Who am I? : Representing the self offline and in different online contexts

EMANUEL, Lia, NEIL, Greg J, BEVAN, Chris, STANTON FRASER, Danae, STEVENAGE, Sarah V, WHITTY, Monica T and JAMISON-POWELL, Sue <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5961-079X>

Who am I? Representing the self offline and in different online contexts

Lia Emanuel[a], Greg J. Neil[b], Chris Bevan[a], Danaë Stanton Fraser[a],

Sarah V. Stevenage[b], Monica T. Whitty[c], Sue Jamison-Powell[c]

[a] Department of Psychology, University of Bath, UK

[b] Psychology, University of Southampton, UK

[c] Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester, UK

Abstract

The present paper examines the extent to which self-presentation may be affected by the context in which is it undertaken. Individuals were asked to complete the Twenty Statements Test both privately and publicly, but were given an opportunity to withhold any of their personal information before it was made public. Four contexts were examined: an offline context (face-to-face), an un-contextualized general online context, or two specific online contexts (dating or job-seeking). The results suggested that participants were willing to disclose substantially less personal information online than offline. Moreover, disclosure decreased as the online context became more specific, and those in the job-seeking context disclosed the least amount of information. Surprisingly, individual differences in personality did not predict disclosure behavior. Instead, the results are set in the context of audience visibility and social norms, and implications for self-presentation in digital contexts are discussed.

Keywords: Self-concept; self-presentation; offline and online disclosure; social network sites.

Who am I? Representing the Self

Offline and in Different Online Contexts

1. Introduction

Technological developments have advanced at such a pace that large parts of our community now engage with what has become known as 'digital living'. Individuals can now build social and professional networks, engage in hobbies and education, conduct business and banking transactions, and much more, within the online environment. As a result, they have to manage many different identities or 'selves' while interacting with more varied audiences than ever before (Marwick & boyd, 2011), often blurring private and public identities as a result (Beer, 2008; Foresight Future Identities, 2013). The strands of work examining offline, general 'homogenous' online and specific contextual online environments have yet to directly compare how self-disclosure may differ between these spaces. The current literature reports varied findings with regards to how individuals choose to represent themselves in face-to-face and online exchanges. Possibilities for these discrepancies include differences in the context in which 'online' is framed, how one perceives their audience, the social function and website architectural constraints within each space. The purpose of the present paper is to explore these influential factors and provide a better understanding of the rules that may govern the considerable task of impression management across such diverse contexts. More explicitly, we test the notion that online self-presentation is sufficiently nuanced for us to maintain multiple discrete identities, and will thus be sensitive to the demands of each online space.

1.1. Online Social Identities

Early work in the area of online social identities suggested a simple and testable prediction: anonymity provided by the lack of physical contact online may encourage a greater level of self-disclosure than in the offline world. McKenna and Bargh (2000) suggested that this may arise through the perception of fewer social constraints, whilst Newman, Des Jarlais, Turner, Gribble, Cooley and Paone (2002) suggested that it may arise through the perception of fewer negative judgments from others. Such an increase in self-disclosure may bring benefits through the formation and maintenance of closer social bonds, as disclosure tends to be reciprocated (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). However, increased self-disclosure may also bring risks. These emerge through targeting for unwanted advertising or phishing attacks; through geo-tagged information being used by criminals (e.g., www.pleaserobme.com) or through unbalanced levels of trust in relationships (e.g., Whitty, 2013).

Tests of this prediction have in fact revealed remarkably inconsistent results. Nguyen, Sun Bin and Campbell (2012) provide a review of 24 recent studies, each of which has examined the level of self-disclosure in online compared to offline contexts. Aside from the inherent weakness of a retrospective self-report methodology used in many of these reviewed studies (see Schwarz, 2007), Nguyen et al. highlight the danger of assuming the internet to be a single homogenous space. Consequently, studies that compare generic online to generic offline behavior may be flawed in their basic conception. Indeed, Barkhuus (2012) critically notes the importance of audience, purpose, and context in which information is disclosed. Furthermore, the social identity model of de-individuation (SIDE; Postmes, Spears & Lea, 2002) suggests that individuals become more sensitive to such social cues when interacting online as they may have less information about who they are interacting with. With this in mind, the mixed results noted by Nguyen et al. are perhaps not surprising, and may highlight nothing more than the differences in demands within a highly heterogeneous set of online spaces.

