Impact of Information and Communication Technology:
Identity Construction on Facebook in a Postmodern Society

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Abstract: This study explores how students present, represent and communicate their social selves visually on the online space. Using a comprehensive literature review and an ethnography study on the popular social networking site, Facebook, the researchers draw relevance from the emerging themes and relate them to the identity construction of the Facebook user in a postmodern society. The findings relate the influences and impact of information and communication technology on social identity. Through these influences this study seeks to prove that Information and communication technology like Facebook acts a catalyst of Post-Modernism and serves to change and revolutionise social identity of the individual and the society.

Key words: Information technology, social network, facebook, identity, self presentation, post-modernism

INTRODUCTION

There is an escalating focus on online social identity with the proliferation of online communication, changing interaction and communicating patterns that enable us to interact in diverse ways with a dispersed group of people. There seems to be a gradual shift from the real physical world to a virtual world which is not surprising as people tend to make space for themselves in the new public sphere triggered by the dynamic progress of information technology. Over the past couple of decades humanity has increasingly turned to information technology as a boon through wherewithal that information technology offers, unimaginable heights of scientific and technological progress. However, rather than uplifting and emancipating society, the wholesale implementation of information technology has brought with it a host of unintended and unforeseen consequences too as far as the society is concerned.

The study of adult e-Communication repeatedly shows that much online interaction is interwoven with identity performance (Turkle, 1995; Markham, 1998; Sunden, 2003; Thomas, 2004). The reason for more studies probing identity is the affordances of technology and the social interactions that are the outcome of interaction with technology. The new technology presents us an array of tools to interact with people who researchers have not met face to face who are geographically remote and people reticent to emote. Social networking sites are perhaps the broadest and most infiltrating of internet mediums in postmodernism. Reaching vast audiences on local and global spectrums, these websites are user friendly, cheap and allow users to engage in conversation. This study seeks to explore the construction of identity by young adults through presentation of the self in the profile pictures of a social networking site, www.Facebook.com.

The past half-century has witnessed accelerations in flows of media and communication and there have been some profound implications of these accelerations. The arts have grappled to attempt and make sense of these changes but the sheer pace of these changes has surpassed the ability to consistently interpret them. The evolutionary shift from print to television and other digital forms of communication has not only passed on endowing machines with symbolic functions but also on granting machines with gradual processes of creating cultural subject out of human beings (Morse, 1998). Information technology has become ubiquitous. It has spread to almost all aspects of society and has taken many differing forms. Information enabled by information technologies has risen to a place of prominence, becoming the central driver of modern society. Access to technology and the new online social environment where technology is embedded are the persuasive interests that influence the study of social identity. Cultures of the world have their own traditions built around centuries of relating to the world in their own ways and embrace these norms as such. But the internet has the ability to influence global culture in other ways. Even if cultural products are rejected as globalization and imperialistic attacks on ideological systems, the postmodern structure of the internet may quietly transform the way individuals relate to the world simply by allowing interactions to

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happen in certain ways. Conlon (2000) believes that information technology provides functionalities that are vital to the development of post-modernism. These functionalities include, amongst others, the distribution and enablement of the global economy, the storage and dissemination of information via databases, the changing of the workplace and rise of the information worker, the speeding up and optimization of social as well as professional life an increase in the ability to communicate and the creation of virtual worlds on the internet.

Impact of information technology on society: Information technology has served to emasculate the influences of tradition, cultural heritage, community and family and has served to create new definitions of society. With the saturation of society with information technology and the rising influence that information and communication is playing a new type of society has emerged that is very different from traditional societal structures-the information society. The information society is one that has become so saturated with information and communication technologies that it is completely dependent and is being shaped by them. According to Conlon (2000), the old structures of neighbourhood, employment, family and church no longer have the power to connect society that once they had. Society has evolved to a state predicted by Castells (1996) where it can no longer be understood or represented without taking technology into consideration. Owing to the pervasiveness of information and communication technology in all aspects of life and its a for ementioned non-ethical nature, there will inevitably be an impact on society and the individual.

Post-modernism: Post-modernism is interpreted in various perspectives by philosophers, anthropologists and theorists. Fredric Jameson's book on postmodernism emphasizes the formative role of economic and political conditions including postwar globalization which is the emergence of new information technologies, new flexible forms of production and the breakdown of the traditional nation-state in the emergence of postmodern modes of cultural production. Still others point out to the cultural objects identifying post-modernism as a set of styles brought about by artists in the form of art, movies and other artifacts. But this is again negated and criticized for implying that post-modernism is simply not a style but is more than that it is a culture change that is an impact of economic, political and cultural disorder. The postmodern entails a crisis of universality and cultural authority that is profound questioning of the very foundations of truth that shore up the knowledge of social structures and the

means of producing knowledge about social relations and culture. Tarnas (1991) says "the postmodern mind may be viewed as an open-ended, indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual and cultural currents".

