

Pixel vs. Font. Facebook and Young People's Self-Presentation

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Abstract: This paper explores various strategies for self-presentation used on Facebook, among a sample of 1330 Italian students aged 14-19 years. Based on two social network site practices, the production of text material and the publication of personal photos, we have constructed a model embracing four types of categories and behaviors. We examined the categories according to structural variables, variables regarding self-narration, and two psychological scales. The results show the validity of the four categories in distinguishing different styles of Facebook use and allowing us to define those styles in greater depth. In particular, the publication of photos by those who do not contribute written text seems to indicate the need to maintain one's real-life social network; the production of text alone seems to reflect the need to deepen one's most passionate interests; while the combination of the two communicative modes tends to reveal a greater capacity in planning for the future.

Key words: Social Network Sites, Internet, Self-Presentation, Time Perspective

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Introduction

The diffusion of Internet and the increasing availability of instruments allowing for mobile connection, such as tablets and smartphones, are changing the communication modes of huge population sectors. Younger people, in particular, are now growing up in environments where all sorts of activities seem to be supplemented and reinforced by a digital dimension.

In the 1990s, research was largely based on the premise that online experiences represented a separate level of reality with respect to offline ones. This premise has now given way to new perspectives of convergence between media and context (Jenkins, 2006).

The Web is described in ways which are less and less theoretical and increasingly linked to everyday existence (Boyd 2004, 2008; Scanagatta and Segatto, 2007). The focus is on “sites of sociality” rather than “virtual space” (Casalegno, 2008); on forms of collaboration rather than strategies of simulation or risks of alienation.

Analogously, new objectives have emerged for research on identity: i.e., on ways by which one may present oneself and create relationships with others online. “Anonymous” environments (MUD, forums and chat-rooms, for example), in which net surfers could play roles and assume identities different from “real” ones (Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 2005), have gradually been replaced by “nonymous” environments (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008) where one must talk about oneself, often using one’s own first name and surname or, in any event, giving information of a personal nature. Life is transformed into a “social event” to be shared, combining mass and interpersonal communication (Boccia Artieri, 2012). Constructing one’s personal profile is therefore a complex activity, demanding energy; choice of expressive style; performative elements for expressing tastes, interests and attachments; and time to dedicate to comments, links or the publication of photos.

Analysis is focused on users’ individual agency: on their capacity to create relationships with other subjects, attribute meanings, and give overall sense to self-narration, while creating a balance between social opportunity

and risk, in terms of privacy; between social opportunity and misunderstanding or abuse (Livingstone, 2008).

In this perspective, Social Network Sites (SNS) present the most clearly indicative contexts around which a solid body of literature has grown (boyd and Ellison, 2007), including studies written in Italian (Iannelli, 2010).

This article will concentrate on ways used by adolescents to express themselves as they present themselves in publicly displayed connection.

Among SNS, Facebook is the most widely studied in the literature, the most widespread in Italy, and the most popular among adolescents. It has specific traits; Papacharissi (2009) aptly defines it as a “glass house” in which, unlike other SNS of a more normative nature, private and public spaces may be managed using an “artisan’s” methods, creating greater opportunity for openness and spontaneity.

The processes of reflexivity and self-determination (Giddens, 2000; Beck, 1997; Archer, 2003) seem to be unfolding along new biographical pathways, untied from traditional or group attribution, but strongly linked to communications structures mediated by SNS, at least among adolescents.

Self-presentation: photos and SNS content

SNS are understood here as “social machines” (Scanagatta and Segatto, 2007) whose function is to facilitate the search for contacts, and their maintenance (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007), and the construction of new forms of identity through negotiation processes (Buckingham, 2008). The “networked selves” (Papacharissi, 2011) thus generated display modes for expressing their uniqueness which are reinforced by ties to other individuals and by those individuals’ comments.

By way of SNS, social actors seemingly gain access to their own interiority, not so much through introspection as through interaction, thus reinforcing their capacity to consider themselves as both object and subject of reflection as they view themselves from outside (Mead, 1934). This reflexive activity apparently gives rise to a sort of “interior conversation”

between two parts of the self, the “I” (the conscious self) and the “me” (the assumed attitudes of others).

