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“This is me”

A look at user self-presentation on Facebook:

Navigating tensions in the online world of identity creation

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Abstract

More than one in five people worldwide use Facebook on a regular basis. Since its inception in 2004, it has grown to be the most popular social network in the world, with huge profits and number of employees. There is little doubt that Facebook has a major presence in our lives, and due to its relatively recent conception, an under-researched one. Studies have included areas such as identity presentation, social anxiety, health benefits and disadvantages and whether Facebook use changes our offline behaviour. The aim of the present study was to hear the voices of Facebook users, and find out what they think, feel and do when they use the platform. Analysis of semi structured interviews with nine female participants from the Auckland area aged 25-34 was conducted. One key finding was that rather than presenting a version of their own identity on Facebook, people were *creating identities using* Facebook. A second important finding was that they were doing so in a sea of contradictions and tensions. Unease was apparent when users said they would not do a certain thing on Facebook and then found evidence to the contrary, and also when their desire not to appear judgemental was voiced in the midst of a judgement. Extremely visible was the effect and presence of the 'audience' and associated expectations, while participants also uneasily recognised the agent-like nature of Facebook as a part of their identity creation. Finally, it was clear how important it seemed to be for users to acknowledge the distinct existence of the 'Facebook world' as a distinct identity, despite citing their struggle to remember this in their everyday lives. Future research would help to understand more about the effects of Facebook, given its power and non-neutral presence and the findings of this study that users are not always fully aware of the details of Facebook, extending to their own usage of it.

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