Taking the Good with the Bad:

Effects of Facebook Self-presentation on Emotional Well-Being

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Self-presentation is the act of strategically revealing, concealing, and editing the self, sometimes deceptively, in order to convey a desired impression to an audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). For instance, people routinely attempt to come across as competent to bosses, witty or entertaining to friends, or physically attractive to romantic interests. As these examples show, self-presentation has an explicit *social function*, in that people attempt to exert interpersonal influence by convincing audiences of their qualities. Additionally, self-presentation has a less obvious but essential *identity construction function*, in that people figure out who they are and how they feel about themselves by crafting public images and observing their audience’s responses (Schlenker, Dlugolecki, & Doherty, 1994). Indeed, the process of engaging with and attempting to impress an audience has been shown to induce changes in people’s self-concepts and self-esteem (e.g., Kelly & Rodriguez, 2006; Tice, 1992).

In recent years, social network sites (SNSs) have infused the study of self-presentation with renewed theoretical vigor. SNSs function by inviting users to describe themselves through detailed personal profiles and then connecting them with large audiences of friends, family members, acquaintances, and/or strangers with similar interests (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Profile self-presentation has become a major locus of academic interest because (1) it is extraordinarily ubiquitous, with billions of users worldwide creating and becoming affected by their online versions of self on a regular basis, and (2) it differs from everyday, non-mediated forms of self-presentation in theoretically meaningful ways. While face-to-face self-presentations are typically impromptu, evanescent, and delivered to small audiences of just one or several other people, SNS-based self-presentations can be edited and rehearsed, can be archived and permanently available online, and are broadcast to unprecedentedly large audiences. What kinds of self-presentations do people construct under these circumstances? What are the social and identity construction functions of these self-presentations?

Chapter 26 discusses the social function of SNS-based self-presentations, or how users enhance their interpersonal relationships and acquire social capital online. The purpose of the present chapter is to address the identity construction, or *intrapersonal* effects of profile self-presentation. How do the versions of self publicized through SNSs affect how people view, understand, and feel about themselves? I begin by detailing the constellation of technological affordances that shape the content of profile self-presentation, as well as the resulting images of self that are conveyed through profiles. I then discuss the effects of engaging with one’s own profile on feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. Since SNS use involves engaging with others’ self-presentational claims as much as with one’s own, I then turn the tables and investigate the repercussions of exposure to others’ profiles on users’ subjective well-being. I conclude with a discussion of the state of theoretical development on the intrapersonal effects of SNS-based self-presentation, as well as with suggestions for theoretical advancement.

Please note that while SNSs encompass a multitude of technological platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, the majority of research on this topic has focused on Facebook. Several reasons may account for the disproportionate attention bestowed upon Facebook: It is the most popular SNS, with 1.2 billion users worldwide, and therefore highly impactful; it is among the oldest SNSs, thus allowing academic research to accrue over time; and it features extremely detailed profiles, where users are not only prompted to divulge general descriptive information (e.g., “about me,” favorite TV shows, favorite quotations, relationship history, etc.), but also to broadcast their daily thoughts, musings, and activities through unrestricted free-form text and photographs. Self-presentation is therefore a more central part of the social networking experience on Facebook than on other SNSs. Unless otherwise noted, the research discussed below was conducted on Facebook.

**Self-presentation Construction on Facebook: The Desirable Self**

What kind of self-presentations do people create on Facebook? As previously mentioned, online self-presentation is markedly different from its face-to-face counterpart, in that it is shaped by an assortment of technological affordances that alter how people process and convey information. The theoretical framework of *selective self-presentation* (Walther, 1996; 2007) identifies the following affordances as significant in shaping online self-presentation. First, *asynchronicity*, or unlimited composition time, allows online communicators ample opportunity to reflect upon, plan, and execute their self-presentational claims. Second and relatedly, *editability* allows them to revisit, alter, and polish these claims before delivering them to the audience. Notably, both asynchronicity and editability are luxuries that are unavailable in face-to-face interaction, where communicators cannot linger indefinitely while composing their thoughts, nor can they “take back” undesirable statements. Third, *the reallocation of cognitive resources* enables online communicators to invest the totality of their attentional resources into the self-presentational task at hand, without impediment or distraction from environmental disturbances. For instance, a Facebook profile can be composed in the privacy of one’s study, with no other stimuli competing for one’s attention. Conversely, while crafting one’s self-presentation during a dinner date, one’s attention is split between the conversation and the waiter, food, other diners, ambient noises, and happenings in the restaurant. Fourth, *a reduction in nonverbal cues* frees online communicators from having to manage cues such as gestures, posture, eye contact, and physical appearance during the interaction. Instead, they can display their physical selves through photographs, which can be easily staged and selected for conveying desirable images (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

