrences, but were all observed more frequently on Instagram stories than they were on the main feed. Self-images (23.36%) were posted often but not nearly to the frequency as they're posted on the main feed. It's also important to note the similarities between the main feed and Instagram stories. They both reported near equal amounts of relationship, heartfelt, and lifestyle content.

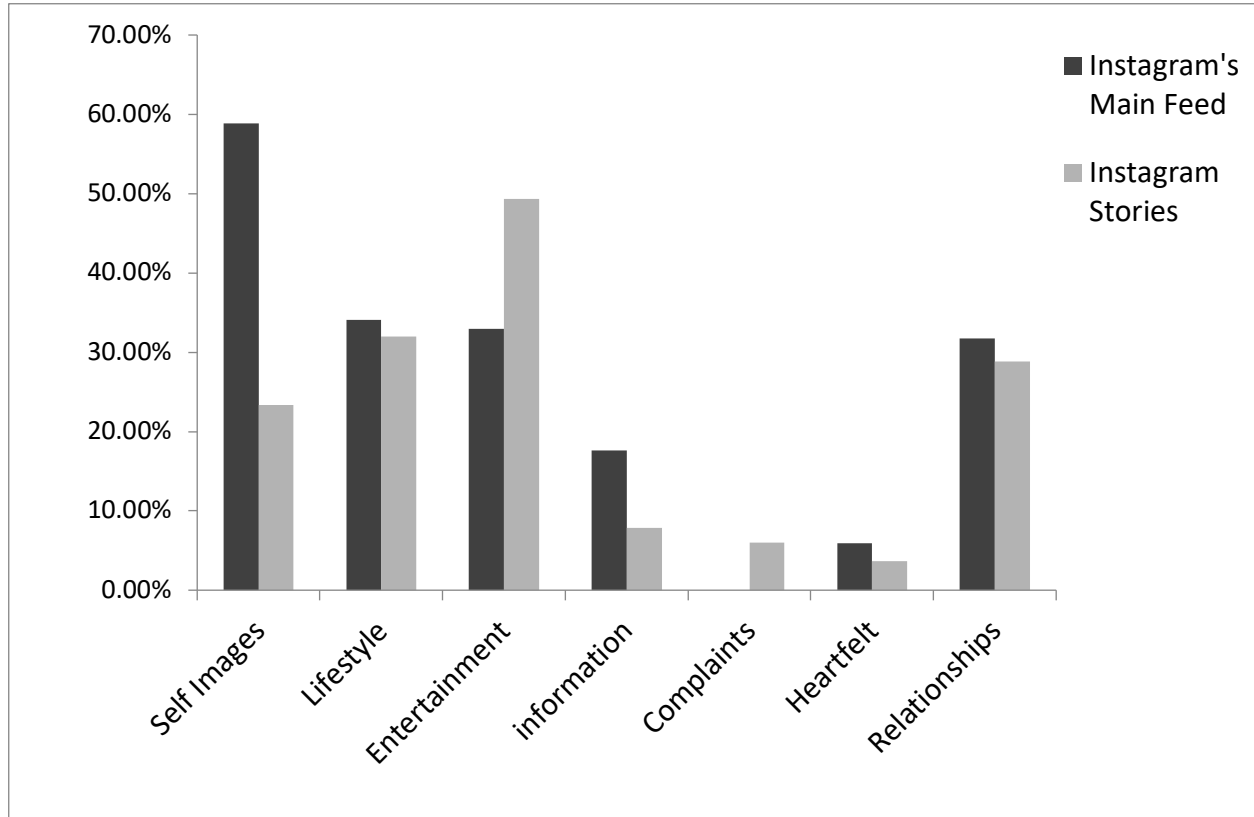


Figure 3: Percentages of primary category content on Instagram’s Main Feed & Instagram Stories.