1.2. Tailored Online Self-Presentation

Rather than continue to compare online with offline levels of self-disclosure and impression management, more recent work has taken the approach of exploring self-disclosure within discrete online contexts (see for example, Boyle & Johnson, 2010; Caine, Kisselburgh & Lareau, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Nosko, Wood & Molema, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013). As a body of work, this literature emphasizes the importance of three factors: the function of each online space; the social norms governing interaction within that space; and the perceived audience that one may encounter. Van Dijck (2013) encapsulate this very eloquently in noting that self-presentation in a more personal online space such as Facebook is all about *self-expression*, whereas self-presentation in a more professional context such as LinkedIn is all about *self-promotion*.

As a result, it should not surprise us to note differences in how individuals present themselves in different online spaces. This accords with the wealth of theoretical literature on impression management in the physical world (see Higgins, 1987; Rogers, 1959), and with the careful management discussed by Leary and Kowalski (1990) in terms of the disclosure of particular aspects of our selves, at particular times, and within particular contexts.

1.3. The Present Study

Where the conclusions of online self-presentation research are currently weak is in their susceptibility to the confounding influence of the structural constraints that various online fora impose on their users. This is a point noted by Papacharissi (2009), and it assumes importance here

because differences in self-disclosure across different online spaces may reflect differences in *capacity* to self-disclose rather than differences in *intention* to self-disclose. The present study addresses this concern by exploring self-disclosure across different spaces in a manner that it not tied to the design of that space.

Within the present study, participants were asked to self-disclose through using the Twenty Statements Test (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The TST asks participants to provide twenty different statements in response to the question 'Who am I?'. With free rein as to the sort of information that they provide, patterns of disclosure can be explored both in terms of quantity and type of information revealed (Kuhn, 1960). This has several benefits over existing methods. First, it is a quick, simple and established task for participants to undertake. Second, it is context-free meaning the TST can be placed within different offline and online contexts allowing participants to engage in self-disclosure without being constrained by the design features of each space. Third, the TST has shown itself to be sensitive enough to reveal aspects of our multiple selves (see Carpenter & Meade-Pruitt, 2008), and to capture the effects of context on self-presentation (Bettencourt & Hume, 1999; Gardner, Gabriel & Lee, 1999; Somech, 2000). As such, the TST lends itself well to an exploration of self-disclosure across different contexts.

The context in which we present ourselves is arguably not the only driving factor in self-disclosure. Several personality characteristics and individual differences have been suggested to influence online interaction patterns and behavior (e.g., Orchard and Fullwood, 2010). For instance, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that individual differences on the Big Five personality inventory are associated with differences in online usage and contribution to social networks (e.g., Amichai-Hambuger & Vinitzky, 2010). Similarly, self-awareness, an individual's situational self-focus, is sensitive to situation or context (Carver & Glass, 1976) and has also been associated, under certain circumstances, with greater disclosure behavior online (Joinson, 2001). Two further characteristics may also be important. Specifically, an individual's tendency to self-monitor their behavior has been linked to the degree to which they use privacy management strategies (Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010). Finally, tendencies to provide information that is considered socially desirable (social desirability bias) has been suggested to be reduced when providing sensitive information in an online interaction relative to face-to-face interactions (Newman et al., 2002). Considering the influence that these individual differences may have on self-disclosure across online and offline contexts, measures of personality traits, self-awareness, self-monitoring, and social desirability are included here, and may help explain variations in self-disclosure patterns.