In SNS, in any case, particular emphasis seems reserved for the “me”, in the sense that the parts of the self which are shared and represented are those “incorporated in the peer group”: those pieces of information already known by others, associated with comments made and displayed. Less emphasis is placed on the “I”: that is, on the more intimate dimension, known by the individual (Livingstone, 2008).

Boccia Artieri (2012) advances the provocative concept of an “actualized other”, pointing out that SNS not only make interacting with the established community *possible* - based on feedback (comments, “likes”, etc.) - but *probable*, opening the door to new forms of reflexive activity. In this perspective, new, hybrid forms of communication seem to be emerging which are capable of combining mass and interpersonal communication, newly gauging the perceived distinction between *public and private*.

boyd (2008) maintains that adolescents use two methods in self-presentation: a) furnishing false information and limiting access to their profile, while giving prevalence to instruments guaranteeing privacy; b) controlling their audience by sending messages which include specific persons or by using friend lists, thus declaring whom the communication addresses.

The very condition proper to adolescents, in fact, leads them to search for social acceptance, and thus to describe themselves in the most positive light possible, furnishing cues some of which may be unconscious (Goffman, 1959). In mediated interactions, in any event, the profile may be considered a wholly intentional act of self-presentation, the fruit of content choices which respect expressive codes imposed by the SNS. The norms of conduct on Facebook would then be interiorized, creating a frame capable of clarifying which behaviors are acceptable, and allowing the individual to adapt his/her own style to the contextual demands. Here, control over communicative acts does not seem limited to the selection of information corresponding, to a greater or lesser degree, to the subjective truth; instead, it seemingly extends to codified expressive forms characterized by restriction, privacy-enhancing instruments, and expectations of reciprocity

with respect to the behavior of others (Ellison, Hancock and Toma, 2012).

This article will focus on the two practices which are most highly structured and, at the same time, most widespread in furnishing information about oneself:

- the introduction of written text, which allows persons to record events;
- photography, instrumental in capturing a fleeting moment (boyd 2011).

The first dimension, then, refers to written content on the SNS, and embraces a series of activities, ranging from the posting of comments to updating one's personal profile page. The latter activity implies the insertion of texts which may simply update personal information (status), communicate personal ideas, or communicate the opinions of others by remixing content from various sources (Jenkins, 2006). In this context, SNS identity is constructed through the sharing of information meant to facilitate self-presentation (Papacharissi, 2011). "Comments" are not only a dialogue tool, but also a way of manifesting one's social connections (boyd, 2011).

Even when addressing a single "contact", they become public, expanding connectivity and reinforcing group cohesion (Ellison *et al.*, 2011).

Instead, as Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) point out, the publication of personal photos brings about a shift in one's personal presence with respect to the text, highlighting particular moments in the life of persons (weddings, birthdays, vacations, etc.). As these authors explain, such photos are not only an aid for the memory, but also a symbolic instrument giving value to shared experiences and, potentially, to group membership and cohesion. Personal photos, like writing (and often, more than writing), allow us to capture moments and make them endure; they document experiences and relationships.

On an empirical level, we shall observe a combination between the two dimensions, based on the presence/absence of content-sharing and the publication of personal photos. Our analysis is therefore starts with the classification of adolescents into four categories based on their way of

using SNS, shown in a typological index³. We have identified the following categories of adolescents who signed up for a SNS:

- “non-contributors”: individuals who do not produce written content and do not publish photos;
- “only contents”: individuals who produce written content but do not publish personal photos;
- “only photos”: individuals who publish personal photos but do not produce written content;
- “photos&contents”: individuals who produce written content and publish personal photos.

Due to the explorative aim of this analysis, we can formulate only very limited hypotheses concerning the differences among categories of adolescent users of SNS.

For example, we intend to verify the existence of differences in SNS-linked behavior according to the person’s age, particularly among those attending the first and the fifth year of high school.

Secondly, we hypothesize that the expression of physicality in SNS may indicate a profile closer to reality, one based on a self-image which is less artificial compared to other types. Therefore, those who publish personal photos would seemingly display a profile nearer to reality compared to those who furnish no photographic self-images.

