

35. Self-Presentation on Social Media¹

İbrahim AKKAŐ²

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of social media for self-presentation. For this purpose, how social media use affects the self and self-presentation is discussed based on the concept of "self-presentation" proposed by Goffman. Many people around the world have been using social networkin sites lately to stay in touch with online and social media friends, discover new "friends" and share user-generated content such as photos, videos, news and shopping. The use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram has increased in recent years. In addition, social media applications that offer opportunities such as entertainment, games, information acquisition, music, video and photo sharing have increased the interest in them. Therefore, self-presentation is one of the most important reasons why people use social media. Self-presentation, a key concept in an individual's identity development, now extends beyond face-to-face interactions to social networking sites. Users have tried to get positive feedback on self-presentation by constantly sharing various photos, places and videos on social media.

Keywords: Identity, Digital Identity, Self, Self-presentation, Social Media.

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² Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü / Assist. Prof., Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Social Work (Erzincan, Türkiye), **eposta:** ibrahimakkas191@gmail.com, **ORCID ID:** <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1381-2982> **ROR ID:** <https://ror.org/02h1e8605>, **ISNI:** 0000 0001 1498 7262, **Crossref Funder ID:** 501100009706

Sosyal Medyada Benlik Sunumu³

Öz

Bu makale sosyal medyanın benlik sunumu açısından önemini tartışıyor. Bu amaçla sosyal medya kullanımının benliği ve benlik sunumunu nasıl etkilediği Goffman'ın önerdiği "benlik sunumu" kavramından hareketle tartışılmaktadır. Dünya çapında pek çok insan, çevrimiçi ve sosyal medya arkadaşlarıyla iletişimde kalmak, yeni "arkadaşlar" keşfetmek ve fotoğraf, video, haber ve alışveriş gibi kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan içeriği paylaşmak için son zamanlarda sosyal ağ sitelerini kullanıyor. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp ve Instagram gibi sosyal ağların kullanımı son yıllarda arttı. Ayrıca eğlence, oyun, bilgi edinme, müzik, video ve fotoğraf paylaşımı gibi olanaklar sunan sosyal medya uygulamaları da bunlara olan ilgiyi artırmıştır. Dolayısıyla benlik sunumu, insanların sosyal medyayı kullanmasının en önemli nedenlerinden biridir. Bireyin kimlik gelişiminde anahtar bir kavram olan benlik sunum, artık yüz yüze etkileşimlerin ötesine geçerek sosyal ağ sitelerine kadar uzanıyor. Kullanıcılar sosyal medyada sürekli olarak çeşitli fotoğraf, yer ve videolar paylaşarak benlik sunumu konusunda olumlu geri dönüşler almaya çalışmışlardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kimlik, Dijital Kimlik, Benlik, Benlik Sunumu, Sosyal medya.

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Social Media

With the growth and widespread use of social media technologies, a greater number of applications have been developed. These tools allow users to share information in text, audio, photo, and video formats and use them to improve communication skills. This has led to the emergence of a variety of different social spheres, as well as the development of applications that are called social media. As a collection of technologies, social media allows individuals to follow communication, content, and the like between their friends and social networks. These sites allow users to simply upload content on the internet and share it with other people (Kaya, 2021:47). The technological advances of the last siecle have led to rapid social transformation, significantly altering the way people interact with each other. Face-to-face communication is no longer the only way to establish social relations, as social networks have enabled social interaction and social relations through digital means. Social networks have become very popular platforms for social interaction thanks to the popularity of the Internet, the readily available tools for accessing the Internet, the development of social networking sites which are easy to use and rich in content, and the variety of applications offered to users. Through these venues, individuals share their interests, opinions, preferences, information and bodies, in short, who they are. The new tools for self-expression and impression management are social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:1).