Participants in the present study engaged in the TST on two occasions. Initially, their twenty statements were completed in private, and this enabled scrutiny of the amount and type of information provided under baseline conditions. Subsequently, participants were asked to reveal their statements in one of the following contexts: an offline (face to face) context, a generic online context, or specific online context s (a dating website or a job-seekers website). Importantly however, participants were given the opportunity to report or withhold their original answers before revealing them in a public context. It was this withholding behavior that was used as a measure of self-disclosure to explore the effect of context on impression management. In this way, the influence of each disclosure context could be explored, relative to the private, baseline, data. These different offline, generic online and specific online contexts were selected because they provided a means to compare offline and online disclosure taking into account the three key factors (identified previously - Section 1.2): the *function* of each online space; the *social norms* governing interaction within that space; and the *perceived audience* that one may encounter. The specific online contexts (e.g., dating and job-seeking) provided a tangible target audience, to compare against a more nebulous 'online' audience. Further, these two specific online spaces represent familiar concepts to SNS users, yet have very different purposes, end goals and motivational aspects for being a user on these types of networks. Two hypotheses emerged. First, if McKenna and Bargh (2000) and Newman et al. (2002) are correct, the three online contexts (e.g. generic, dating and job-seeking) should elicit greater overall levels of disclosure compared to the offline context in a test in which homogeneity of the online space is not assumed. Thus, in the present paradigm those in the offline context should exhibit the highest withholding behavior when moving from the private to public context, relative to all other online contexts. Notwithstanding this, if Van Dijck (2013) is correct, the function of each space should tailor the type of information that participants choose to self-disclose in a test in which disclosure in online contexts is not constrained by design features. Specifically, we would expect to see differences between the generic and specific online spaces regarding the amount of statements withheld and type of statements revealed in these public contexts. Two different contexts within the specific online space were used as an initial exploration of self-disclosure between social and professional spaces not confounded by dissimilar website structures.

2. Method

2.1. Design

A mixed design was used whereby participants' completion of the TST was within-participant. Specifically, 20 statements were recorded for each participant both when completing the TST privately, and when completing the TST publicly. The nature of the public context was varied

between-participant. Context varied so that participants either revealed information to another person face-to-face (offline context), to a generalized online audience (generic online context), or to specific and targeted online audiences (online dating context or online job-seeking context). The within-participant variable provided a baseline of disclosure behavior for each participant to explore how this self-disclosure changed when moving from a private to public context. The between-participant manipulation of public context allowed for the examination of how self-disclosure may vary between offline, general online and specific online contexts. For both the private and public TST the total number of statements and the type of information the statements contained were recorded. The statements participants chose to withhold in the public context were also taken, and these measures represented the dependent variables.

2.2. Participants

A total of 148 participants took part on a volunteer basis, in return for course credit or a small payment (£5). Participants were recruited from two UK Universities, across all departments, through University wide online notice boards and Psychology Departments' online research participation schemes. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the context conditions such that 50 participants were in the offline context, 50 participants were in the generic online context, and 48 participants were in the specific online contexts (24 participants in the online dating context, and 24 participants in the online job-seeking context). Ages ranged from 18 to 51 years (M = 23.6 years, SD = 5.96), with 50 male (34%) and 98 female (66%) participants. Further, 63.5% of participants were undergraduates, 24.3% were postgraduates and 12.2% were academic/administrative staff. Regarding ethnicity, participants identified as 55.4% white British, 23.6% other white, 8.8% Asian, 4.7% Indian, 3.4% African and 4.2% Other. Considering nationality regionally, participants reported 65.5% British, 15.5% Asia, 10.8% Western Europe, 4.1% Eastern Europe, 2.0% North America, 0.7% Africa, and 1.4% did not wish to state.

2.3. Materials

Given the strengths of the TST to examine self-representation across different contexts, as discussed in Section 1.3, this measure was employed to gauge disclosure patterns in the offline, generic online and specific online conditions. In addition, four measures of personality and individual differences that are suggested to be influential in disclosure behavior across online and offline spaces were taken. These measures are outlined below.