Finally, we wished to ascertain whether the “photos&contents” group is more active online compared to the other categories; we soon came to consider this category of SNS users as being more active than others, in stark contrast to the “non-contributors” who, instead, seem to dedicate less time and energy in presenting themselves and, therefore, in constructing an online identity.

³ We chose not to use statistic techniques which automatize the classification process, such as cluster analysis, since we intend to emphasize the actual explicative value of the two dimensions by way of explorative analysis, in which the four categories of adolescents are compared using structural and behavioral aspects of SNS use.

Method

Participants

This study is based on 1701⁴ interviews with students attending the first, third, and fifth year in 15 high schools of the Veneto Region (technical institutes, vocational schools, and lyceums).

The survey foresaw an online questionnaire (CAWI: Computer-aided Web Interviewing) presented to students during school hours by way of a specific site, between May and June 2012.

Based on our research goals, in the analyses which follow we shall consider only students who declared membership in an SNS (1330). Percentage-wise, this sub-sample contains more males (68.4%) compared to females (31.6%). Such proportions are probably influenced by the different composition of the sample with respect to the type of school attended, since 69.2% of the sample attend a technical institute or vocational school, while the remaining students attend a lyceum.

Measurement

The data presented in this article refer mainly to the questionnaire section pertaining to Social Network Sites. The section begins with questions on young people's identity as constructed online, a time scale, and a dependency scale.

The section pertaining to SNS presents questions concerning activities performed by students on such sites, on the number of individual "contacts", on the identity adopted, on frequency of use, and on privacy tools applied.

The time scale is based on the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (TPI). In this study we have chosen to use a reduced version of the TPI which had been previously tried out on an Italian sample (D'Alessio, Guarino, De Pascalis and Zimbardo, 2003); it comprises 22 items. This reduced version does not consider the past dimension which, as pointed out in the literature, is not significant in relation to an adolescent population;

⁴ The enquiry furnishing our data, entitled "Young people and cross-mediality", was financed by the Veneto Regional Committee for Communications (CoReCom).

therefore the scale includes only the two present factors (Hedonistic and Fatalistic) and the future extension.

The dependency scale was created by Bisi (2003) with the aim to measure the degree of young persons' Internet dependency. It comprises 19 items, which the young participants are asked to assess according to a 5-point Likert scale. The items reveal to what degree the young person shows symptoms typical of Web dependency, such as having spent more time on the Internet than planned, showing a drop in school achievement, feeling the need to check one's e-mail or profile before beginning any other activity, etc.

Data analysis plan

The two dimensions used in studying various SNS behaviors were combined by constructing a typological index (Marradi, 2007; Corbetta, 1999) using a contingency table. Therefore, each index item is based on the presence/absence of the two dichotomous variables, "shares personal photos on SNS" and "produces content (posts comments, updates status, changes personal page)".

Results were reached after reducing the space between the attributes (Lazarsfeld, 1993): i.e., the student is considered active in producing content if he/she performs at least two of the activities listed.

In order to analyze the ratio to other variables we applied ANOVA to the cardinal variables and scales, while for the other nominal variables we used tables of contingency with measures of association such as χ^2 .

Results

As described previously, in comparing the variables defining which students publish personal photos and which students produce written content on SNS, we obtained four different behavior categories, which we intend to confront with other variables present in the questionnaire linked to the study, "Young people and cross-mediality", and to the results of the two psychological scales applied to the same sample.

Table 1 initially shows the distribution within the sample of the four categories resulting from the combination of the two dimensions defined.

Table 1: Distribution of SNS behavior categories

<i>Category</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>non-contributors</i>	291	21.9
<i>only contents</i>	186	14.0
<i>only photos</i>	468	35.3
<i>photos&contents</i>	382	28.8
<i>Total</i>	1327	100

The distribution of category types turns out to be fairly balanced, except for the “only contents” group, representing little over a seventh of the sample. On the contrary, the “only photos” group turns out to be the largest, covering over a third of the interviewees.