**Snapchat Results**

Consisting of entirely ephemeral content, Snapchat usage is difficult to quantify. All snaps observed came from participants’ stories that disappear after 24 hours. A total of 459 Snaps were analyzed from 34 different participants. Ten of these 34 participants did not post any content during the timeframe of data collection. The average number of snaps observed is 12.38 snaps per person, and the median value is 5.5.

There was great deal of lifestyle content (52.29%) observed on Snapchat, by far the largest percentage of lifestyle content observed on any SNS. Participants snapped pictures of their food and drinks, pictures of the school they attend, their jobs, and most significantly, the traveling that they do. Be it either going on a tropical vacation or visiting a monument in their

local park, travel appears on Snapchat stories very often. Participants' heavy usage of lifestyle content highlights the popularity of snapping mundane, everyday activities. Relationship content (36.38%) is more frequent on Snapchat stories than on other SNSs. Videos of friends and family acting humorous were commonplace.

The percentage of self-images (19.17%) was high on Snapchat and it had the highest percentage of selfies (6.54%) of any SNS. Of the 30 selfies snapped during the timeframe of observation, only one of them was snapped by a male. Self-videos, the video equivalent to a selfie, were more frequently snapped than selfies (7.19%). 12.02% of the observed snaps contained filters. Profanity was used most often on Snapchat (6.32%), but it was still a relatively infrequent occurrence across all SNSs. Informational content (2.40%) and heartfelt content (1.09%) were both rarely observed on Snapchat.

### **Discussion**

There were several differences in the observed user-generated content that were generated on each SNS. This indicates that SNS users do in fact differ their self-presentation between multiple SNSs which provides us information on the ways in which their self-presentation differs between platforms. Facebook users utilize humor and are often more light-hearted than on other SNSs. Twitter stands out as it was used by the smallest number of participants but yielded that largest number of artifacts. Users posted on Twitter primarily to disseminate information and to share content about their hobbies and personal interests. Instagram is highly filtered as users attempt to present themselves in an almost flawless manner. Snapchat users intimately present themselves using mundane activities to perpetuate a particular lifestyle.

This study is unique in that it uses content analysis to study self-presentation on ephemeral SNS feeds such as Snapchat stories and compare it to more traditional SNS feeds like there is on Twitter. My findings suggest that ephemeral content on SNSs effectuates less regulated and less filtered self-presentation styles than non-ephemeral SNS content does. This means that users post more freely on ephemeral SNSs, likely because the content will be deleted in 24 hours. In other words, maybe differential self-presentation across SNSs is not determined by the user's perceived audience, maybe it's driven more by the technological affordances of the various platforms. Further research is needed to assess and substantiate this claim.

Mundane activities and the users' promotion of a crafted lifestyle are the most common forms of content posted on ephemeral SNSs. This includes videos of a user listening to music, or photographs taken on vacation. In this study, Instagram is the only SNS with observable ephemeral and non-ephemeral content feeds (due to lack of posts on participants' Facebook stories). Figure 3 proves through the example of Instagram, that there's observable variation in the types of content posted on a single SNS's ephemeral and non-ephemeral feeds.

Non-ephemeral content on SNSs are lasting artifacts and it seems from the results of this study that, contrary to Rauzzino & Correa (2017), and Arab & Diaz (2015), users, specifically young adults, understand the implications of non-ephemeral content. That is why participants in this study tended to filter their self-presentation on non-ephemeral SNSs more than they did on ephemeral SNSs. This study supports previous research that concludes that self-presentation on Instagram (specifically its main feed) is the most highly filtered of any SNS (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016). Users of Instagram's main feed are skilled at crafting and presenting to their followers a well-regulated version of themselves. Twitter users focus their generation of content to the dissemination of information and promotion of their hobbies. This differs greatly from



typical content on Instagram, but it still supports the theory that self-presentation on non-ephemeral SNSs is more heavily filtered than on ephemeral SNSs. The other non-ephemeral SNS, Facebook, exists in a middle ground between entertainment-oriented Twitter and the meticulously crafted self-presentation exhibited on Instagram. Facebook is likely able to exist in this middle ground given that it features a timeline and profile typical of non-ephemeral SNSs but also promotes the usage of ephemeral content in the form of stories (which were rarely used in this study) and live videos.