Twenty Statements Test: Participants completed the TST using the online survey engine at www.isurvey.soton.ac.uk. This online survey provided participants with 20 open-text boxes in which

they were asked to type in a response to the question 'Who am I?'. Each open-text box was presented individually, with participants moving to the next page of the survey after completing each statement. During the public disclosure phase, participants were able to see all of the statements they had provided, listed on one page of the online survey. For each, they indicated whether they wanted to report or withhold their original statement. If the participant selected withhold, then they were given the option to change that withheld statement but did not have to provide a new statement if they did not want to. After reviewing all initial statements participant submitted their final set of statements to one of the public contexts.

The 41-item Five-Factor Personality Inventory: The Big Five inventory adapted and validated by Buchanan, Johnson & Goldberg (2005) for online data collection was used. Participants used a 4-point scale to indicate the degree to which they agreed with statements describing aspects of extraversion (e.g., I am the life of the party), neuroticism (e.g., I have frequent mood swings), agreeableness (e.g., I believe that others have good intentions), conscientiousness (e.g., I make plans and stick to them) and openness (e.g., I believe in the importance of art). Scores were summed across the items relevant to each sub-section to provide five sub-scale scores.

The 9-item Situational Self Awareness scale: The scale developed and validated by Govern & Marsch (2001) was used, with three questions in each of three sections governing public self-awareness, (e.g., Right now, I am concerned about the way I present myself), private self-awareness (e.g., Right now, I am aware of my innermost thoughts) and situational self-awareness (e.g., Right now, I am keenly aware of everything in my environment). Participants responded using a 5 point scale to indicate the degree to which they agreed with each statement, and scores were summed to provide three sub-scale scores.

The 18-item Self-Monitoring scale: The scale reported and validated by Gangestad & Snyder (1985) was used, in which participants gave true/false answers to indicate whether each statement described themselves (e.g., I would probably make a good actor). The number of 'true' endorsements was summed and represented the degree to which participants monitored their own self-expression.

Finally, the *17-item version of the Social Desirability scale*: The scale developed and validated by Stober (2001) was used, in which participants gave true/false answers to indicate the extent to which each statement described themselves (e.g., I sometimes litter). The number of 'true' endorsements was summed and represented the extent to which participants may seek to give a positive impression of themselves to others.

2.4. Procedure

Participants were tested individually in a three-phase study, with the order of phases being identical across all conditions. In the private disclosure phase, participants completed the TST by typing an answer to the question "Who am I?" for each of the 20 blank text boxes. For each statement, participants were encouraged to finish the statement "I am…"by describing themselves. Participants were asked to provide 20 different statements. As participants proceeded through the survey, previous statements were visible at the bottom of the screen so that they could see what they had typed before, but these statements could not be changed. Submission of the 20 statements marked the end of the private disclosure phase.

During the public disclosure phase, participants were told that their answers to the TST would be made available to others. For those in the offline context, participants were told that they would reveal their statements to the experimenter sat with them. For those in the generic online context, participants were told that their statements would be placed "online" within a general profile so that anyone could view them. Finally, for those in the specific online contexts, participants were told that their statements would be used to create an online profile within a given context (dating website, or job-seeking website) depending on their condition. However, before information was revealed, participants were given the opportunity to review and withhold any statements if they wished. Accordingly, a drop-down box appeared alongside each of their initial statements allowing participants to indicate whether they wanted to report or withhold each item. If participants chose to withhold a statement they were given the option to replace their initial statement. A new open text box appeared when participants selected withhold with instructions stating they may change their initial statement if they wanted but did not have to provide a changed statement. Given the ability to withhold statements completely, participants were able to submit fewer than the initial statements that they started with. This marked the end of the public disclosure phase.

Finally, in a questionnaire phase, participants completed the battery of online personality questionnaires described in section 2.3. in a fixed-random order. The entire process lasted approximately 30 minutes, after which participants were reassured that their TST statements would not, in fact, be revealed. All participants were thanked and thoroughly debriefed.