Structural variables

It is interesting to start by comparing the four types of adolescents who joined a SNS and the structural variables presented by the questionnaire. First of all, an individual’s age is not associated with the variable defining behavior types, neither according to the Pearson test χ^2 nor in applying an ANOVA to the dependent variable of the person’s age. As could reasonably be expected considering previous results, the school year and school type were not significantly associated, statistically, to category type. Instead, significant association emerged between behavior type and student gender ($\chi^2=56.235$, $p<.001$). In particular, females clearly prevail in the “photos&contents” group (40.6% of all females, 23.3% of all males). Males are prevalent in the group of “non-contributors” (25.9% of all males, 13.4% of all females). This fact confirms results given by Rosen, Stefanone and Lackaff (2010), who found that on the average, females share more photos online than do males, and generally spend more time composing their SNS profile.

A further structural variable applied to the four categories is the

individual's self-placement with respect to his/her social class; no significant differences result. Not even in relation to the presence of an ADSL line at home do we see significant differences from one category to the next.

Instead, students who net surf using their personal cell phone show a more numerous presence among the "photos&contents" (31.8% compared to 22%). On the contrary, among the "non-contributors" we see the greatest gap between those who do not net surf with their cell phone and those who do (27.6% vs. 19.4%).

This characteristic is important in tracing a profile of the most active SNS users. So is the variable relative to possession of a personal computer: we find that 31.9% of students having a pc belong to the group of "photos&contents" users, compared to 24.2% for those not possessing a pc. Interestingly, however, those who do not possess a personal computer are placed mainly among the adolescents who share only photos (the "only photos" group, 40.3%), while 31.9% of those saying they possess a pc belong to this category.

Identity and SNS use

The questionnaire given to students presents several variables defining modes of SNS use, which have been correlated to the category table we created. In this section we shall discuss their relation to actions performed by SNS users, frequency and mode of use, and several quantitative data on the number of "contacts".

One of the most important factors relates to the individual's identity; the person was asked whether his/her profile truly reflects them. The variable distributes with statistically significant differences among the four category types ($\chi^2=22.084$, $p<.001$), since the percentage of individuals declaring that "the profile truly reflects what I am" is significantly higher in the "photos&contents" category (79.6%) compared to the other groups. In particular, the groups which do not publish photos perceive their profile as being true to reality in only 65.5% of the cases.

The dimension corresponding to the publication of personal photos, therefore, relates to a self-presentation which is closer to reality. The two most extreme categories reflect different styles of self-presentation: those

bent on showing their own real identity on SNS favor a more open style in sharing personal information through photos and written content.

As pointed out by Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011), self-presentation by way of tools furnished by SNS, synthesized in the two dimensions we are considering here, is tied to performance, since it closely selects the information published, therefore constituting a mediated identity.

SNS users' behavior is associated with their actions: for example, "non-contributors" use the SNS in order to make friends to a significantly lower degree (24.1%, $\chi^2=10.941$, $p<.05$) with respect to all the other categories, in particular "photos&contents" (35.6%).

Note that even the distribution of individuals who say they use SNS to seek out persons sharing the same hobbies differs considerably among the four groups ($\chi^2=15.379$, $p<.01$). In this case, however, the higher incidence corresponds to the "only contents" (20.4%). On the opposite side, the "only photos" seek out persons sharing the same hobbies, to a lower degree (9.4%).

A further factor we examined regards the expressive actions purportedly characterizing students' use of SNS: for example, blowing off steam, communicating with adult figures of referral (parents and teachers), talking about sexuality; but also quarreling, asking a boy or girl out, or breaking up with them. As regards all these actions, only some behaviors differ from one category to the next; in particular, those who use SNS in quarreling with friends are more numerous in the "photos&contents" group than in others (13% compared to 4.5% for "non-contributors": $p<.01$), and those who use SNS to talk about sex are more numerous in the groups producing written content ($p<.05$).

Instead, as regards instrumental actions carried out online, the "photos&contents" group are considerably more active ($\chi^2=17.561$, $p<.01$) in online buying/selling (50.3%), whereas the "only contents" play games online to a greater degree (85%) with respect to the other categories. Listening to music online and watching films in streaming are more closely associated with the dimension of content production; therefore the two categories with this trait are dedicated to such activities in over 95% of cases, showing a significantly different distribution compared to the other categories.