The shift to information age has been accompanied by a dematerialization of objects and commodities, implying that non material goods play a more commercial role in the economy and consumption creating a flutter in consumerism. Process of production is governed by non-material functions and there seems to be a rise in mediation of goods that is referred to as phantasmagoria of signs. The move from structuralism to post-structuralism has had some influence on postmodernism. One of the main contributions of post-structuralist thought is that all denotation is connotation. What researchers are consequently left with is reality composed of systems of representation. Shifts in semiotics have lead to a greater sense of intertextuality as to how signs necessarily relate to one another. Text is read in relationship to other text and visuals are interpreted in relation to other visuals, thus a range of textual and visual references is brought to bear on internet textuality. This dematerialization process has resulted in a perceived state of instability, transgression and the blurring of boundaries and distinctions. Things that inhabited different worlds and value systems and were consumed by different audiences, now occupy a single cultural space (Slater, 1997). Through understanding and examining the influences of information technology in this study, the researchers attempt to prove that information technology acts to promote the various permutations and facets of post-modernism and has an impact on identity. It focuses on the representation of Facebook users who form the major part of the popular culture.

Identity and popular culture: The rise of popular culture, particularly of mediated communicated formats that infuse everyday life including architecture, entertainment, prayer, play and work, adds a dimension to the effective environment, the physical and symbolic environment researchers experience and share on an everyday basis (Grodin and Lindlof, 1996). This dimension exists more temporally than spatially; it resides in increasingly portable, fast and above all, chic, valued, stylish mediated interaction (Meyrowitz, 1985). Self and especially identity became separated from the definition of the situation in the extraordinary contexts of popular culture. Popular culture provides the overriding context and definition, particularly for the age group most fully enmeshed in mass-mediated experience particularly the youth. As Couch (1995) proclaimed several years ago, evocative

rather than referential forms of communication now dominate the meaning landscape. The presentation of self has changed drastically. The key conceptual tie for identity and the definition of the situation is the generalized other but social media provide numerous others. When both actor and audience have at least one foot in popular culture, they hold shared meanings for validating the actor's performance. Actors still want to present a self but the time, place and manner in which they do it have been fundamentally altered by new awareness contexts stressing more evocative and "present" orientations rather than consequential and future ones. Social networking sites promote identity as a resource to satisfy individually oriented needs and interests to "be whomever you want," Popular culture's emphasis on entertainment and commodification of the self informs this emphasis. Any individual can identify themselves on a myriad of levels: in a personal sense, a social sense, on an ethnic, cultural, spiritual or religious basis and by way of their moral values. As a consequence, identities can be seen as flexible or even conflicting Bhavnani and Phoenix (1994) with no one person's identity being the same as another and each person having their own unique mix of allegiances (Richardson and Wood, 2000). Identity is contextualized and produced in a symbolic environment shared by other actors. Popular culture and information technology have influenced the arena for identity and social definitions in two fundamental ways: they opened a wide range of experiences, models and scenarios from which people can draw and they added unique communication formats and interaction styles. Young adults play a significant role in shaping audience expectations and criteria for self-presentations for themselves and others. With Facebook becoming a popular choice of communication and an ideal space to communicate their likes, dislikes, thoughts, opinions and ideologies through presentation of their self it implicitly define and redefine their identity.

Identity and self presentation: According to Smock (2010), self-presentation is a theoretical construct that refers to the processes individuals use in attempting to control how others perceive them. Using the personal profile, Facebook users have the ability to present a controlled image of themselves to their audience of friends and acquaintances and this information control is vital to self-presentation. As compared to face to face self-presentation, the ability to modify and manipulate online presentation allows the user to be selective when choosing a version of the self to present, thereby permitting the user to present multiple versions of the self (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008). Personal home pages are

well suited for elaborate, strategic self-presentations (Chandler, 1998; Karlsson, 1998; Miller, 1995; Wynn and Katz, 1997). Personal home pages can be created to convey an impression of one's own person and personal identity to certain audiences (eg., potential employers, chat friends, colleagues) and to improve contact opportunities and networking (Erickson, 1996). Vazire and Gosling (2004) argue that personal websites are highly controlled environments for self-expression and that "nearly every detail of a personal website is the result of a conscious decision on the part of the author". Boyd (2004) suggested that many online social applications such as Frienster.com are largely designed for self-presentation. Symbolic interactionists see the "self" as fluid, dynamic and existing "as a relationship between mind, body and society" (Turkle, 1995). People's behaviour results from their understanding of social situations. Presentations are integral to defining and understanding one's identity, "a complex social construction created and sustained by a subject's location within a culture and a society" (Thiel, 2005). The idea of identity has occupied the attention of philosophers and scholars for years (Ellis, 2010). Though, a multitude of research has been conducted about constructing an online identity, the research has been relatively broad to date (Gearhart and Kang, 2010). Current research includes online identities as they relate to self esteem Gonzales and religious presentation (Bobkowski, 2008) but little research has been conducted about the construction of identity through a Facebook profile. Gonzales and Hancock (2008) found that online self-presentation strategy does in fact have the power to change a user's identity. As stated by Gearhart and Kang (2010), identity theory has underlying roots in symbolic interactionism as its goal is to understand how social structures affect the self. Mead (1936)'s theory of the social self is one of his more popular topics (Goodman, 1995) and is useful in this study given that the concept of self is realized through observation, anticipation, performance, observance of reaction, subsequent anticipation and subsequent performance and ad infinitum. Mead (1936) believed that the self emerges through this continual chain of action. According to Goffman (1959) individuals play many roles in many circumstances. Each element of the Facebook profile contributes to identity creation; it is this identity or self created that can influence the way a person acts in both online social networking sessions and even in face to face interactions. Researchers of these Facebook profiles may choose to represent multiple identities congruent with their multiple social roles in "real life" or may choose to represent one identity only (Gearhart and Kang,