On the whole, these technological affordances endow online communicators with substantial control over their self-presentational claims – much more control than is available to face-to-face communicators. This control can be used to craft optimized images, that are more aligned with users’ self-presentational goals, whatever those goals may be. This is the key proposition of the selective self-presentation framework. In fact, the redundancy present in the formulation of “selective self-presentation” (self-presentation being a selective process by definition) is specifically designed to convey the notion that online self-presentation is selective above and beyond its face-to-face counterpart.

What are users’ self-presentational goals on Facebook? Generally speaking, people desire to impress their audiences by presenting attractive, interesting, and competent selves. Face-to-face research shows that the presence of an audience substantially amplifies this desire, with people simultaneously feeling more anxious about their public performances and more eager to impress (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). As previously discussed, Facebook connects users with unprecedentedly large audiences, with one recent study estimating that the average Facebook user counts 440 audience members (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). It is safe to say that at no other point in history were ordinary people able to summon such vast audiences for their self-presentational claims. This level of public scrutiny should magnify self-presenters’ motivation to impress, and should lead them to expend considerable thought and effort into crafting desirable images. Additionally, self-presentational claims on Facebook are recordable and archived onto the site, ensuring that audiences have access to them for significant lengths of time. Recordability should further enhance users’ motivation to come across in a desirable way.

In sum, the selective self-presentation theoretical framework proposes that Facebook users should be highly motivated to create desirable images (due to the presence of an audience and of recordability) and able to do so (due to the controllable affordances described earlier). In support of these claims, Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) found that Facebook users put forth carefully curated selves, that emphasize social connectedness, popularity, well-roundedness in terms of activities and interests, and thoughtfulness, while editing out less desirable aspects of self, such as pessimism, anxiety, and lack of spontaneity. These identities are (1) aspirational, in that users value them and sincerely wish to embody them, and (2) are tied to the technologically mediated realm of Facebook, in that users believe they cannot express them quite as successfully offline. Further support for the selective self-presentation framework emerged from the cognate domain of online dating, where users have access to the same controllable affordances and are similarly motivated to impress their large audiences of romantic prospects: Users embellished their online personae through small and strategically placed deceptions, that either catered to their audience’s preferences (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, & 2008) or compensated for specific shortcomings, such as low physical attractiveness (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Despite this initial evidence in support of the selective self-presentation framework, a subsequent study failed to find idealization in Facebook self-presentations (Back et al., 2010). Facebook users were asked to report their actual and ideal personalities using an abbreviated form of the Big Five Personality Inventory, which captures people’s extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and emotional stability. Then, naïve observers were asked to infer these same traits from Facebook users’ profiles. Results show that observers’ ratings were significantly correlated with users’ actual-self ratings, but uncorrelated with users’ ideal-self ratings, leading the authors to conclude that Facebook profiles convey an accurate, rather than embellished version of self. While this pattern of results appears discordant with the propositions of the selective self-presentation framework, it still leaves open the possibility that Facebook profiles convey images that are more positive than users’ actual selves (although, as we have seen, not entirely decoupled from them). Since each of the Big Five personality traits contains a positive (e.g., emotionally stable, conscientious) and a negative anchor (e.g., neurotic, unconscientious), it is possible that observers’ ratings had a higher mean – indicative of more positive evaluations, than self-ratings, despite the two being highly correlated.