As regards the frequency of SNS use, we also applied an analysis of variance for the average number of hours spent online among the four groups. The results show statistically significant differences and, by way of our *post hoc* testing (with Bonferroni correction), we can see that the “only contents” group spend a greater number of hours online compared to the other categories, both on weekdays (3.37 hours compared to an average 2.49) and on holidays (3.91 compared to an average 2.87). On the contrary, the “only photos” student group spends a lower number of hours online (2.07 on weekdays, 2.49 on holidays).

The frequency of SNS status updating also differs significantly according to the typology ($\chi^2=39.047$, $p<.001$). In particular, those who update their status at least once a day are present in greater number among the “photos&contents” group (31.9%) and the “only contents” (28.3%). Therefore, in this case as well, the dimension tied to written content appears to be associated with the frequency of status updating.

One important factor in SNS usage regards the privacy level perceived by young people, as well as the restrictions applied outside one’s own network and/or towards persons only recently met. With respect to privacy, we find significant differences among the categories ($\chi^2=8.753$, $p<.05$). Higher levels of perception regarding the protection of privacy appear in the “only photos” and the “only contents” group (around 50% of those interviewed).

Restrictions on the visibility of written content are also used in a statistically different manner according to the typology ($\chi^2=15.504$, $p<.01$), in particular with respect to the groups producing written content. In fact, over 70% of cases in the two groups producing text on SNS declare that they use restrictions, compared to the “non-contributors”, amounting to slightly over 60%.

The last trait of SNS use which we analyzed is of a quantitative nature: it regards the number of “contacts” (defined here as persons named as potential communicants).

In Table 2 we can see differences for different categories in the average number of contacts, in the number of contacts with whom the interviewees habitually communicate, and in the number of contacts whom the students don’t know personally.

Table 2. Average n. of SNS contacts by category

Category	n. contacts	n. habitual contacts	n. contacts with non-acquaintances
non-contributors	385,9296	49,5160	132,0420
only_contents	498,7889	57,8125	181,4560
only_photos	561,2721	66,1909	189,3470
photos&contents	712,1746	71,6388	227,1632
average	558,2046	62,9798	186,7134

The most active SNS users, “photos&contents”, show a markedly higher number of contacts compared to less active users. This datum is confirmed by the number of “friends” with whom users communicate habitually. If we apply an ANOVA to these data, the differences between category averages appear statistically significant (respectively: $F=19.348 - p<.001$; $F=3.821 - p<.05$; $F=9.971 - p<.001$).

A final important datum regards the composition of the contact network: we see that the presence of personal acquaintances among “friends” significantly correlates to the publication of personal photos, ($p<.001$), and therefore, to the “only photos” and “photos&contents” groups.

In conclusion, the “photos&contents” group has on average more contacts compared to the other groups; its members tend to update their profile more frequently than the “only contents” which, instead, spend the most hours online.

Four-part classification applied to psychological scales

With a view to discriminating among different types of young SNS users, we submitted the four-part classification to two scales relating, respectively, to time perception and Internet dependency.

As previously explained, the Zimbardo scale of time perception (TPI) was submitted to interviewees in reduced form (D'Alessio et al., 2003), one able to define factors pertaining to the future and the present, thus putting aside past orientation, which should be less relevant for an adolescent population. In calculating the score for SNS behaviors among the four

groups, we used results from Segatto and Sciandra (in press) which show, for a representative sample of Italian adolescents, that there is no distinction between a hedonistic and fatalistic present, since orientation on both scales ends up coinciding, in the sub-population examined.

Therefore, through an analysis of variance we discovered significant differences among the four categories for both scales ($p < .01$ for the future scale and $p < .05$ for the present scale); in addition, by *post hoc* testing we see that:

- “non-contributors” show a significantly lower present orientation compared to “photos&contents”;
- “photos&contents” show higher future orientation compared to the three other categories.

According to Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), future orientation is linked to the capacity for plan-making and also to success in school; in fact, in analyzing with an ANOVA students’ orientation toward the future compared to their self-evaluation regarding their scholastic performance, a significant linear correlation emerges ($p < .001$). Those with a highly positive judgment of their school achievement turn out to show a future-directed orientation much more marked compared to students with a lower opinion of their school achievement (*post hoc* testing with Bonferroni correction).