3. Results

3.1. Amount of Information Withheld

The mean number of statements provided by participants in the private disclosure phase, prior to revealing the context, was analyzed by context condition using a one-way between-

participants Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Analysis confirmed that the four groups did not differ in the amount of information provided at the outset (M = 19.97, SD = 0.16; $F_{(3, 144)}$ < 1, ns). This was to be expected as participants experienced the same methodology to this point. Nevertheless, it provided a useful baseline against which disclosure behavior could be evaluated.

The way in which the offline, generic online and specific online contexts influenced participants initial self-disclosure was explored. Specifically, the amount of information from the private context participants chose not to reveal publicly (i.e., the statements they withheld), were examined. [1] In order to correct for individual baseline differences in the amount of statements provided in the private context a ratio score for withholding behavior was calculated. Specifically, a withholding score was calculated as a ratio of the number of statements withheld divided by the number of statements initially provided.

A one-way between-participants ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of disclosure context on this withholding score ($F_{(3, 144)}$ = 5.45, p < .001, η^2 = .10). Figure 1 shows the Helmert post-hoc contrasts, which confirmed differences in withholding between the offline context and all online contexts (p = .04), between the generic and the specific online contexts (p = .004), and between the specific dating and job-seeking contexts (p = .02). In other words, as the context became more and more precise, the proportion of information that was withheld increased.

Figure 1.
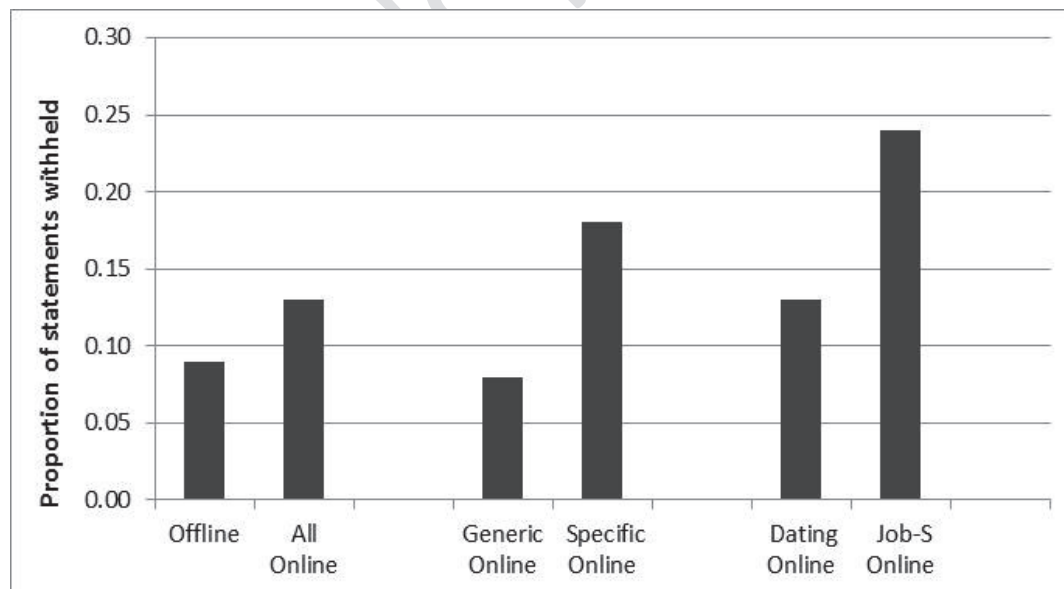
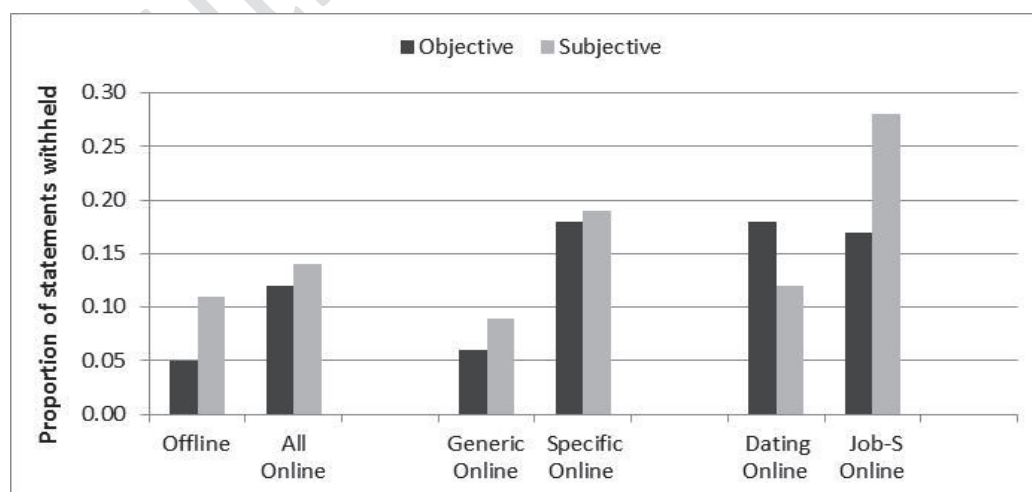Mean proportion of statements withheld by planned contrast comparisons.