2010). Toma and Hancock (2010) point out that ''self-presentation is a complex and communicative process that involves understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses being receptive to the values of the target audience and using the medium of communication to one's advantage. Scholars suggest that this assertion of individuality may be especially critical and difficult for young women who must assert themselves in a society where "human" has traditionally been equated with "man" (Elm, 2007; Gilligan, 1982; Grisso and Weiss, 2005). This study conducts an in-depth investigation on a sample of Indian youth and interprets the narratives of identity construction of images, photographs posted in their own profile pages. The study gives particular attention to the photographs that Facebook users place on their Facebook profiles in the belief that as heavy consumers of visual media they are likely to be familiar with how they might use visual symbols in the images that they use to present themselves.

Images in interaction: The study of visual media has a long history in the social sciences. However, for a variety of reasons the use and study of images in scholarly works has been limited. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) noted that while a few researchers use still and video footage, most do not. One reason for this is the belief that images "do not speak for themselves" and require a greater amount of interpretation than written words (Goffman, 1979). Practicality and professional socialization also likely have a role in the limited use of the visual. Today with the enhanced screen culture of laptops and mobile phones, we are able to access online communication systems anytime we want. The new cultural phenomenon of ubiquitous screen media motivates images to have a superior position than text, especially compared to the predominant text-writing culture before the invention of the screen. This significant transformation from a culture based on writing to a culture based on images opens up a new chapter for communication of hyper-visual language. Images have become one of the primary means for conveying information, entertainment and modes of consumption (Manning, 1998). One reason the visual has an elevated role is that it permits the use and display of symbols. Dramaturgical studies are largely interested in these symbols, exploring how they come to have meaning, how people make meaning of them and how people use them.

Facebook is strongly tied to making identities by the simple fact that it revolves around "profiles" of self and others. Visual communication is an integral part of this process. The profile picture is not just a nice addition is arguably the most predominant feature of a person's

activity on Facebook. A person's home page start with a profile picture, considerably larger than any other postings on the page and is followed by the name to the right in much smaller space. It can become clear from this instance alone that the picture carries more weight than the name does on Facebook. Also, because the picture is on the far left and we as a culture read from left to right, it can be assumed that after the words Facebook, we will see the picture first. It is also considerably larger than the title Facebook which is above the name so it is arguably more attractive than even the logo of the site itself. We can see from this argument alone how important this profile pictures are. The identity of a user and how they are connected with other users starts off with an image. Through these examples, we see that the construction of image is heavily emphasized through the visual presentation of the self. Photos (referred to simply as "pics" by most Facebookers) are a dynamic element that drives a lot of activity on Facebook. Uploading pictures is merely the first step. After that the person who uploaded the picture goes into a process of pic labeling, posting initial comments, tagging others who are involved, grouping pics in an album and perhaps selecting one as the featured profile pic. Many pics receive not only comments from the uploading Facebooker but receive responses from other Facebookers as well.

Although, the image that someone chooses to portray in an online community is in an extension of his or her real-world performance, Facebook also gives its users the chance to present themselves differently than they would in real life. Some sociologists believe that because profiles may stand alone as a representation of a person, someone can write himself or herself "into being" on his or her Facebook profile (Boyd, 2008; Grisso and Weiss, 2005). That is online arenas may not just reflect someone's identity but they may be tools that help someone create an identity. Facebook specifically with its social complexity and rapidly growing number of users is an ideal network to study when trying to discover the reasoning behind how and why users act and interact in the online space. The profile allows users to construct an identity through pictures, status updates and personal information, presenting a self to their online network or an audience that is imagined or perceived. This study focuses on how people define, use and construct identity in the virtual and social networking site known as Facebook.

Theoretical framework
Goffmans fronts and self presentation: Goffman (1959, 1964, 1983) developed a framework of concepts to help

understand how people convey symbolic information about themselves for others to use. The one of the means for conveying information is through the use of fronts. Fronts are "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959). They are the sum of an actor's "expressive equipment" that an audience observes. Fronts provide observers information in the form of recognizable, standardized mannerisms, appearances and settings. Fronts allow people to fill in information that might not be given during a performance. Photos can be seen as an extension of a performance because audiences have learned to interpret them so that they are no longer one-dimensional "tracings" but instead are read as a representation of person or an event (Goffman, 1979).