Significant differences between one category and the next emerge, as well, when applying the Internet dependency scale (ANOVA, $F=19.027$, $p < .001$). In this case, however, the factor related to the production of written content is dominant; i.e., those who produce written content reach a higher level on the Internet dependency scale, as confirmed by *post hoc* testing. Therefore, both the “only contents” and the “photos&contents” group show more marked signs that they may be dependent, according to the Bisi scale (2003).

Finally, in an overall comparison we calculated scores for the scales of students declaring they didn’t sign up for a SNS (“unconnected”).

The “unconnected” show a level of future orientation similar to that of “photos&contents” members, and therefore significantly higher compared to the other three categories, whereas present orientation reaches the lowest

level in the entire sample.

On the Internet dependency scale as well, the “unconnected” show the lowest level in the sample, as could be expected given their infrequent use of SNS. Regarding general access to the Web, members of this group declare that they netsurf on their cell phone to a markedly lower extent compared to members of SNS (-16%; $p < .001$). This group also shows a lower incidence of ADSL at home (-7%; $p < .01$) and pc ownership (-9%; $p < .01$). Instead, we find no significant difference as to the number of hours spent online during weekdays and holidays.

Therefore, despite the differences observed as to Web access, we may suppose that in carrying out specific in-depth studies concerning the interests of this sub-population, we may discover attitudes, choices and interests diversified with respect to Web use which exist independently of any supposable “digital divide”.

Summary

Given the vast body of variables applied to the four-part classification of student users of SNS, in the table which follows we summarize the results of the contingency tables and ANOVAs applied in our analysis. Table 3 lines up the variables which are distributed differently with respect to the types of students examined, appearing in the column. If the percentages or the averages for the quantitative variables emerge as significantly higher compared to the overall sample, in the relative box we find the sign ‘+’; if the contrary occurs, we find ‘-’.

In the remaining cases, the resulting data is to be considered similar to the overall sample data.

Discussion

The data expressed above show the emergence of different communicative strategies in self-presentation on SNS, providing indications well beyond the limits of our initial hypotheses.

Alongside true and proper “biographical projects”, revealing a strong need to reflexively express one’s identity, we seem to find space for more

Table 3. Summary of results for category analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>TYPE</i>			
	<i>non-contributors</i>	<i>only photos</i>	<i>only contents</i>	<i>photos & contents</i>
<i>Structural</i>				
<i>Gender: female</i>				+
<i>Gender: male</i>	+			
<i>Netsurfs with cell phone</i>	-			+
<i>Possesses a pc</i>		-		+
<i>Identity and SNS use</i>				
<i>"Your SNS profile really mirrors what you are"</i>	-		-	+
<i>Uses SNS to make friends</i>	-			+
<i>Uses SNS to find people with the same hobbies and interests</i>		-	+	
<i>Uses SNS to quarrel with friends</i>	-			+
<i>Uses SNS to talk about sex</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Buys/sells online</i>	-			+
<i>Plays online</i>			+	
<i>Listens to music online; watches films in streaming</i>			+	+
<i>Spends the most hours online</i>		-	+	
<i>Updates status at least once a day</i>	-		+	+
<i>Feels SNS privacy is protected</i>	-	+	+	
<i>Uses restrictions on content visibility</i>	-		+	+
<i>Number of contacts</i>	-			+
<i>Presence of personal friends among contacts</i>		+		+
<i>Scales</i>				
<i>Present-oriented</i>	-			+
<i>Future-oriented</i>	-	-	-	+
<i>Internet Dependency</i>	-	-	+	+

pragmatic pathways reflecting personal enthusiasms, concrete social needs, or a simple presidium of virtual space to which little is added beyond one's name.

Generally speaking, we may say that the two axes adopted in this study are promising, and capable of guaranteeing considerable heuristic value; indeed:

- expressing oneself through content of a linguistic or paralinguistic nature (comments, updating of one's personal profile and status) implies the exercising of introspective practices which are costly time-wise, exposing the individual to a need for adopting more restrictive norms governing access to his/her profile.

- choosing to produce, select and share photographs regarding one's daily life expresses, instead, the individual's intention to supplement explicitly his/her offline identity with an online one, while making the various self-narrations mutually coherent, and exercising greater control over the "audience" (the persons to whom communications are addressed).