Each social media application has a profile page for its users. Users here share about themselves in an attempt to explain who they are. Viewers get an idea of who owns the profile by looking here. As a result, a person's own page is similar to a resume that can be evaluated by the entire world. Boyd and Ellison say social networking sites follow three basic principles. First, users create a public or semi-public profile in the system. Second, they itemise the profiles they may know in that system (Kaya, 2021:48). A profile is a unique page where a person can “exist by writing the self.” A person is required to fill out forms with a variety of questions when joining a social network. Profiles are usually created by responding to questions. They include identifiers such as age, location, interests, and an "about me" section. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile photo. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles with rich media content or to change the appearance and image of their profile. Others allow users to add modules ("applications") that enhance their profile, such as Facebook. (Boyd and Ellison, 2207:210).

Despite some definitions in a quite narrow sense, social media refers to “electronic forms of communication where users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content” (Alves et al., 2016:1029). Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to transform communication into an interactive dialog. Meanwhile, social networking sites describe a kind of social structure made by people who associate with each other in relation to a particular area, such as a partner. While social media refers to a broad concept, social networking sites refer to only one of the communication sites like wikis and blogs; in other words, it is a subcategory of the social body. (Yenilmez Kaçar, 2021:18). Social media are web- and mobile-based technologies that make communication an interactive dialog. A social network, on the other hand, refers to a social structure where people with common interests come together. Connecting with others is the main goal of social networks. Some argue that social networks preceded social media, while others believe the opposite. In essence, social networks are based on human interaction (Cohn, 2019:1). Social networks eliminate various negative situations in terms of time and space. People become dependent on their computers and phones and are forced to be alone. Social media is not only a habit for today's virtual users. It's also a new environment for socializing. Worldwide network systems make it possible for people to communicate with each other over the internet. The social environment has been transformed

into an internet-based environment. People communicate, meet and socialize with other people through social networks (Doruk Akbakın, 2021:120).

In the studies conducted, it is seen that the term "social network" is generally used synonymously with "social networking sites". A review of social networking sites reveals them to be online platforms, whereas social networks refer to social relationships established on them (Yenilmez Kaçar, 2021:17).

Social networking sites can be defined as a collection of virtual user profiles that can be shared among the users. Research on the antecedents of social network use is limited despite the importance of the Internet and social networks in modern life (Hughes et al., 2012:561). Social networking sites (SNS) have become increasingly important social platforms for computer-mediated communication as a result of their rapid penetration into people's daily lives. A few successful examples are Facebook, Myspace, and Friendster. By definition, social networking is a new communication method that utilizes computers as a collaborative tool to increase group coverage and influence (Lin and Lu, 2011:1152). A social network is a cyber environment where individuals can create their own profiles, share texts, pictures, and photos, and connect with other users through online applications and groups (Lin and Lu, 2011:1153).

There may be differences in the nature and naming of the links between sites. Rather than serving as a way for individuals to meet each other, social networking sites serve as a way for individuals to express themselves and make their social networks visible (Boyd and Ellison, 2007:210).

The use of social media in daily lives of individuals continues to evolve with the introduction of new tools, environments and opportunities brought by new technology. Basically, social media are platforms where people read, share, and discover news, information and content through an interactive communication process between one person and more than one person, or from more than one person to more than one person. Platforms are social environments (Özçağlayan and Uyanık, 2010:60).

Many social media platforms are internet-based and allow users to share in interactive participation. The first step to having interaction potential for individuals is to join the networks by creating a profile. Interaction emerges naturally because of joining. The networks where individuals become users allow them to interact with their environment and other people. They express themselves by sharing and commenting on the content they produce or materials (news, photos, music, etc.) previously prepared by others (Kaya, 2021:49).

In the past, the media were primarily newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the like, but with the advent of digital technologies, the invention of the internet, and the use of Web 2.0 technology, another form of media has risen to prominence and surpassed traditional mass media in all areas of life. Basically, social media consists of a set of internet-based applications built on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0 allowing users to create and share content (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:11).

Social media is often referred to by channel characteristics that determine the direction of messages or use specific tools such as Facebook or Twitter to exemplify interaction modes (Howard and Parks, 2012:362).