We considered this possibility in a subsequent study in our lab (Toma & Carlson, 2015). As a departure from Back et al.’s (2010) research, we focused on Facebook users’ own beliefs about how they come across in their profiles, rather than on naïve observers’ perceptions. We asked college students to rate how they think they come across in their Facebook profiles using semantic differentials with a negative (e.g., unlikeable, unattractive) and positive anchor (e.g., likeable, attractive). People’s beliefs about how they come across to others are known as meta-perceptions (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). We then compared these Facebook meta-perceptions with users’ reports of how they actually view themselves (i.e., actual selves) and how they would ideally like to be (i.e., ideal selves). Several results replicated Back et al.’s (2010) findings: Facebook meta-perceptions were significantly correlated with users’ actual self-views, indicating consistency between the two, and were uncorrelated with users’ ideal self-views, supporting the notion that the Facebook self is not idealized. However, we also found a clear positive skew in users’ Facebook meta-perceptions: All meta-perceptions were significantly higher than the mid-point of the scale used, indicating that users believed they came across positively in their profiles. Moreover, on dimensions of self indicative of sociability and being laid-back (i.e., “outgoing,” “funny,” “adventurous,” “relaxed,” and “calm”) , users believed they came across more positively on Facebook than they really were. These dimensions are arguably important for popularity among college students, which is why they might have been targeted for self-enhancement.

Interestingly, Facebook users believed they came across accurately on dimensions of self whose enactment required the audience’s complicity, such as likeability and friendliness, or required direct evidence, such as creativity and physical attractiveness. These findings suggest that the stretching of the truth that can happen in Facebook profiles is minimized by the presence of an audience, whose input on self-presenters’ claims is invited (i.e., through “likes” and “comments”), and who expect a “show, don’t tell” approach to certain self-presentational claims, such as creativity and physical attractiveness (see also Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

In summary, this body of research offers evidence in support of the notion that Facebook self-presentation is selectively self-presented, in the sense that it is carefully curated, positive, sometimes embellished, but definitely not decoupled from reality. The presence of an audience of friends and family who knows the self-presenters well and can contribute to the profile appears to anchor self-presentations in reality, and foreclose egregious deceptions. Nonetheless, self-presenters have sufficient liberty to emphasize the positive aspects of self, leading to the creation of images that they themselves consider flattering, often more so than strictly warranted by reality (Toma & Carlson, 2015). In particular, images of self that display social connectedness, popularity, and social integration seem to be especially prominent on Facebook (Toma & Carlson, 2015; Zhao et al., 2008). All in all, the Facebook self appears to be desirable: It is very much anchored in users’ actual selves, but selectively emphasizes the positive aspects of this actual self, while omitting or downplaying the negative ones.

**The Upside: Facebook Self-affirmation**

What are the intrapersonal effects of crafting and then engaging with the version of self encapsulated in the Facebook profile? Do the images of self projected on Facebook affect how people understand and evaluate themselves? In other words, do they affect users’ emotional well-being? We tackled these questions in a suite of studies where we asked users to attend to their own Facebook self-presentations and then measured various indicators of emotional well-being (Toma, 2013; Toma & Hancock, 2013). We proposed self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) as an overarching framework with high predictive ability regarding the psychological effects of engaging with such a version of self.

Self-affirmation theory argues that people have a fundamental need for self-worth and self-integrity: It is imperative that they uphold a positive and flattering view of self in order to cope with the inevitable challenges and threats of everyday life. Indeed, if people didn’t consider themselves to be inherently good and valuable, they would likely be paralyzed by failure and unable or unwilling to fend for themselves. People achieve this elevated vision of self through a variety of tactics, many of them defensive: They reject information that threatens their self-worth, despite this information being accurate; they hold implausibly inflated beliefs about their own merits and capabilities; and they downplay their own contribution to negative events, while exaggerating their contribution to positive ones (see Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

One additional route towards securing a sense of self-worth is self-affirmation, defined as the simple process of bringing to awareness positive and cherished aspects of self (Steele, 1988). These include values and fundamental belief systems, defining social roles, treasured relationships, and personal accomplishments. Simply focusing on this information supplies an overall sense of well-being and of perspective: In the grand scheme of things, people realize that they are worthy and valuable and, as a result, any given threat that they may be dealing with seems less consequential. In fact, the trademark effect of self-affirmation is that it neutralizes the defensive responses that are naturally elicited by ego threats. Since self-affirmation fulfills the fundamental need for positive self-regard, it renders other defense mechanisms unnecessary.