Props, settings and gesture: Goffman's dramaturgical and impression management framework is rooted in symbolic interaction and places great emphasis on situational performance (Smith, 2006). Therefore, once actors have decided, consciously or unconsciously on a particular front to use before an audience, they will use a variety of techniques to make their performance of the front believable. Within the dramaturgical and self-presentation framework, people use many of the same techniques in their everyday lives. Goffman identified props, settings and gestures as being three possible components of a performance. Any object can be a prop if the "user believes that the possession or display of it will affect others" (Leary, 1995). Examples may include clothing, body posture, body make up, gait, the possession or absence of car keys and intensity of eye contact. Organizations can also use props for symbolic purposes. Like fronts, the meanings of props are socially negotiated and defined through social interactions. Gestures can be signs used by the individual to prove that he or she belongs to a certain group or it can be identified with the peer group that they belong to like college students use hand gestures to describe things and shake heads often to indicate acceptance and refusal. Settings, according to Goffman (1959) involve furniture, decor and other background items that supply the audience with a sense of place. They tend to consist of items that are immovable to give audiences members a sense of credibility about the performance. Settings are especially useful for the performance of several fronts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study investigated the ways in which college students in the ages 18-23 construct a specific identity and a self-presentation strategy through photographs in

their Facebook profile. Rather than, examining the vast amount of social networks available, this study focused specifically on Facebook due to the growing popularity of Facebook usage among the Indian internet users. Researchers chose to study college students who were undergraduates as it was observed through the ethnographic study that the 18-23 age groups used more photographs than other age groups and changed photographs at a rapid pace. This makes colleges students who are Facebook users within this age range of particular interest to study in order to learn about social and communication behavior on social networking sites.

Primary research question (RQ1): How do college students discuss and interpret their Facebook identity. How do they showcase their Facebook profile image to interact and construct an identity?

This qualitative study employed an ethnographic research design. The two independent sets of data were gathered for this study. They were participant observation and photo-elicitation interviews. The first data collection method was participant observation. The second data collection method was photo-elicitation interviews (Annexure) which were all conducted after participant observation experience. Photo elicitation is based on the idea that using photographic materials during the interview process can increase the participant's feeling of involvement with the interview and research process, assist them with memory recall and help them provide more nuanced responses and offer them avenues for helping the researcher create interpretations for their observations (Hurworth, 2003). Though photo-elicitation generated interest among fellow researchers, very few subsequent studies using it as a methodology have been published (Harper, 2002). Used here, the term 'photo-elicitation interview' implies that participants were asked to look at either their own Facebook profile, the profiles of other users or both and either respond to specific questions about the profiles or simply react to them. This study used purposive and snowball sampling to locate participants for the interviews. To obtain the richest information regarding personal usage, heavy Facebook users were selected to participate. The criteria for heavy usage in this study were user log-in 4-6 times a week and having maintained a Facebook profile for at least 6 months and that participants had a Facebook profile that contained at least 20 photographs. The session lasted for half an hour. Participants chose to remain anonymous. Photographs of the chosen participants were analysed using the codes developed through participation observation and photo elicitation interviews. This sampling strategy is ideal for studies in which it is difficult to define a representative population and also find individuals who

are representative of the entire range of experiences within a population (Weiss, 1994). It is a "strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can not be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2005). Of the 40 photo-elicitation interview participants, 20 were male and 20 were female. In this group, all belonged to the undergraduate level and the ages of participants ranged from 18-23. Interviews were conducted by the researchers and key informants who were participants themselves and had their own Facebook profile page. This was to ensure validity and reliability. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 min in length and occurred in a face to face setting. During face to face interviews, the researcher pulled up the participant's Facebook profile so that the participant could view the information on his/her profile as she was speaking to the researcher. Each respondent was briefed about the interview session through phone and obtained the consent of the participant to display his or her Facebook profile for the duration of the interview. These subjects and questions covered general areas of choice of profile pictures, sexuality, gender and their role in identity creation as well as specific areas of identity creation and how it relates to each participant's self-presentation strategy. The goal was to have participants openly reflect upon this process and share how they decided to include specific information on their profile what they believe their profile picture says about them and what factors influence the way in which they have chosen to present themselves.

RESULTS

People employ fronts in nearly all social interactions, especially when they know they are observed in public settings. In this way, fronts are the stereotypical performances that audience members believe they are about to see. Fronts function to provide audience members and actors with an understanding of excepted and expected performances. Without these socially negotiated, generally agreed to standards, people would have no idea how to act properly in a new environment. Social life requires that people act differently in different situations and in front of different audiences. If people acted exactly the same in all circumstances, it would be very difficult for audience members to understand the actor. Fronts are learned behaviors that once understood are selected by actors, not created (Goffman, 1959). People learn fronts through social interaction and develop a repertoire of them that they can use across a multitude of settings. The visual self-representation on Facebook portrays an easily editable identity. The user's narrative identity can therefore always evolve through the

consistent uploading of visual information. This system of persistent metamorphosing empowers online identity through Facebook to have its own narrative life. This study investigated the ways Facebook users construct an identity and create a self-presentation strategy through their Facebook profile data was collected through 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews after which the results were coded and condensed into categories and compared with Goffmans self presentation techniques.

This phase involved comparing and contrasting participants' responses relevant to their perception of audiences and comments found in photographs and relating them to Goffmans self-presentation theory. During each interview, the researcher wrote direct observation notes in addition to transcribing each participant's answers. At the end of every interview, the researcher analyzed the notes and wrote analytic memos to refer to at the conclusion of all interviews. After several participants shared similar responses to a certain question, the we marked the topic of the question as a potential theme to be explored at the culmination of the data collection process. When all 40 interviews had been conducted, the researcher used open coding with the help of key informants to initially analyze the data collected, looking for emerging themes that had not already been discovered in the data collection process. The researcher condensed the data and coded to further dissect the categories and distributed the data into various sections accordingly.