It includes (1) infrastructure and the means to create and distribute content that reflects individual as well as shared values, (2) the content that takes the form of digital messages, news, and ideas that become cultural products, and (3) both the tools and the content that people, organizations, and industries produce and consume. (Howard and Parks, 2012:359).

Social media are internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 ideologies and technologies that allow the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010:62).

Social media is social in nature, it transcends a particular proprietary tool with a lot of social content. Users' social activities are highly influenced by design choices and infrastructure, far beyond traditional usage categories and gratification theories. From our perspective, social media can be divided into three areas: (a) the technological infrastructure and platforms used to generate and distribute content; (b) the range of digital content, including personal messages, news, concepts, and cultural expressions; and (c) the individuals, organizations, and sectors involved in both the production and consumption of digital content. (Howard and Parks, 2012:359). The uses and gratifications approach is a theory put forward to explain why and how an individual chooses certain media content to meet various needs and achieve various purposes (Kacar Yenilmez, 2021:99).

Kaplan and Haenlein similarly provided a brief definition of social media as “an array of internet-based applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:61).

Social media platforms are online communication channels that enable mass personal interactions, operate on the Internet, and are characterized by their persistent nature. These platforms derive their primary value from user-generated content. (Carr and Hayes, 2015:49).

A social networking site is defined as a website that allows users to create online communities and share user-generated content. People may be individual internet users or they may be restricted to those belonging to a particular organization (e.g. company, university, professional society, etc.). Community members may be offline friends (friendships can be expanded online), online acquaintances, or interest groups (based on school, hobbies, interests, common reasons, occupation, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) (Kim et al., 2010:217).

Generally speaking, social networking sites are web sites that allow people to stay in touch with others in online communities. Myspace, Facebook, Windows Live Spaces, Habbo, etc., are some of the most widely used social networking sites in the world today. Social media sites are web sites that allow people to share content. Among the most widely used social media sites are YouTube, Flickr, Digg, Metacafe, etc. Teenagers and young adults dominate most social websites. There is roughly the same number of male and female users (Kim et al., 2010:219).

Self-Presentation in Social Networks

Social networks have become increasingly important as a means of face-to-face communication. In social networks, individuals can express themselves and meet their individual and social needs, both as an alternative and complementary to face-to-face communication (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:99).

The self is defined as the awareness that arises from an individual's interactions with their own environment, beliefs, values, rules, relationships between them, and inferences about their behavior (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:49).

According to theories of self and identity, individuals naturally prioritize understanding themselves and their identities and use this self-awareness to navigate the world around them. Identity and self are expected to influence individuals' behaviors, perceptions of themselves and others, as well as their

actions, emotions, and self-regulation. The concept encompasses all of the beliefs, evaluations, perceptions, and thoughts that individuals hold about themselves. (Kaya, 2021:139).

Today's online environments provide new opportunities for self-presentation and impression/identity formation in human interaction (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:157). The intent of a well-designed social network page is not only to tell the world about an individual's life, but also to show how they want their social environment to perceive them (Maronto and Barton, 2010:39). A common assumption supported by content analysis suggests that social network profiles are used to create and communicate idealized selves (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:158). The idealized virtual identity hypothesis suggests that individuals often present themselves on social network profiles in ways that showcase idealized traits rather than reflect their true personalities. As a result, self-presentation on social media tends to emphasize an individual's idealized view of themselves rather than an accurate representation of their true self. (Back et al., 2010:372). With the internet on mobile phones, users can conveniently connect anytime, anywhere to these sites, allowing them to present themselves more quickly and conveniently. On social networks, users manage their impressions by creating profiles, sharing photos and videos, writing opinions, joining groups, commenting, messaging and interacting privately with certain people. For example, they try to control how others see themselves by creating a profile emphasizing the aspects of their self that will make a good impression on Facebook, sharing links that offer clues about their identity on Twitter, and posting photos that reflect their ideal self on Instagram (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:118).

A fundamental practice in all modern social media platforms is carefully managing your self-presentation through technology. We create identity on Facebook by adding unique features (such as hometowns, favorite groups, etc.) whereas on Twitter, we create by sharing links. On Instagram, on the other hand, we revive the self that we want to share or want to be through the images we take (Deeb-Swihart et al., 2017:42-4).