As previously discussed, the Facebook version of self tends to highlight social connectedness with friends and family, and selectively focuses on flattering aspects of self, while remaining grounded in reality. We hypothesized that Facebook profile self-presentation would serve as an everyday venue for self-affirmation, and thus would exercise positive effects on users’ emotional well-being (Toma & Hancock, 2013, Study 1). We adopted a two-prong procedure to testing this claim. First, we utilized the defensiveness-reducing paradigm of self-affirmation effects (McQueen & Klein, 2006), which proposes that an activity can be deemed self-affirming if it reduces the defensive responses that are naturally elicited by ego threats. Such a reduction in defensiveness indicates that participants’ reservoirs of self-worth have been replenished by the self-affirming activity. Second, we directly compared the effects of Facebook profile exposure to those of a well-established self-affirmation exercise: Pondering and writing about one’s most important values (McQueen & Klein, 2006).

Specifically, we threatened participants’ academic egos through failure feedback on a public speaking task and gave them an opportunity to defend themselves by derogating the feedback. Before the opportunity for feedback derogation, we interjected another, ostensibly unrelated activity: the self-affirmation manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to examine their own Facebook profile for five minutes or, for comparison purposes, a stranger’s profile, or to complete the values-essay self-affirmation manipulation. If Facebook profiles are indeed self-affirming, we expected participants who examined theirs to react less defensively to the failure feedback than participants who examined a non-affirming profile (i.e., a stranger’s). We also expected participants who completed the Facebook self-affirmation procedure to behave identically to participants who completed the values-essay self-affirmation procedure. The results supported these hypotheses. After engaging with their Facebook version of self, participants acted in more open-minded and less defensive ways, indicating that their perceptions of self-worth had been boosted: They were less likely to reject the feedback as inaccurate, to rate the evaluator as incompetent, or to dislike the evaluator. In fact, participants who were self-affirmed via Facebook reacted identically to participants who were self-affirmed using the well-validated values-essay technique. Additionally, participants who examined their own profile self-presentations registered an increase in positive affect, feeling more “supported,” “loved,” “grateful,” and “loving” than their counterparts who examined a stranger’s profile (Toma & Hancock, 2013, Study 1).

This initial study indicates that attending to one’s own Facebook self-presentation can soothe a hurt ego. However, it is important to acknowledge that participants in this study only experienced well-being benefits because an experimenter *instructed* them to engage with their Facebook self-presentation. Would participants experience the same benefits on their own, absent an experimenter’s prodding? Do people naturally gravitate towards their own Facebook profiles in an effort to restore feelings of well-being? We examined this possibility in a subsequent study (Toma & Hancock, 2013, Study 2). We used the same ego threat procedure as in Study 1, with participants given failure feedback on an academic task or, for comparison purposes, neutral feedback. Then, instead of instructing them to go on Facebook, we presented them with a list of five activities and asked them to choose which one they would like to perform next. One of these activities was examining one’s own Facebook profile; the decoy activities were pre-tested to be equally interesting, engaging, and exciting, but not self-affirming. Results show that, when participants’ egos were not threatened (i.e., after receiving neutral feedback), they chose the Facebook activity at a rate not different from chance. However, when their egos were threatened (i.e., after receiving failure feedback), they gravitated towards their Facebook profiles at a rate double that of their non-threatened counterparts. This provides evidence that people *do* appeal to their Facebook selves in order to assuage feelings of distress, and allows us to make stronger claims that Facebook self-presentation offers users emotional well-being benefits in times of psychological need.

A large body of research shows that, in addition to boosting overall feelings of self-worth, self-affirmation has numerous other salutary effects, such as decreasing stress, improving mood, and reducing distortions in social perceptions (see Sherman & Cohen, 2006, for an excellent review). In a subsequent study (Toma, 2013), I investigated whether becoming affirmed by engaging with one’s own Facebook self-presentation has such additional benefits – specifically, boosting self-esteem. Note that, although related, self-worth (the hallmark of self-affirmation) and self-esteem are distinct, with self-esteem being viewed as just one of several resources that people can use for boosting feelings of self-worth and therefore achieving self-affirmation (Steele et al., 1993).