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[1] The amount and type of changed withheld statements were considered. However, only 45 participants provided an alternative statement after selecting withhold. The proportion of changed withheld statements (M = 0.03, SD = 0.07) observed was considered too low of an occurrence to have the statistical power need to run similar analyses as those reported on withholding behavior.

3.2. Type of Information Withheld

The importance of the type of private information that was withheld from public disclosure was considered. In line with Kuhn & McPartland's (1954) method of statement classification for the content of the statements, responses were categorized as objective statements if they contained information that was factual or easily verifiable by a third party (e.g., "I am a woman"; "I am a chemical engineer student"). Conversely, responses were classified as subjective statements if they contained information that was value-driven (e.g.," I am kind"; "I am a good friend"), or required knowledge of the person to be verified (e.g., "I love baking"; "I am very sporty"). Classification of information type was conducted by three experimenters independently. Inter-experimenter agreement was high, α = .88, with disagreement resolved by discussion.

Considering the initial private phase, it was clear that participants provided substantially more subjective (M = 14.64, SD = 3.67) than objective statements (M = 5.34, SD = 3.68) at the outset ($t_{(147)}$ = 15.41, p < .001). Due to this difference, when considering the type of information *withheld* at the public disclosure stage, it was again important to calculate the proportion of each information type withheld as a ratio of the amount of each information type initially provided. A two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the importance of information type (objective vs. subjective) and the four disclosure contexts on the withhold score of each information type. From this, a main effect of disclosure context emerged ($F_{(3, 144)}$ = 4.55, p < .005, η^2 = .09). Both the main effect of information type ($F_{(1, 144)}$ = 2.76, p < .10, η^2 = .02) and the interaction between information type and disclosure context ($F_{(3, 144)}$ = 2.46, p = .065, η^2 = .05) emerged as trends within the analysis.

Figure 2.

Mean proportion of objective and subjective statements withheld by planned contrast comparisons.

A cautious analysis of the simple main effects through a one-way between-participant ANOVA revealed that the proportion of objective statements withheld was significantly affected by disclosure context ($F_{(3, 144)}$ =3.64, $p < .025$, $\eta^2 = .07$) (See Figure 2). This indicated that participants in the offline context withheld fewer objective statements than those in the online contexts ($p < .03$), and participants in the generic online context withheld fewer objective statements than those in the specific online contexts ($p < .01$). However, the specific dating and job-seeking contexts were equivalent in the proportion of objective statements withheld.