In fact, many social profiles represent a blend of both the real personality that represents the authentic self and the ideal self. Social networks provide platforms for individuals to construct online communities in which they can express aspects of both their idealized identities and their authentic selves. Within these digital spaces, individuals have the ability to curate their online social environments and self-presentations that reflect a combination of their real identities and idealized aspects. Thus, social networks serve as platforms for individuals to digitally create and navigate their social identities and environments. (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:158).

Identity is defined as 'the concept of a limited set of claims' while digital identity is defined as 'something or an artifact referring to a person'. A digital identity is a way of presenting one's self both professionally and personally on the internet. Self-presentation is "a conscious or unconscious process by which people try to influence the perception of their self-image, typically through social interactions." As social networks became increasingly prevalent on the web, identity became naturally accepted as a social activity that was defined as a social performance, while digital identity was defined as a person's performance through a digital image. (Ayed, 2011:608). A particular discipline examines the disembodied and metamorphic nature of digital identity, exploring self-expression, social connections, and group formation in virtual environments (Malcic, 2018:206). Constructing digital identities is the first step in establishing a presence in virtual spaces. Social networks, in particular, provide a fertile ground for digital identity formation due to the variety of options and opportunities they offer. (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:160).

In addition to allowing users to express themselves without the need for any tools, social media also offers them the opportunity to become famous and admire their privacy disclosure. Even though following, liking, and sharing messages here gives an individual social status, it also undoubtedly creates a feeling of exposure and surveillance. As a result, expanding the boundaries of privacy contributes to the material and spiritual dimensions of another sharing. The most valuable share of privacy is the body. In the digital world, the physical appearance is so much ahead of the personality that the discussions about the essence are not even on the agenda anymore (Arık, 2018:176).

The body is the physical extension of the self and mediates the individual's ability to express himself in interaction with others and to reveal the self. The concept of body, which brings many concepts such as body image, body esteem, body diagram, is also closely related to the self. The body is the expression of memory and the visible face of the self. It is evident that individuals present themselves through their bodies from the perspective of self-presentation. As the first and most natural tool of an individual, it has always been a symbol of power and status, an element of communication, and a reflection of cultural and social values (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:65). It is viewed as a developing entity in Western societies. In other words, it is a project that needs to be worked on and accomplished as part of the individual's self and identity. To accept the body as an individual's project is to accept its appearance, height, shape, and even content can be reconfigured according to the owner's will. Considering the body as a project necessitates individuals to deal with their body actively. The body is also considered as an element of communication. Individuals perceive other individuals through their bodies and convey what they want to say through their bodies (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:66).

Social interaction is a dynamically variable set of social actions between individuals and groups. It is a dynamic social process in which individuals' actions and reactions are shaped by the actions of other individuals or groups. Social structures and cultures are built on social interactions, and social interactions form the building blocks of society. Social interaction is a process in which individuals mutually influence each other during social encounters. Social encounters today occur not only face-to-face, but also through technology such as messaging, video calls, and social media (Kaçar Yenilmez, 2021:58).

Social Media as a Stage

In addition to creating a rich context for positive self-presentation, social media facilitates upward social comparisons, in which individuals compare themselves to those who appear better (Yang and Brown, 2016:403).

Scholars like Mendelson and Papacharissi have observed that individuals use social media platforms as channels to express their identities, often presenting a carefully curated and selective version of themselves." (Chua and Chang, 2016:193).

The process of self-presentation involves communicating one's self-image to others and plays an important role in the development of an individual's identity (Baumeister, 1982:3). For young people today, social media (for instance, Facebook and Instagram) offers a powerful method of promoting themselves (Yang et al., 2017:212). Today, privacy violations, which are overshadowed by displays of self, devotion to individuality, obsessive surveillance and the desire to be observed, are not given much importance. Individuals who generally focus on communicating, conveying what they think and revealing their identity are unaware of questioning what the sharing will mean today and tomorrow

(Arik, 2018:180).