In the second place, the normative system regulating the publication of SNS content is characterized by a marked differentiation among expressive forms; the user strives to define types of behavior which may guarantee the achievement of specific goals.

The individual agency of the interviewees therefore seems to rely on self-narrating modes which are partly pre-codified, at least in the choice of cues selected in order to communicate with one's audience and generate interaction. Such codes imply different levels of investment in terms of time and personal resources.

In the interaction of the various attitudes observed, the four groups assume specific characteristics, allowing us to posit research questions which might well be studied in depth during further research (fig. 1).

a) Based on the results of this study, the student group communicating solely through written online content has been attributed with "*instrumental orientation*". This group strongly focuses on precise aims (playing games, pursuing hobbies, downloading music, etc.), giving prevalence to the possibility of exploring their interests in greater depth by networking rather than striving to construct a true and proper identity

mirroring their reality. The profile here is understood as a “filter to reality” through which one transmits information considered opportune or useful in constructing new relationships based on common interests.

Indeed, while members of this category say they are satisfied with the privacy level allowed by the SNS, they obtain it by setting up specific restrictions on the visibility of personal information which would allow them to be traced down.

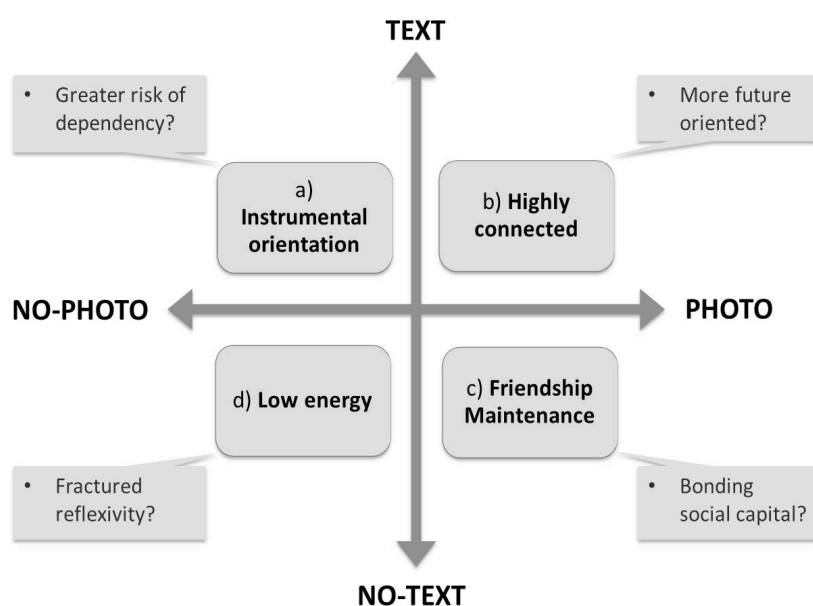


Figure 1. Types of SNS users renamed and research queries

Altering what is considered real may be considered a way to appear more interesting and attractive (Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan and McCabe, 2005) or, more simply, to combat shyness and deal with delicate

topics, such as sex.

This tendency characterizes the group which spends the most time online; its members often update their profile and express personal opinions, as well as playing games. In other words, an important portion of their free time and social life seems to be spent online, in search of an equilibrium which itself might expose them to the risk of Internet dependency to a greater degree compared to most of the other interviewees.

b) Students in the second group, defined as “*highly-connected people*”, present themselves by using both written text and visual images; they state that their profile mirrors what they really are. The Web and the use of SNS function as actual extensions, given the individuals’ possibility to perform actions and interact as they search for complex equilibriums in which self-narration is seemingly linked to “performance”, understood in terms of a continuous attempt to communicate with and influence others (Goffman, 1959; boyd, 2010).

The high “connection level” regards the very relationship between online and offline life, supplemented in aspects both natural and relational, and in concrete activities (such as buying and selling objects).

Members of this group can rely on greater technological resources allowing them to keep their profile “always on” and ensuring response to their most frequent comments and status updates.