The measurement of self-esteem presents challenges, because (1) self-esteem is highly liable to socially desirable responding, with participants often exaggerating their reported self-esteem in order to conform to social norms, and (2) many people are unaware or unsure of their self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Fazio & Olson, 2003). To address these challenges, I used an implicit procedure to assess self-esteem: the implicit association test (IAT). The IAT measures the speed with which participants associate words pertaining to themselves with positive (e.g., “wonderful,” “superb”) and negative evaluations (i.e., “terrible,” “awful”). Its underlying logic is that, if participants routinely think of themselves in positive ways, they will more quickly associate self-related words with positive than with negative associations, whereas if they routinely think of themselves in negative ways, they will more quickly associate self-related words with negative rather than positive associations. The IAT has been shown to be robust against reporting biases, and to tap attitudes that people might not consciously know they endorse (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

Given the desirable nature of Facebook self-presentation, I hypothesized that after browsing their own profiles for five minutes, participants would register an increase in state self-esteem, as measured by the IAT, compared to participants who browsed an average stranger’s profile. Results supported this prediction. Engaging with the Facebook version of self supplied a significant self-esteem boost, leading participants to evaluate themselves more positively on a deep, unconscious level. These results are consistent with Gonzales & Hancock (2011), who similarly found that analyzing and writing on one’s own profile led to increases in self-reported self-esteem (measured using Rosenberg’s scale) compared to looking at oneself in the mirror.

To summarize, this body of research has identified several emotional well-being benefits conferred by one’s own Facebook profile self-presentation: a boost in feelings of self-worth (i.e., self-affirmation), a more open-minded and less defensive attitude towards threatening information, increased positive affect, and increase temporary self-esteem, measured both in an explicit and implicit fashion. The act of selectively presenting the self in front of an audience made up of friends, family, and acquaintances serves a substantial intrapersonal function: It affects how people think of and evaluate themselves. Since the audience inspires self-presenters to put their best foot forward, and the technological platform of social media allows them to carefully control their statements, the images of self presented on Facebook tend to be desirable, and so are the subsequent evaluations of self.

**The Downside: Social Comparison on Facebook**

As previously mentioned, composing and attending to one’s own self-presentation is only one aspect of Facebook use. It almost goes without saying that users also engage with one another’s self-presentations, observing and reflecting on their friends’ self-presentational claims. This phenomenon has been labeled “social surveillance” (Joinson, 2008). What are the intrapersonal effects of social surveillance? If emotional well-being benefits are accrued from engaging with one’s own self-presentation, are they also accrued from engaging with others’?

The literature to date strongly suggests that this is not the case. In an initial study on this topic, Chou and Edge (2012) found that heavy Facebook users and those who included more strangers in their friend network were more likely to endorse beliefs that others had happier lives than them and that life was unfair. In other words, a tendency to spend a great deal of time on Facebook and to connect with strangers was correlated with perceptual distortions about the quality of others’ lives compared to one’s own. To explain this pattern, the authors proposed that Facebook users’ social perceptions are distorted by two heuristics. First, the availability heuristic, whereby individuals base their judgments on information that they can easily recall, leads heavy Facebook users to bring to memory others’ flattering Facebook self-presentations, and inhibits deeper reflection about aspects of friends’ lives that may not be captured onto the Facebook profile and that may not be quite so glamorous. Second, the correspondence bias, whereby individuals tend to assume that others’ actions reflect their personality traits and stable dispositions, rather than situational factors, leads heavy Facebook users to assume that the flattering self-presentations encapsulated by Facebook reflect others’ actual personality traits and not happy occurrences in their lives. The authors argue that these heuristics work together to create illusions that the desirable self-presentations on Facebook comprehensively reflect others’ stable dispositions and accomplishments. However, the operations of these heuristics were not tested directly in this initial study.