Using the same ANOVA approach, analysis of the proportion of subjective statements withheld was also significantly affected by disclosure context ($F_{(3, 144)} = 4.48$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = .085$. Figure 2 depicts the results from the planned contrasts. Specifically, there was no difference in withholding subjective statements between those in the offline context relative to all other online conditions ($p = .13$). However, those in the generic online condition withheld less than those in the specific online contexts conditions ($p = .01$), and participants in the online dating context perhaps unsurprisingly withheld less subjective statements than those in the online job-seeking context ($p = .02$). This behavior may fit with the norms of each space in that, in an online dating context, it may be expected that an individual reveals more of their attitudes, likes, or subjective qualities than in an online job-seeking context.

3.3. Individual Differences in Withholding Statements

In order to determine whether demographic or personality variables may predict a tendency to withhold information, regression analyses were conducted. Potential predictor variables from the scales described in section 2.3 were entered into a series of individual regressions to rule out any factors which had no relation to disclosure behavior. The proportion of withheld statements was the dependent variable. The criterion for entering a variable into the main linear regression was $p < .20$ (Field, 2005). From this, variables meeting this criterion included public self-awareness, self-monitoring, extraversion and openness. These were entered into a stepwise regression. Surprisingly, no variables emerged as significant predictors of withholding behavior, $R^2 = .05$, $F_{(4, 132)} = 1.87$, $p = .12$ (see Table 1). These results indicate that individual differences could not account for differences noted across the different disclosure contexts.

Table 1.
Regression results for personality predictors of proportion of statements withheld by participants.

Variables	B	t	p
Openness	.16	1.80	.07
Public self-awareness	.10	1.12	.27
Extraversion	-.15	-1.56	.12
Self-Monitoring	.12	1.18	.24

4. Discussion

The current study examined how individuals chose to represent themselves across different offline, generic online and specific online environments through the use of the TST. When asked to publicly share information about themselves, the results here suggested that participants were willing to disclose more of their private information face-to-face, as compared to disclosing personal information within an online space. This finding emerged even when the heterogeneous nature of the online environment was considered. These results are at odds with the suggestion that the perceived anonymity provided by an online environment would lead to greater instances of personal disclosure (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Newman et al., 2002). However, in line with Van Dijck (2013) the present results showed the importance of context of online spaces in influencing both the amount and the type of information disclosed. Specifically, when asked to disclose information in a generic online space, participants chose to disclose more information about themselves than those asked to share information in online spaces with distinct purposes. Interestingly, the results here suggested no influence of personality factors in driving disclosure behavior. Whilst this finding should be viewed cautiously given the limited participant sample here; it is worth noting the relatively mixed results within the literature around personality traits as predictors of online disclosure (see Orchard & Fullwood, 2010). In fact, the current results suggested a much greater role for the contextual factors in shaping disclosure behavior, and this is a point that informs the rest of the discussion.

The information that individuals choose to disclose, particularly online, is often linked to an understanding of their target audience (boyd, 2004). This is sensible because it helps to guide appropriate self-presentation within a given situation (e.g., van Dijck, 2013). Within the current study, participants in the offline context disclosed the largest proportion of their initial private statements relative to all online contexts. Further, even after taking into account the finding that the

majority of initial statements from participants were subjective, those in the offline context were the least likely to withhold objective factual information relative to all online contexts. On the other hand, the amount of subjective information withheld was equivalent between offline and all online contexts. Arguably, the offline context had the smallest potential audience for their self-disclosure. It was possible that participants in the offline context saw minimal consequence or risk in having a high level of disclosure, particularly of objective factual information, because of the perception that their disclosure was a temporary event with minimal potential for repeated interaction. As a consequence they may have experienced only minimal need to manage their impression through withholding personal statements.

In the online contexts, participants disclosed significantly less of their initial information compared to the offline context discussed above. However, variation in online disclosure behavior was apparent. In the generic online space participants disclosed more subjective and objective information than those in the specific online spaces. From a privacy standpoint, uncertainty around who may have access to personal information should have led to less self-disclosure (Barkhuus, 2012). However, having a more concrete audience to visualize (e.g., potential romantic partners or employers) in the specific online contexts may have encouraged participants to disclose less information. Specifically, by tailoring their disclosure to the norms typically associated with those spaces. This suggestion is supported by the differences in the amount and type of information withheld between the two specific online contexts.