Self presentation fronts: The results of this study are intended to develop a cohesive reasoning and explanation of a young adult's identity construction and self-presentation on Facebook. College students use five general "fronts" in their profile pictures that lead audience members to see them as:

- Solo front
- Buddy front
- Party front
- Humour front
- Celebrity front

Taken together, these fronts represent a typical student. Students use props, settings and gesture to provide their audience members visual cues to help them form the desired impressions. Much of the material that students place on Facebook is meant to attract attention to the profile.

Solo front: Solo fronts are profile pictures that are like a passport size photograph which was natural and not glamorised and glamorised versions of the profile owners. These type of profile pictures were not many though and

when questioned in the interview a participant said that these type of pictures were used by users who were not that computer savvy or had little idea of using software to edit photographs. When asked to a participant who had a passport pic on his profile he said, "I just put a photograph of what I had and I am not interested in changing my profile picture often as I think it's a waste of time". It was also noted that passport fronts had few friends and not all that social, gauging by the number of interactions on the timeline. Another version of solo front is a glamorised version of the self taken usually by a mobile phone camera by the individual or taken by another person. Photographs taken by the self through a hand held device like the mobile phone is called a 'selfie'. In these type of 'solo fronts' most of the women seemed to be posing smiling and head tilted to an angle with eyes looking intensely to the camera. Male participants did not find it necessary to spend time on clicking pictures like the female participants did and were happy with any picture. The one male participant stated, "I usually crop a picture from a photograph if I wanted a photo of myself or take a picture. But researchers guys do it fast without wasting much time. It is the girls who spend a great deal of time taking pictures posing this way and that". The one female participant said, "I take most of the pictures for my profile picture by myself with my mobile phone. I pose and give a certain look and click a pic. Most of my friends do it too." It was observed that students take a lot of time to pose and click a picture as they deemed profile pictures to be very important part of their profile and wanted to present their best front. Individual pictures and photographs of things, animals, places etc are observed in the solo front. The one of the participants had a picture of a cat as her profile picture and she stated "She is Ginny my pet and I wanted her as my profile picture as I love her more than anybody else". So, profile pictures indicate the person to be an animal lover or an outdoor person or attached to a particular non living thing as it might hold a symbolic meaning for the person.

Buddy front: A second front used by 90% of college students in their Facebook profiles was the buddy front. This front required that students demonstrate to audience members that they had friends and enjoyed spending time with them. Photographs illustrate how Facebook users demonstrate that they have buddies in twos, smaller and larger groups. The importance of the buddies front was evidenced by each interview participant mentioning how social (or not social) a student appeared in their profile. Students have several ways to enact the social front. The first is to have many Facebook friends listed on their profiles. This was an important piece of information that

participants looked for when seeing a profile. While the number of Facebook friends a person had did not necessarily mean that the person was social, it did give an indication about whether the person was socially active. As another participant observed "just because someone is a friend on Facebook does not mean that you're actually best of friends with them." A second way students can enact the buddy front on Facebook profiles was to include many photographs in which students appeared with one or more other people. If a Facebook profile had many pictures which showed the student with other people, participants often commented on how social the person was. Participants noted that these were the people that they would most likely want to meet in person. Used in this way, friends demonstrated group affiliation and served to represent a person's social capital. Appearing in a photograph with others is a powerful way to illustrate social capital even if it does not really exist because it is not easy for viewers to determine the actual relationship between the individuals pictured. When pictures with the same group of buddies are seen it indicates that they belonged to a clique or a gang. Sociability is an especially important aspect of peer groups and social norming. Social interactions as a signifier of sociability, represent an important opportunity for the exchange of symbolic information. As Astin (1993) noted, "interaction" is a key signifier for affiliation and belonging. Social interaction affirms membership in a group and provides a mechanism for sharing and negotiating the group's norms. In addition, social interaction helps to make public which groups a person identifies with. In this way, the social front provides audience members with information that they can use to make assumptions about person.

Party front: A front that was mentioned during each interview and which became very familiar during the photo elicitation interview was the "party front". Key informants defined the term party front as referring to a photograph where the individual frequently attends parties which involves alcohol. Every participant interviewed for this study mentioned that there were many "Party Fronts" related images on Facebook and noted specific photographs on Facebook profiles they believed gave the impression that the student was a hard core party person. Party fronts show students cheering with a toast or drinking directly from liquor bottles or glasses. A participant observed, "It is college and we have fun partying. We put up pictures immediately taken through the mobile phones or cameras". Another participant echoed the same opinion, "Only in college can we party and have a great time". We would like to tell all the other friends there that we are having a great time. It tells