How do these distorted perceptions of others’ successes affect users’ own emotional well-being? This question was taken up by several studies. Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli (2014) drew on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to argue that people naturally compare themselves with others and that when these comparisons are unfavorable, people’s emotional well-being suffers. In particular, people are affected by comparisons to those who are similar to them. On Facebook, comparisons with similar others (friends, classmates, coworkers) are inevitable, and given users’ selective self-presentation, they are likely to be unfavorable. Using a correlational design, the authors found that spending more time on Facebook led to depressive symptomology, and that this relationship was mediated by users’ tendency to engage in social comparisons on Facebook. In other words, users who spent a great deal of time on Facebook were more prone to engage in social comparisons, and these comparisons led them to depression. As a point of departure from the classical exposition of social comparison theory, the authors found that *any* comparison on Facebook led to depression, not just comparisons with those who ostensibly fare better than oneself. A similar study (Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015) showed that Facebook surveillance, or the act of reading the newsfeed as well as others’ profiles, was correlated with envy, which in turn led to depression among Facebook users. The authors explained this pattern via social rank theory (Sloman, Gilbert, & Hasey, 2003), which proposes that humans find themselves in a perpetual state of competition with one another for power, attractiveness, and status, and those who perceive themselves as subordinates in this struggle are vulnerable to depression. Applied to Facebook, this theory would propose that selective self-presentations in profiles create a perception that others are more successful than oneself, which in turn fosters depression.

Both of these studies used survey designs, where participants were asked to estimate their tendency to engage in social comparison and experience envy generally, leaving open the question of how it is that they respond to directly observing Facebook friends’ profiles. Haferkamp & Kramer (2011) provide some answers: In an experimental design, participants who examined profiles of attractive and successful individuals experienced fewer positive emotions and poorer body image than participants who examined profiles of unattractive and unsuccessful others. Similarly, Appel (in press) finds that participants generally experienced envy after seeing an attractive Facebook profile, and that these feelings of envy were stronger for depressed than non-depressed users. Presumably, selective self-presentation on Facebook can activate feelings of inferiority in depressed individuals, which in turn predicts envy and an aggravation of the depressive symptomology. However, both of these studies used fake Facebook profiles, fabricated by the experimenters to be either desirable or undesirable. It is unclear whether these profiles are congruent with the actual Facebook profiles that users are exposed to on an everyday basis. Additionally, both these studies used profiles of strangers, rather than of users’ actual friends. Given that Facebook users spend the majority of their time reading about their existing network of friends, rather than of complete strangers, it will be important for future research to clarify how users respond emotionally to those with whom they have a preexisting connection (friends, family members, acquaintances).

Finally, one study shows that, just as users gravitate towards their own Facebook profiles to restore emotional well-being (see previous section), they also use others’ profiles to manage emotional needs – specifically, mood. Using fake profiles that were manipulated to be either desirable or not, Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) found that Facebook users who were experiencing negative mood due to failure feedback in a task preferred to spend time on undesirable, rather than desirable profiles. Facebook users appear sensitive to social comparisons on Facebook, and in particular to the deleterious effects of exposure to flattering, selectively self-presented profiles.

To summarize, this emerging area of research pinpoints to real psychological costs that can come from selective self-presentation on Facebook: When examining others’ profiles, users are prone to social comparison, and this social comparison leaves them feeling dejected, arguably because they don’t feel they measure up to others’ glittering lives. Individuals with psychosocial problems, such as depression, appear to be especially vulnerable to these unflattering comparisons.

Overall, there appears to be a disconnect between users’ understanding of their own profile self-presentation and of others’. While users are consciously putting their best foot forward in their own profiles, crafting the “desirable self” described earlier, they may fail to realize that so does everybody else. Instead, users appear to take at face value others’ profile self-presentations, which in turn leads them to assume that they compare unfavorably to others. No research has yet explored this gap between users’ understanding of their own Facebook self-presentation and of others’, making this an exciting area for future scholarly inquiry. It is especially puzzling that heavy Facebook users appear more prone to this perceptual distortion than light users (Chou & Edge, 2012), because, through dedicated use of Facebook over time, they might have learned that others’ self-presentational strategies are similar to their own. Understanding why this is the case is also important.

**Theoretical Discussion and Future Directions**

How might we characterize the current state of theoretical development on the subjective well-being effects of SNS self-presentations? As detailed in this chapter, there are three facets to this issue: (1) understanding the kinds of self-presentations that are crafted on SNSs; (2) understanding the effects of one’s own self-presentation; and (3) understanding the effects of others’ self-presentations. The connection between attending to Facebook self-presentations (either one’s own or others’)and well-being effects has been made by a fairly substantial body of research. However, as previously discussed, the academic community is yet to unpack the relationship between attending to one’s own self-presentation and attending to others’. Why is there a self-other discrepancy between people’s understanding of their own and others’ self-presentational strategies? Why do people fail to realize that others also glamorize their lives to some extent on Facebook?