The possibility of identity design enables many people to participate in social media unconditionally. Identity is social in nature and is a fluid structure that is influenced by the everyday habits of society. As a cultural environment, social media facilitates the interaction, communication, visibility, and value of identities through relationships. Social networking sites are not places that facilitate the meeting of people, but rather places where people can display their social networks to others and develop their identities in this manner. Anxiety about creating self-perception is the main motivation for mobility in social networks. Therefore, social media shares play a crucial role in identity design. As a result, many people open up their private areas to the public, hoping to benefit from the interaction (Arik, 2018:183).

Individuals use a variety of self-presentation tactics in both online and face-to-face interactions. Research on strategic self-presentation in face-to-face contexts suggests that individuals tend to use self-enhancement strategies to create favorable impressions. Consequently, individuals may emphasize positive aspects of themselves while minimizing or mitigating negative attributes. This can lead to instances where individuals reinforce positive attributes in unrelated domains to counterbalance publicly known negative information about themselves. (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016:789). Classical self-presentation theory posits that in interpersonal interactions, individuals actively manage or influence the impressions they convey to others. Drawing on Goffman's conceptualization, individuals are like "actors" on a stage who strategically emphasize positive aspects of themselves in order to project desired impressions to their audience. Self-enhancement theorists emphasize the tendency of individuals to emphasize positive attributes while minimizing negative ones in their interactions, reflecting a broader desire to leave favorable impressions on others. (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016:790). It can lead to the creation of the "false self" between the real self and the ideal self (Gil-Or et al., 2015:1).

With the rise of the Internet and users' ability to create their digital personas and profiles, Goffman's theory of self-presentation has become a common framework for researching self-presentation in online environments. (Chua and Chang, 2016:191).

A concept developed by Goffman called dramaturgy, which explains identity as performance, is an integral part of the social interaction flow that occurs when individuals create their own identity performances. A digital level of this concept is achieved through online environments, and in particular social networks that allow users to create their own digital identities. These environments create spaces for disembodied, mediated, and controllable alternative performances to be presented to the audience (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:159). Websites and social media platforms based on the presentation of the individual play an important role in constructing the identity of the users with their contents and their connection networks. Content that the user talks about their experiences, likes, following or comments corresponding to their interests, expressions using text, photos or sounds provide clues about the identity of the persons (Kaya, 2021:180).

Social media platforms provide ample opportunities for individuals to engage in positive self-presentation, fostering a culture of upward social comparison in which individuals measure themselves against those perceived as superior (Yang and Brown, 2016:403). The prevalence of upward social comparison on social media has led to a predominant focus in current research on evaluative comparisons, such as assessments of social status, popularity, superiority, and physical attractiveness (Yang et al., 2018:95). Rather than simply emphasizing superiority or inferiority, individuals assess similarities and differences in attitudes, beliefs, and values and determine whether adjustments are

necessary based on their own perspectives. Drawing on Goffman's concept of dramaturgy, individuals engage in both foreground behaviors, which are performed in front of others, and backstage behaviors, which involve preparatory work hidden from view, in order to project a positive image. In the context of social media, users not only engage in onstage performances, but also create "exhibits" to display in designated areas (Hogan, 2010:377). Unlike live theatrical performances, these digital exhibits are products of past actions that remain for others to view at their leisure. Therefore, while social media content such as profile pages, photos, comments, and feedback serve as platforms for self-expression, they are inherently constructed and curated (Chua and Chang, 2016:192).

Goffman's dramaturgical approach, based on the metaphor "all the world's a stage," illustrates how individuals often present an idealized rather than authentic version of themselves. This technique allows individuals to manipulate their behavior and selectively disclose information (Hogan, 2010:378). In this theatrical setting, each performance is both performed and interpreted by the audience. Individuals construct performances using verbal and nonverbal cues that influence their physical surroundings and facial expressions in order to shape how others perceive them. Unlike physical identities, individuals can maintain multiple digital identities, allowing for flexibility in self-presentation. This ongoing process of shaping impressions is what Goffman calls "impression management. The concept is further elucidated by the notions of front and back stage. The front stage represents the observable realm where individuals enact their roles and engage in open performances. Conversely, backstage denotes a more private realm where intimacy and familiarity loosen the constraints of performance (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016:160).