As the online space became more specific we found that participants withheld more personal information. As an exploratory analysis the differences between the two specific online contexts are tentatively discussed. Participants in the 'job-seekers' context withheld more statements than those in the online dating context. Notably, disclosing information in the job-seekers context led to withholding substantially more subjective information as compared to the online dating context. However, these two specific online contexts did not differ with regards to withholding objective information. This potentially reflects different norms for appropriate representation of one's self between the two specific online contexts. For instance, disclosing a more conservative and factual identity in the online job-seeking space may have been more normative (e.g., Viégas, 2005), whereas, revealing more attitudes, likes and subjective qualities was seen as fitting to an online dating space. Without any visual cues about their audience (e.g. profile pictures or profile information) participants may have relied more on the social cues available (Postmes, Spears & Lea, 2002), and strategically presented an identity or representation appropriate for the interaction space (Lampinen, Lehtinen, Lehmuskallio & Tamminen, 2011), while withholding

personal information that did not present an ideal self in that particular context (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

The reported methodology provided empirical evidence that supports the notion that individuals are sensitive to the nuanced differences provided by different online spaces. In doing so, they reflect the importance of the audience and the function of the space and tailor their information accordingly. By employing the TST method, self-disclosure could be examined independent of a specific online platform and free from the architectural (Papacharissi, 2009) and shelf-life (boyd & Ellison, 2007) constraints often tied to these pre-designed spaces. In light of the rapidly evolving online services and applications available to individuals, this less constrained approach provides an excellent basis to move forward in better understanding the multiple identities individuals possess across offline and online spaces. However, we must also consider that the reported TST approach, where the online spaces are imagined or dictated by task instructions, may lead to different disclosure behaviors relative to real SNS spaces individuals use. For instance, participants may have different motivations, conceptions and long-term goals around disclosure in cultivated and situated online personas. Nevertheless, there may be scope for future research to utilize the strengths of the TST in real online spaces. For example, the TST could be used to ask individuals to describe who they are on Facebook or LinkedIn. Comparing these statements to individuals' real profiles may be one method to compare possible differences between disclosure in task driven and real spaces.

Further work is needed to clarify *how* and *why* individuals change and adopt different personas as they move between different environments. One approach would be to further explore disclosure patterns across more diverse contexts, such as online education or health network groups, which are emerging as influential social networks. In addition, a more comprehensive sample of participants beyond an academic community may provide a more representative picture of SNS users within these other contexts. On the other hand, the reported paradigm could also be applied to address more in-depth and nuanced questions on how individuals tailor their disclosure. The current experiment provided evidence that context does affect the type of information disclosed. However, the broader categories of objective and subjective information could be broken down further to more fine-grained classes (e.g., Del Prado et al., 2007). Importantly, this type of a more fine-grained approach may shed light on motives for self-disclosure patterns and the type of information revealed in certain contexts. Whilst the current experiment showed participants were motivated to change their self-representations across contexts, further probing via questionnaire and interview techniques may enhance our understanding for the reasons behind withholding

particular personal information. Further elucidation of the complex relationship between social motivations, context, privacy, and self-disclosure (e.g., Emanuel, Bevan & Hodges, 2013) is needed to both improve privacy and identity management practices as well as understand the rapidly evolving landscape of identity (Stevenage, Whitty & Saxby, 2013).

The reported work underscores the importance of considering not only offline and online spaces, but also the context in which these spaces reside in when examining self-disclosure. Particularly, as individuals move from offline to specified online spaces, self-disclosure of personal information decreases, and we begin to show how the type of information shared in these spaces differs to fit a certain function. Whilst the current results suggest that the space, audience and functionality play a role in driving self-disclosure behavior, future research needs to consider what individuals choose to reveal as well as and their motivations behind disclosure within these distinct environments. This will inform our thinking during this exciting time as our concept of identity evolves, and as our offline and online boundaries continue to merge.

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