Identity in organisational social media
from a representational to a performative perspective

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Why is Identity Important?

› Drivers of identity expression

- Communication
- Recognition
- Identification
- Shared understanding

Self

Perceiver
Mainstream in social media research
- focused on youth and student populations
- dominant themes
  - self-promotion
  - narcissism
  - self-disclosure
  - online/offline comparisons
  - negotiation different or conflicting self-representation contexts
Self-representation and impression management in Social Media

› Professional usage of social media
  - research new but increasing
  - most in externally available platforms
  - themes
    - informal communications aids connectivity
    - used to enhance professional visibility
    - considered important by individuals to self-promote to external labour market
  - expressions of and access to expertise key usage
    - self-representations play significant role in these work practices
Identity & Representation in Social Media

› development of representational perspective
  - self is stable, static and whole
  - representations interact on self’s behalf
  - representation of identity derived through social interactions

› origins of representational perspective
  - Goffman – social theorist
  - “theatrical analogy”
    - front-stage and back-stage analogous to self and representation
Identity – Representational Lens

- Only possibility
- Not Possible
Development of the representationalist perspective

› virtual anonymous “identities as therapy”
  - Sherry Turkle
  - disembodied and anonymous MUD environments
  - new emergent mode of identity production

› Turkle’s tradition morphs over time
  - ‘real’ self-presentations versus audience perceptions in online dating
  - whether anonymity and disembodiment change presentation of ‘true’ self on internet as opposed to face-to-face
  - actual self equates to offline and online presented or idealised
Identity – Representational Lens

A confusion of self, identities and representations
Identity in Social Media Representationalist Lens
Rethinking the representationalist perspective

› Rethinking Goffman
  - Goffman himself ambiguous
  - theatrical metaphor interpreted in SM research as:
    - Back stage = somehow more real or authentic
    - Front stage = in company and ‘performing’
      - only very limited sense of social

› Representationalist practice
  - avoids identity altogether
  - focus on impression management

Self is the “product of a scene that comes off, and is not the cause of it”
The nonymous environment
- defined as opposite of anonymous environments
- **LinkedIn** anticipates actual education, employment history as part of profile
- **Twitter** celebrity brands (e.g. Stephen Fry)

semi-nymous environments
- online dating requires individuals to eventually meet offline
- impression management between attracting partners and presenting “authentic self”
Problems with representational lens

- push to single identity across online-offline environments
- reflexive nature of participation i.e. self may be modified through participation
Theoretical Breakdown 2 – Authentic Identities

› Social network architectures e.g. facebook
   - “profile as identity” implies single and static identity
   - allows multiple identities but considers one of these as a single “authentic” identity

› Implications
   - binaries of “real versus fake”, “public versus private”, “single versus multiple identities”
   - understanding of authenticity, credibility and reputation influenced
Representationalist Black Box

- Self v Identity
- Expression v Recognition
- Identity v Identification
- Authenticity
- Real v Fake
A performative lens

› explicitly rejects essentialist position
  - properties of things DO NOT inhere in those things
  - we DO NOT access knowledge of things through representations of them
  - NO subject/object divide
  - conceptual boundary work is fluid and continually constituted
Identity – Performative Lens

Entangled

Situated

Enacted

Reflexive

Co-constitutive
While it appears that we have an essential stable self-identity, that self-identity is multiple, fluid, socially co-constitutive with ever shifting boundaries that are determined through an ongoing self-identity performance.

We shift from thinking about self-representation to identity articulation practices.
Identity as Practiced

Identity work and articulation

Communication

Discourse

Sociomaterial entanglements
Knowledge work through a performative lens

› Identity is a two-way street

› Identity work in organisational studies
  - identity narratives are site of convergence for managers
  - workplace learning motivated by identity construction
  - interaction identities created to add meaning to group work
Knowledge work through a performative lens

› knowledge work research is subject to similar black-boxing effect
  - mystification of knowledge as tacit or produced

› Identity and knowledge work as entangled
  - need to understand boundaries and decisions made as individuals enact their identities during work practices
  - situated within organisation
  - entangled with technologies, practices, processes and systems
  - multi layered perspective
Implications further work

› representationalist perspective intuitive in SM
› need to get beyond pre-given perspectives
› multiple perspective and iterations of research needed
› need to get at the decisions and boundaries individuals make during identity work and articulation as they are situated in knowledge work and organisational practices
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