In postmodern society, there's been a noticeable shift toward a greater emphasis on physical appearance as a core aspect of personal identity. This is evident in the widespread presence of body-related features in media such as newspapers, magazines, and television, as well as the emergence of multiple standards of beauty. The pursuit of an ideal physical appearance is facilitated by products and technologies such as diet pills, exercise programs, and cosmetic surgery. Individuals are now expected to adhere to body care routines aimed at improving their health and appearance, with failure to do so often stigmatized as a moral failing. Mike Featherstone observes the rise of a new self-concept in our modern consumer culture: the self as performer, where appearance and display are paramount. This contrasts with the nineteenth-century emphasis on character, which prioritized qualities such as citizenship, democracy, and morality. Whereas in the past identity was shaped by a variety of factors beyond appearance, today aesthetics-how one looks-plays a dominant role in defining the self (Negrin, 2008:9).

In the realm of online performance, both audience and performer exist in disembodied forms, electronically reincarnated through the chosen signs of representation. In this context, there are no physical eyes observing the performer, nor are there any tangible traces of communication. Instead, these "unknown audiences" are represented through the language of their avatars, influenced by the architectures of the online platforms they inhabit. These performances reside in the imaginations of users who use tools and technologies to create, renegotiate, and continually update their shared social constructs. To construct their online personas, users manipulate communicative codes with varying degrees of skill, while also shaping the staging and environment in which these digital selves operate. As social networks become more complex and users become adept at navigating multiple digital environments, these coded interactions evolve from mere textual exchanges to identities that act as puppets in structured virtual spaces. Within these mediated online environments, the distinction between front and backstage becomes blurred: what may feel like an intimate setting may be under the electronic scrutiny of a vast, anonymous audience, with no visible witnesses to the unfolding

performance. As a result, online exchanges hover between the private and public spheres, embodying elements of both. It serves as a front-stage area accessible from private spheres, fostering personal and occasionally intimate connections, but also open to "outsiders" who must possess communication and exchange skills to share knowledge and ideas with others (Pearson, 2009:5).

In the online realm, users have the ability to assume any identity they choose. Much like actors in role-playing scenarios, individuals can consciously choose to reveal identity cues or self-descriptions that are either closely aligned with reality or wildly divergent from it. The advent of Web 2.0 and the proliferation of social networking sites have greatly expanded the virtual arenas in which alternative identities can be enacted. However, these new platforms also give rise to debates and uncertainties about the boundaries between public and private discourse and the interplay between these constructed and mediated identities (Pearson, 2009:3).

The notion of identity as performance, as articulated by Goffman, suggests that individuals engage in ongoing identity performances tailored to their social environments. With increased self-awareness, online environments amplify this performative aspect. Social networking platforms serve as spaces where individuals can present disembodied, mediated, and controllable alternative performances to others (Pearson, 2009:4).

Conclusion

Social media has led to significant changes in the lives of individuals. In the traditional sense, the social groups that individuals participate in with their real identities by being in the same place, have started to be replaced by virtual groups, and the identity has turned into digital. In spite of the fact that social media has had a significant impact on identity and self, it has created the perception that individuals can do everything they do in the physical world in the virtual realm as well. This perception influenced self-presentation. Self-presentation is the impression one makes on others. Social media has led to changes in communication. Social media is where most people spend their time online. Using social media, individuals can create information and content about themselves, comment, communicate and interact with others, check in and upload photos. Many individuals use social media to socialize with their friends and to be visible in virtual groups. The use of social media also allows individuals to present themselves online. To conclude, individuals can upload and share photos on social media, create and manage personal profiles, and share their thoughts. What people share on social networks can provide insight into who they are and their personality. These features of social media offer individuals opportunities to present themselves, which in turn influence the development of self-concepts or identities.

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