

“The Mask of the Screen : Digital Persona vs Embodied Selfhood in the Social media Age.”

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Abstract : This research explores the contrasting dynamics of virtual self-presentation ("digital masks") and real-world embodied experiences ("selfhood") in the social media age. It examines how online personas, often curated and idealized through digital manipulation, diverge from individuals' physical realities and authentic selves, potentially impacting self-perception, social interactions, and mental health. The study investigates the implications of this duality, particularly in the context of social media's influence on body image and identity formation among young people.

Keywords:

Digital identity, Social media, Online self-presentation, Digital persona, Embodied self, Authenticity, Impression management

Introduction :

In today's digitally connected world, identity is shaped not only through real-life interactions but also through curated self-presentation on social media. Individuals often construct digital personas that highlight select, appealing aspects of their lives—crafted to gain approval and visibility. These personas may reflect truth, but they rarely capture the full complexity of the embodied self, which is shaped by physical presence, emotions, and spontaneous experience.

Social media platforms reward content that attracts engagement, making validation through likes and comments a powerful influence. Over time, this feedback loop encourages performance over authenticity. As digital personas receive more attention than the lived self, individuals may experience a growing tension between how they appear online and who they truly are.

Review of Literature:

1. Sundar & Marathe (2020)

Their research delves into how social media users adapt their self-presentation based on platform norms. They found that people feel pressured to align their online image with idealized standards, often leading to anxiety and detachment from their real-life identity.

2. Rosi Braidotti (2021)

Braidotti's posthuman theory applies to how we understand identity in digital spaces. She suggests that the self is now fluid, constantly reshaped by algorithms, media exposure, and online interaction, blurring the line between what's digital and what's embodied.

3. Nieborg & Poell (2022)

Their study focuses on platform capitalism, showing how social media encourages users to brand themselves. In this process, the digital persona becomes a product, often disconnected from the user's emotional and physical reality.

4. Abidin & de Seta (2023)

Their ethnographic work on influencers and micro-celebrities reveals that many online personalities struggle to balance their digital identity with their real-life roles. They highlight the emotional labor involved in keeping up a digital mask.

5. Bucher & Helmond (2024)

This study investigates how interfaces—likes, views, filters—shape self-perception. Their findings suggest that users adjust their digital selves to meet platform expectations, even when it contradicts their offline identity or emotions.

Research Gap:

While many studies explore social media usage, few specifically examine how individuals navigate the tension between their digital persona and their authentic, embodied self. There is limited research on how this duality affects self-perception and emotional well-being, especially among youth.

Objectives:

- . To explore contrast between online self presentation (The Mask) and the offline embodied selfhood
- . To study how social validation shapes digital self presentation

Hypothesis:

H0 : There is no significant disconnection between curated online identities and offline reality.

H1 : There is a significant disconnection between curated online identities and offline reality.

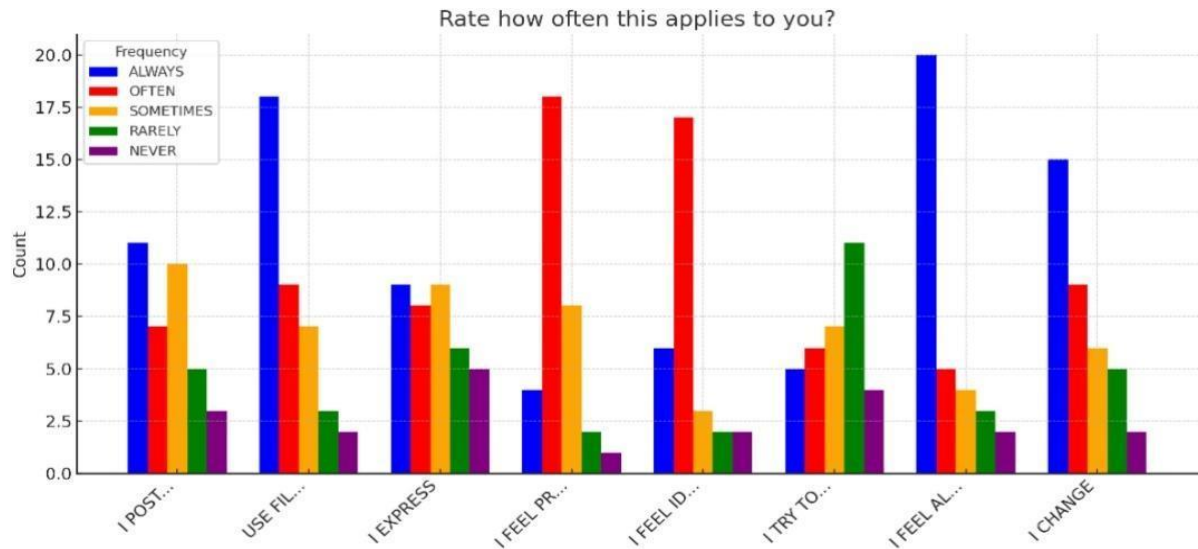
Research methodology:

This research is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire designed to understand patterns of online self-presentation and its contrast with offline selfhood. The questionnaire focused on participants' behaviors, feelings, and attitudes related to social media use. A purposive sampling method was used to select individuals who actively engage with social media platforms. The collected data was analyzed to identify common trends and insights related to digital identity. All necessary ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, were carefully maintained throughout the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The questionnaire responses were collected from individuals of varying ages, genders, and occupations, allowing for a diverse perspective on social media behavior. Most participants reported that they present a better version of themselves online and often adjust their behavior to appear more likable or accepted.

Fewer participants felt that their online identity completely matches their real-life self, indicating a gap between digital and offline personas. Responses also showed a mix of agreement and neutrality regarding emotional responses to likes and validation, as well as the tendency to share content just to fit in.



Rate how often this applies to you?

Statement	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
I POST...	11	7	10	5	3
USE FIL...	18	9	7	9	2
I EXPRESS	9	8	9	6	5
I FEEL PR...	4	18	8	2	1
I FEEL ID...	6	17	3	2	2
I TRY TO...	5	6	7	11	4
I FEEL AL...	20	5	4	3	2
I CHANGE	15	9	6	6	2

Interpretation:

The results suggest that participants often curate their online identity to appear better or more likable, creating a disconnect from their real-life self. Social media encourages self-expression, but also brings pressure to fit in and seek validation, leading to a blend of authenticity and performance.

Conclusion :

The study shows that most individuals create a curated version of themselves online, shaped by the need for social approval and validation. This results in a clear gap between digital and real-life identities, highlighting the presence of a digital mask. While social media allows expression, it also brings pressure to perform and fit in, making digital selfhood a blend of authenticity and image control.

Suggestion:

- .Include digital literacy education in schools and colleges.
- .Promote content that values authenticity over popularity.

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