

Bar-Ilan University

Facebook as an expression of possible selves

Michal Turner

Supervisor: Professor Deborah Court

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Abstract

An attractive Facebook profile suited to the accepted social norms in Israel may enhance desirable Possible Self (desirable possible self is: attractive, successful, admired, loved etc.). This study examined: How Possible Self is expressed on Facebook. To examine Possible Self-expression on Facebook, a qualitative study was conducted which included: analyzing the contents of the participants' Facebook profiles and interviews, a narrative interview and a semi-structured interview to 13 women aged 26-33, who have an active Facebook account. The search for participants was done through Facebook groups that the researcher is part of, as well as through the researcher's circles of friends on Facebook (see: participants). One significant conclusion that came from this study is that we have a circular behavior (see Figure 4): the desire for social acceptance and creating a desirable Possible Self is based on Facebook members' feedback to an admired or not admired activity. Based on the social feedback, "desirable" (according to the social norms of people on Facebook) behavior increases and "undesirable" behavior subsides. The effect of these phenomena created a strategic and calculated Facebook profile. Strategic profile is characterized by a selective, flawless profile adjusted to Israel's social norms. Frequency, manner and content of the information which the participant publishes on Facebook, is carefully selected by them (see Figure 3). All of these enhance the desirable Possible Self (popular, beloved, successful, etc.). It was also found that there is room for a rejected Possible Self (lonely, depressed, unemployed, incompetent, failed, unwanted, etc.) on Facebook. Participants will not reveal a rejected Possible Self on the personal profile, but in Facebook groups encompassing communities, a rejected Possible Self can be expressed. In Facebook groups they feel comfortable to share their difficulties and benefit from a therapeutic factor known as universalism, the fact that there are affiliate

users in the same situation creates relief and relaxation. Other phenomena revealed in this study are: the phenomenon of social pressure to open or keep a Facebook profile, and respond in reciprocity to achieve a desirable Possible Self. The phenomenon of social comparison that exists on Facebook, the study revealed the tendency to compare the quality and happiness of the participant's life between the quality and happiness of her Facebook friend's life. In conclusion, the interest in maintaining an attractive Facebook profile is probably because Facebook's effect on mood and on a desirable Possible Self. Facebook is also a tool for the opinion of the masses, and hence has large Impact. Therefore, it is recommended to gain exploration and information about the effects of Facebook and teach children and youth about this influential tool, its advantages and disadvantages. This study constitutes part of depth understanding required about Facebook in particular, social networking and a virtual environment as a whole.