everyone that "our gang is an action gang". Both these participants highlight the very powerful and pervasive belief that many study participants had about the college experience. College is not simply a place to study. It is where one gathers friends and party. Participants believed that a 'cool college student' culture required them to have "partying" pictures on their Facebook profiles. If they did not have them, the student ran the risk of giving the impression that they were not 'cool' or 'hip'. That is they were not participating in the activities that others believed were part of being a student. One of the participants said, "I go to parties but I do not drink. I go only to have a good time. In this way, participants let it be known that even if they were not hard core partiers, they liked to be a part of the partying people. This observation is significant because most of the students interviewed for this study identified themselves as a person who does not drink but do not mind being seen in pictures with the party people. A participant, provided some insight into this apparent contradiction when he identified two categories: "alcohol parties" and "non-alcohol parties". When asked how he reconciled to the many images of him posing with other students consuming alcohol on his profile with his statement that he was not a party person in the strictest terms, he stated that he usually attends "non-alcohol parties". Another participant observed. "But, there are hard core parties where alcohol is the main idea of a party". Key informants affirmed this distinction. "Real partiers" engaged in this type of behaviour often. A participant stated while looking at several profiles that had numerous party pictures: "I mean most people who have pictures like that... it looks like they are just drinking to get drunk. They think it's cool. They are just drinking to accomplish a goal. So, the other people see it and think that these to be good people to party with".

Evident in these quotes is that a great deal of social pressure exists for students to present themselves engaging in behaviors that are valued in college culture. This type of social pressure is not new. However, as the participant observed in the above quote, engaging in extreme behavior due to social pressures is no longer enough in the digital age. It now requires college students to have photographic evidence of party behaviour in order to make them seem cool. The power of the "partier" impression extended even to those students who did not identify themselves as hard core partiers and who did not have any of these types of images on their profiles. For example, when asked what impressions someone might form from looking at her profile a participant responded, "I am not a huge partier because I do not have pictures of myself drinking or party type things on my profile." Instead of providing an example of an impression that

students would form of her based on the actual material she had placed her profile, she believed that the impressions other students would form would be based on the absence of any party pictures. This represents the power the "party front" has on college students. There were other participants who were not interested in any way to party and were categorised as nerds, geeks or "oh she is not the type" by the party going ones. When asked to the participant she stated "My parents are very strict and does not allow me to party and I have to listen to them".

Humour front: Humor played a significant role in most Facebook profiles and participants noted when a profile made the student look humorous, funny or silly. Several participants actually stated that they expected to see humour in every profile they looked at. The humour front showed participants that the person was enjoyable to spend time with and that his or her friends probably really like the person. Participants observed that humour can appear on Facebook profiles in many forms, in both the text and the images. Humour was observed in the form of cartoon pictures and funny quotes. For example, a photograph shows a student trying to be funny by distorting her face. Participants also mentioned that they enjoyed looking at the many silly faces and commenting on them. Humour appeared to be one the most important self-presentation techniques that students use on their Facebook profiles and participants frequently used humour to imagine what the person might be like in person how. This suggests that humorous, funny or silly material on a Facebook profile serves as a powerful signifier that a person would understand and engage others in a humorous manner. In this way, humour may also serve the secondary purpose of providing a non-threatening way to initiate communication with another Facebook user. Humour front suggests that the person is easily approachable and easy to be friends.

Celebrity front/cinematic front: Celebrity front and cinematic fronts sported pictures of film actors, sports celebrities, musicians, singers, etc. indicating that the profile owner was a fan of the particular celebrity. Some of the participants even posed with their favourite celebrities. The one participant stated," I love A.R Rahaman and got to take a photograph with him after a long wait". Another participant who was a fan of the cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar sported pictures of Sachin on his profile picture. The one point to be noted was most of the profile pictures of such fans had their favourite celebrity on almost every profile picture. Cinematic front wore pictures of individuals who posed in a certain way

that film actors did in their movies. This was particularly highlighted by the way an individual stood, sat or looked. For example, a photograph showed a student tilting her head and smiling in a certain way that was not natural and was glamour personified. When asked to the participant about the pose she said girls usually posed in certain way to look beautiful and enticing. Most of the girl participant echoed her opinion. When asked to other participants about the cinematic pose the male participants said that it was girls who usually posed, preened and gave stylish poses. During participant observation it was noted that when compared to female participants male participants gave off less cinematic poses.

Visual symbolic images: Goffman (1959) was aware that people use visual symbolic images to convey information during face to face interactions. His framework categorized these pieces of information into three types: "props, settings and gestures." The symbolic information that participants pointed to in Facebook photographs also fit into these into these three categories. The profile pictures were analysed for props, settings and gestures during both participant observation and photo elicitation interviews.

Props: College students used both animate and inanimate objects as props. As far as animate objects were concerned most of the students used birds, animals and people as props. The animals used as props in profile pictures ranged from dogs, cats, horses, snakes, kangaroo and other exotic birds. People props were friends, celebrities, family. Inanimate objects included dresses, bags, shades, shoes, bikes cars, umbrellas and other accessories worn on bodies. Food and drinks like alcohol, carbonated drinks, fast food like cakes, pizzas, burgers, chips, etc., featured as props in most of profile pictures of college students. During the photo elicitation interviews students revealed that they like to take photographs in their new dresses that they bought recently and in places that were popular. A participant observed, "I got a red outfit for my birthday and wore it to McDonalds where I gave a treat to ten of my friends". Another participant stated, " Sometimes my friend and I go into the trial rooms in the malls while we go shopping and click pictures but we do not buy the dresses as it is very expensive. That way we get to pose in a new outfit without spending money". A male participant states that "boys usually pose with their cars and bikes". Other inanimate objects used by participants included sports equipments, electronic gadgets and other equipments as props to present themselves on Facebook.