This study also attempted to determine whether participants altered their self-presentation in accordance with the values of their strongest or strictest audience. At the heart of this question is context collapse and who or what determines it. There was a large amount of variation examined among the generated content of participants. As shown in Figure 2 and discussed extensively in the results section, there were many differences in the types of content posted on each SNS. As a qualitative study, the nuances of our participants' habits on SNSs is apparent and has led us to agree with neither Marwick & boyd (2010) nor Marder et al. (2016). Due to such a high degree of variation of user-generated content among participants, it cannot be determined whether users alter their self-presentation in accordance with the values associated to either the strongest or the strictest audience. Context collapse is still considered to be occurring among users due to the observed differences in user generated content among SNSs; but this study cannot confidently attribute any one type of audience to be the cause of users' variation in self-presentation.

Out of the 174 participants who completed the survey, 114 of them did not provide any SNS handles to be followed or, in some cases, provided bogus and indiscernible handles. That means that 65% of those who filled out the survey did not feel comfortable with being followed

on their SNS accounts. Even participants who provided at least one of their SNSs to be followed did not allow themselves to be followed on all of the SNSs that they reported using. This raises the question, what is it that these SNS users do not want to be seen? It suggests that SNS users are quite concerned about their privacy online.

During the phase of observation, several participant accounts did not generate any content and various other accounts generated a relatively large amount of content. At first glance, it may be concluded that this is a problem with the interpretation of research or how it was gathered. From a statistical standpoint, it may seem that users who did not generate content provided no data, or data that is void of analytical value, while users who generated large amounts of data skewed the results to reflect their tendencies. Importantly, the choice to *not* generate content is itself a choice that the user makes and therefore, holds communicative value in understanding the user's tendencies on SNSs. Therefore, these two polarized extremes do not produce statistical unreliability; they are simply a representation of how user-generated content is posted in the real-world. Applying the Pareto Principle to this matter can help to make sense of how these two extremes contribute to the entire amount of data (Sanders, 1987). The application of the principle states that 80% of user-generated content is generated by 20% of the users. For example, in this study, 79.52% of content generated on Instagram Stories were generated from exactly 20% of Instagram users.

Furthermore, the recognition of there being two extremes in frequency of generating SNS content holds value. Comparing this finding with Figure 1 grants us an understanding of how people use SNSs. In Figure 1, Twitter was reported to be used the least and Instagram the most despite Twitter having the largest number of analyzed artifacts and Instagram having almost the least amount of analyzed artifacts. This shows that users do not interpret "using SNSs" to be the

same as generating content. A user very well may use a particular SNS daily but instead of generating content every day, they are consuming the content generated by the accounts they follow. This is reflected in the large number of users that didn't generate content but did state that they used particular SNSs daily. This finding supports previous research that suggested SNSs are used as a pass-time activity (Dogruer, Menevis, & Eyyam, 2011).

It is important to note the limitations of this study to outline suggestions for further research in this field. As a qualitative study, this did not include a representative sample. Being an honors thesis, this study had only one primary researcher. Given the ongoing, daily, time-intensive nature of studying ephemeral content on SNSs, having a team of researchers would have allowed for the examination of a larger population as well as ensuring the accuracy of coding by testing inter-rater reliability. There were also significantly more females in this study than males. Future studies should focus on analyzing ephemeral content, which is an emerging trend on SNSs that needs more research. Qualitative studies should use this study as a framework to analyzing ephemeral content and should recognize that there is more to be learned about self-presentation and ephemeral content. Quantitative studies on self-presentation and ephemeral content on SNSs should consider this research in the creation of their research method and the interpretation of their results.

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