A related question that presents itself is that of the greater ecology of Facebook use. Facebook enables multiple types of psychologically meaningful activities. In this chapter, we have reviewed ample evidence that engaging with one’s own self-presentation produces quite different intrapersonal effects than engaging with others’. These are just two of the possible uses of Facebook, with users also engaging in direct communication with one another, both publicly (via “likes” and comments) and privately (via the instant messenger and email functions of Facebook), playing video games, and reading news. What is the net intrapersonal effect of these activities? Are some more psychologically potent than others? Does Facebook self-affirmation (via one’s own profiles) compensate for the deleterious effects of social surveillance? Given that Facebook has retained exceptional popularity with users around the world for over a decade, an argument can be made that its psychological benefits exceed its costs. That is, on balance, users may feel that Facebook is a valuable experience for their emotional well-being (but see Kross et al., 2014, for a counter-argument). However, it will be important for future research to examine how various Facebook activities contribute synergistically to users’ overall psychological responses.

Let us now consider, in greater detail, the state of theoretical development in each of the three issues identified earlier: self-presentation construction, effects of engaging with one’s own self-presentation, and effects of engaging with others’ self-presentation. Self-presentation construction is the foundation upon which intrapersonal effects are predicated. Therefore, it is essential to achieve a deep theoretical understanding of what types of self-presentations are likely to be composed on Facebook in particular and SNSs in general. This understanding, I argue, consists of elucidating how people utilize technological affordances depending on their goals, needs, and individual characteristics – in other words, how technological and psychological factors intersect to produce effects. SNSs are moving targets, with constantly fluctuating features and affordances, such as the relatively recent addition of the Timeline on Facebook, or its changes in the management of privacy settings. This creates a real risk that studies which simply identify SNS effects without unpacking how these effects stem from technological and socio-psychological factors might not be generalizable over time, when technological features change.

As discussed, the selective self-presentation framework has been advanced as a useful theoretical lens for understanding Facebook self-presentation. The selective self-presentation framework itself, a subset of the Hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996), does a thorough job at detailing how technological affordances such as asynchronicity, editability, and the reallocation of cognitive resources interact with users’ motivation to craft self-presentations. More recently, Toma and Hancock (2011) expanded the framework by stipulating how users’ motivation to self-present is affected, in turn, by the presence of an audience, the importance of the relational goal at hand, and the anticipation of future interaction with one’s communication partner(s). While studies to date acknowledge these issues, they do not directly parse the individual role of technological and socio-psychological factors in producing Facebook self-presentations, focusing instead on the end images that Facebook users put forth, according to observers (Back et al., 2010) or to the self-presenters themselves (Toma & Carlson, 2015). It will be important for future research to do so. For instance, do people with varying relational goals take advantage of controllable affordances (e.g., asynchronicity, editability) on SNS platforms differently? Does the size and composition of the audience affect users’ motivation to self-present and, in turn, the end images they create? Does recordability truly enhance the motivation to craft desirable profiles?

Let us now turn our attention to the emotional well-being effects of engaging with one’s own self-presentation. As is the case with self-presentation construction, it is important to link technological affordances and socio-psychological factors with observed effects in this area as well. While we (Toma & Hancock, 2013) went to great lengths to delineate how technological affordances and socio-psychological factors should work in tandem to produce self-affirming profiles, we did not directly test the operations of these factors. It will be important for future research to do so. Additionally, a more granular approach to Facebook self-affirmation may be warranted. In our initial work on this topic, we found evidence that the profile as a whole confers self-affirmational benefits; however, it is possible that the various parts of the profile differ in their self-affirmational potency. Perhaps messages from friends, as clear indicators of social connectivity, are superior outlets for self-affirmation than one’s own status updates, for instance. Future research is necessary to test the self-affirmational value of the elements that comprise Facebook self-presentation.