Settings: It was observed that settings used in profile pictures were both indoor and outdoor. Pictures sported settings in local and foreign locales. Coffee shops like CCD, eating joints like KFC, McD, pub and bar settings were seen in profile pictures. These settings were used more than homes were used as settings. Students used college campus, cafeterias and classrooms as settings in profile pictures. Malls were another popular setting that was observed in participant observation and photo elicitation interviews.

Gestures: It was observed that people used their faces, hands, poses to gesture. Profile pictures had distorted faces to appear funny, hands and specifically fingers were used to gesture and students posed or stood in a certain way to gesture. These gestures all looked happy, silly, funny and random. It was observed that boys stood tall and looked straight to the camera while girls mostly stood stylishly with hands on their hips, tilted faces and eyes looking intensely to a particular side.

Reciprocity in facebook through interactivity: Likes and comments are an important part of photographs and visuals. The comments posted by friends reinforce group cohesiveness and closeness. Comments are tied to the pictures not to the individual, meaning that everyone tagged in the photos will have the same set of shared comments. The group nature of comments can be seen through the consistent use of nicknames, references to inside jokes or past events, statements of affection and compliments and gentle ribbing of each other. All these jokes are understood by those in the know. The context of relationship or friendship allows for statements that those outside the group cannot make or would possibly find offensive. Likes are somewhat passive form of reciprocity when compared to comments. When an individual is close to the person in the photograph then comments are made to show a sense of camaraderie and closeness. A very good partner or friend might show his or her interest by liking a picture to indicate that he is following the photographs and posts. Comments are a more active form of reciprocity. Comments allow friends and partners to relive the pictured events, emphasizing the shared good times. Most comments are always accompanied by a smiley that tries to show the mood of the commenter.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the Facebook users true to Goffmans theatrical framework present their fronts in the profile pages of Facebook through visuals, updates and posts. Findings suggest that there is more style than

content in Facebook. Style in a profile page is distinct in the photos and pictures while the content is usually frivolous and a rehashed up version of content shared, duplicated or forwarded from another site. Style of language, style in photographs and images takes over the importance of content. The way the users construct their profile with very carefully edited photographs and pictures and the way they choose what sort of content can be displayed on their profile page makes it a very self constructed medium as far as the presentation of the self is concerned.

Among this sample of young adults, they were found to relish the opportunities to play and display, continuously re-recreating and a highly decorated, stylistically elaborate identity. Having experienced this euphoria young adult tended to favour a plain aesthetic that foregrounds their links to others, expressing a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others. This apparent shift in phases of identity development has implications for young adult Facebook users experience of transitions of identities. The respondents in this study relied on carefully crafted text and selected photographs to construct ideally balanced authentic yet desirable-identities. They took advantage of the asynchronous nature of online communication to reflect on the implications of their disclosures and they adjusted their profiles-added or deleted content-to better parallel what they imagined their audience would view most favorably.

The one of the constructs of identity and which had constantly been accused of being abused is gender. Previously, users had to identify themselves as male or female. They were also given the option of not answering or keeping their gender private which allowed for manipulation of gender identity. In a latest move Facebook introduced dozens of options for users to identify their gender. Users can now select a "custom" gender option. Facebook will also allow users to select between three pronouns: "him," "her" or "their." There are also variants of genderqueer (any gender outside male/female); genderfluid (moving between genders); non-binary (an umbrella descriptor for all genders that are not simply male or female), two spirit and pangender (rejecting singular gender) and agender (rejecting gender altogether). Also, provided is intersex which covers individuals whose sexual characteristics do not map to stereotypes of male or female. This new change in gender acceptance may be welcomed by some while others foresee an endless list of gender options. This move by Facebook may create gender identity confusion among the users themselves as people have only been exposed to the numerous gender identities. The line between the

online and offline worlds are very fine and blurred and may cause spill over, spelling gender trouble for governing bodies of various communities in the world.

It is conceded that commodification which is directly related to power and domination is very much present on Facebook. Identity is an accomplishment of interaction with the broader market/context rather than merely one's peers who are likely to promote the diverse range of popular culture trends and guidelines to capture the largest possible market. It is as first difficult to perceive how Facebook fuels the open-market economy by lulling its users into total passivity and the paradox of freedom. Facebook users while updating their personal profiles essentially technological manifestations of themselves are bombarded constantly with images and pop-ups of products new and old. This makes the Facebook user, buy the product which maybe endorsed by an actor and photographs display brands and other products advertised which is a status symbol. A Facebook user creates an identity of possessing the latest brands and products which is typical among the young adults. It is almost a fad. Many users spend hours trying to capture the perfect profile picture or articulate the ideal set of beliefs, interests, books, movies, etc. It's a game of self-fashioning and Facebook encourages it because it sells. Identity as a feature of mass media and popular culture increasingly is presented as a product and a resource to be used and marketed. Advertising pushes products not processes; identity has been gradually transformed from being an "esoteric" social science process to a mass-mediated and readily available product (Zurcher, 1977).