Besides counting on a higher number of contacts, their type of SNS use expresses openness towards a good number of individuals, circles, and new friendships, by way of tenuous links which may reinforce social capital bridging (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007) thanks, in part, to the numerous pieces of information that they provide which tend to make their profile more credible and attractive (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007).

However, the group’s distinguishing trait is its temporal dimension (TPI scale): its present and future orientation win significantly higher scores, which indicates a more marked tendency for making plans. In other words, with SNS, the investment in processes of identity construction, when assuming a performative character, is seemingly related to greater trust in one’s prospects for the future.

c) Members of the third group use SNS primarily by publishing photos; that is, they narrate their life stories visually. We characterize them with the description, “*friendship maintenance*” since, as other authors point out (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2011), their approach reveals the importance they give to their peer group, and their greater focalization on face-to-face relations. The time spent online by this group is restricted to essentials, unbound from any need to deepen personal interests or to give vent to moods. Although this group’s need for affirming identity seems less marked, its members nevertheless perceive their online profile as being consistent with reality, and believe that privacy levels offered by the SNS are adequate.

In this perspective, Web use extends opportunities for exchanging information and dealing with one’s circle of referral or peer group, already based on links of trust, by ensuring the possibility to stratify personal facts relating to the present and the past, involving “friends” who might be called into play via “tagging”, and thus be recognized in the context of shared experience.

This group’s traits seem similar to those of the “Faithfuls” described in the 2008 Ofcom study. The “Faithfuls” focus on the SNS’ efficacy in maintaining contact with one’s real-life, daily social network. For them, openness toward new friendships may be considered secondary; they express their social capital in terms of bonding.

d) The last group, the “non-contributors”, show a “*low-energy*” attitude. Members differ from those of the other categories in their low-profile presence on SNS; they are passive in terms of public exposition, even while connected to a good number of contacts. Their personal online profile seems to function as a presidium, a reserved space by which they can be found by way of essential information, rather than an expression of any specific identity. “To be there without promoting oneself” would synthesize their attitude, corresponding to a low level of both present and future orientation in terms of the TPI scale. Uncertainty as to their personal prospects and goals seems linked to their difficulty in creating biographic narration.

They appear wary of any risk to their privacy which a careless use of the

instrument might cause, even though they do not adopt specific restrictions concerning their personal data. However, this attitude does not seem to express contradiction, so much as a fundamental lack of engagement; or, in some cases, the belief that SNS are not the proper place for telling about oneself. Any communication which may be sought can take place in private: chat rooms and personal messages are mostly reserved for acquaintances who are less likely to make the user vulnerable to any anxiety or risk connected with the public online dimension. Apparently, these users do not actively seek out new relationships; and generally speaking, they perform few concrete actions to be dealt with by networking. We should point out that among the “low energy” members, there is less use of smartphones which are equipped for net surfing. Considering the impact of “always-on” technologies on lifestyles and forms of communication, this correlation might be studied in greater depth in later research.

In conclusion, the factors analyzed here have allowed us to define and rather sharply distinguish four different categories of adolescent, as regards self-presentation on SNS. By applying several variables to the categories, we have seen varying processes emerge by which the individual defines himself/herself: processes marked not only by the expression of identity, but also by one’s strongest interests, by the nearly exclusive focus on one’s personal social relations, or by one’s mere presence within an online space.

Although this study is of an essentially explorative, empirical nature, we believe that it suggests ample possibilities for further research, based on our findings.

Our research data show that not all adolescents who spend a large amount of time online are subject to the same degree to Internet dependency. An *ad hoc* study would allow us to ascertain to what extent the choice to explore strong interests mainly via Internet, might be considered a risk factor.

Research aiming to designate social capital would allow us to verify the connection between communicative channels and network morphology (bonding and bridging, in particular).

The temporal dimension, assessed by way of the TPI, requires further study in order to verify to what extent a higher (or lower) level of

connectivity and use of communicative channels, is actually linked to a higher (or lower) tendency to plan for the future (or “fractured reflexivity”; Archer, 2003).

Finally, given the results which emerged after applying the “temporal perspective” scale to adolescents who do not join any SNS, this group should be analyzed separately and then systematically compared to the other categories, in order to clarify the connection between online behavior and offline lifestyles.

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