While self-affirmation theory emerged as a robust framework for explicating some of the emotional well-being benefits of Facebook self-presentation, it is important to note that these benefits are by no means exhaustive, and that other theoretical frameworks may equally apply. For instance, symbolic self-completion theory (Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, & Harmon-Jones, 2009) argues that individuals boost emotional well-being by creating and accessing symbols of attainment in defining areas of self – for instance, professional titles (e.g., “PhD) and citations for professors. The Facebook profile may constitute a symbol of attainment in the domain of personal relationships, as it tends to encapsulate numerous tokens of affection from friends (e.g., “likes,” photographs of joint activities, supportive status updates). Therefore, profiles may confer emotional well-being benefits via the route of symbolic self-completion. Similarly, self-verification theory (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003) argues that individuals strive for psychological coherence, or a sense that others view the self in a way that is aligned with self-perceptions. The Facebook profile, which, as previously described, is very much grounded in reality, could supply such a sense of psychological coherence, and therefore may provide an additional well-being benefit. Finally, the implicit self-esteem compensation framework (Rudman, Dohn, & Fairchild, 2007) proposes that, after suffering a blow to a certain defining aspect of self, individuals will unconsciously seek to restore it by gravitating towards information that boosts that particular aspect of self. We have already reviewed evidence that Facebook profiles boost self-esteem in general (Toma, 2013); it is possible that individuals may unconsciously seek these profiles after suffering social rejection or after feeling that their social connectivity is threatened. Since Facebook profiles tend to emphasize these social aspects of self, in a positive manner, they may be particularly well-suited to restore self-esteem that is contingent on social domains.

Finally, let us consider the issue of how accessing others’ profiles affects users’ emotional well-being. Several points of clarification and expansion present themselves in this area. First, multiple theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explicate why people’s emotional well-being dips after exposure to friends’ self-presentational statements (i.e., the availability heuristic and correspondence bias; social comparison theory; social rank theory). Some of these theories are quite similar – for instance, social comparison and social rank theories. It will be important for future research to demarcate the applicability of each of these theories and to integrate them when necessary. For instance, does a perception of being subordinate (à la social rank theory) or a perception of faring worse than others (à la social comparison theory) explain the negative repercussions of Facebook social surveillance? Which of these perspectives is more appropriate to understanding Facebook interaction? Does an availability heuristic enhance the effects of social comparison? Does the Facebook environment offer a unique opportunity to integrate these two frameworks? Second and relatedly, it is important to note that, while studies to date have identified negative effects of Facebook social surveillance and have advanced theoretical explanations for those effects, they have not straightforwardly tested these mechanisms argued to undergird the effects. For instance, the availability heuristic proposed by Chou & Edge (2012) seems like an apt explanation for why Facebook users might think that, in aggregate, others have better lives than them. How might we test this notion directly? By the same token, how might we test whether the correspondence bias is activated by others’ Facebook self-presentations? Finally, on a methodological level, it is commendable that studies in this area have utilized both surveys and experiments. Surveys are useful in identifying relationships between theoretically meaningful variables, and experiments are useful in establishing causality links between these variables. However, as mentioned earlier, experiments have overwhelmingly utilized contrived Facebook profiles, rather than friends’ actual profiles. These contrived profiles necessarily belong to strangers, and therefore it is difficult to extrapolate their effects to the effects of friends’ profiles. Indeed, people cannot be expected to respond to complete strangers in the same way as they respond to actual friends, family, and acquaintances. The next wave of studies in this area would do well to increase ecological and construct validity by examining the effects of exposure to real friends’ profiles. This experimental set-up would then enable researchers to test causality links between some of the variables already investigated by surveys (e.g., envy, depression).

**Conclusion**

Facebook is a potent agent affecting our inner lives. Research shows that it can cheer us up, make us feel connected and loved, and calm us down when we are feeling threatened or stressed. But it can also give rise to insecurity and envy, and demoralize us. Given the extraordinary ubiquity of Facebook around the world and over time, these effects are likely to emerge on a large scale and to be persistent. Academic research has the important task of delineating the conditions under which these variegated effects are likely to emerge, and the mechanisms responsible for them. This chapter has summarized the significant strides made by researchers in this area of inquiry, as well as several promising avenues for future studies.

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