Facebook users' aesthetic universe in the virtual world is the one of repetition of the identical, in an ambiguous relation between introspection and narcissistic reflection, between acknowledged artistic influence that is borrowed and copied. The impetus for change and identity formation rests on acting, presentation of self and conduct consistent with products widely shared by fellow consumers who comprise the legitimating audience for one's performance. The Facebook user becomes a social illusion. The remnants of whatever is left of the self take a flight into the network and become a non entity. The individual is gauged by its performative actions rather than the individual itself. To sum up, postmodernized identity is internalized surface-acting playfully performed and presented in a highly competitive and pressure-driven economic environment which forces the trapped' liberated' individual to make choices every day.

CONCLUSION

Thus, this study proves to a certain extent that the use of information and communication technology allows users to present a controlled image of themselves to their

audience. Because the use of information technology like social media continues to rise, this study provided a strong theoretical basis for any future research that may be conducted on the topic of social networking and identity creation. The study suggests some interesting directions for future research. It builds on the literature of personal photography by examining the more public use of personal photographs on SNSs. Information and communication technology brings with its use, destructive and constructive forces as well as liberating and constricting ones. By its very nature information technology is serving to change and revolutionise the very identity of the individual and society.

Many different implementations of information technology have raised ethical and moral dilemmas that the current ethical and moral standards cannot answer. This stance on the inadequacy of current ethics and morals can be seen as nihilistic as well as evidence of a rejection of the meta-narratives that are proposed by these value systems. When a social media platform like Facebook actively takes a stand to be more inclusive and accepting to the gender queer community, the reality of their existence can no longer be ignored. There maybe people who are disillusioned, citing religious texts claiming the existence of only two genders but it seems like their disillusionment is being eclipsed by the urgency of the postmodern society's gradual push toward sexual, gender and religious diversity. Now that Facebook has joined that push, other social media platforms are sure to follow suit and may cause a spill over to the real world. This study will contribute to a better understanding of 'identity' in the online social sphere as well as in such practical matters as the design of digital systems and policies in the postmodern society. Further, it will contribute to the articulation of gender rights, rights of religious choices, etc. There seems to be a blurred boundary between the offline and the online world as the findings reveal that the community that exists on public sphere like Facebook is real and have to be taken seriously by the authorities who draw policies, rules and regulations and have to be made inclusive in their agenda. In short in the postmodern society the individual is slowly but steadily undergoing transition into a social product that will be soon priced, packaged and promoted.

ANNEXURE

Personal questions:
Name_____
Birthday/Age_____
Sex_____
Gender_____
Religion_____
Education_____

General questions on facebook:
- How long have you been a member of Facebook?
- How often do you use Facebook? [where do u access it from?]
- How many accounts do you have?
- If more than one, why do you have multiple accounts?
- Which privacy settings are activated on your account(s); why? Is there anything that you are especially concerned about not having on Facebook?
- What do you post about the most?
- What do you post about the least?
- What do you try to not post about; why?
- Do you post certain things for specific people?
- Do you post certain things at specific times?
- Who do you mainly interact with on Facebook? Of the people that you interact with most on Facebook, would you say that you see them often face-to-face?
- What kind of activities do you participate in on Facebook?
- Do you have personal rules for your Facebook use?
- What are your concerns with Facebook (if any)?
- How important is Facebook to your social life?

Questions for facebook interviews on personal profile pictures:
- Tell me about your profile pic?
- What type of reactions do you think it gets from people?
- Talk to me about the photos. Where do most of them come from? Are there photos you have decided not to upload? What makes a good Facebook photo?
- What was your impression of Profile picture when you saw it first on Facebook?
- When did you start profiling your pictures? Why?
- Do you use any software to edit your profile pics?
- How do you like to represent yourself? What kind of facial expressions, gestures, poses, etc. and in what venues do you prefer for your profile pictures?
- Can you talk about some of your favourite profile pictures?
- Do you discuss profile pictures with friends?
- Do you look at other people's profile pictures? If so, why?
- How do you come to decide what profile pictures are good and what are not good?
- Do you pay attention to likes and comments? What do you feel when friends like and comment or do not comment on your pictures? Do you change the pictures if you don't find adequate likes? Do you delete comments that you find distasteful?
- Ever had any issues with posting a profile picture something that a "friend" didn't like?
- Anything on Facebook that you wouldn't want your family or friends to see?
- Who do you think view your pictures and posts? Who is your audience? Are there strangers in your list? Do you mind friends of friends visiting your profile?
- Are your privacy settings on in your profile picture album?

Questions for facebook interviews on friends' personal profile pictures:
- Could you go to a friend's profile?
- How would you go about interpreting this person based solely on this profile?
- What sorts of things would you look at?
- How do you look through your friends' profile pictures? Where do you look first, what impression does it give you and why?
- What are your overall impressions of your friends'? Why?
- Do you think your friends' wants people to have these impressions? Explain.
- If a negative impression. Is there any advice you would give to your friends?
- Do you like and comment on a friends profile picture? What are your reasons to do so? Show me pictures that you have commented on and why do you like this particular picture?

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