SELF-REPRESENTATION ON FACEBOOK
by the Y Generation

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See you on Facebook!
A few words to summarize the place of social networks nowadays. Facebook is a social and interactive stage, a virtual space where it is possible to show oneself and to observe people. Media has set standards that a part of the *Y Generation* tends to imitate. This generation, which I am part of, is modeled by the lifestyle and the way of thinking of its time, and this can lead to stereotyped representations. This behavior seems to be normal for a part of the *Y Generation*, who is surrounded by screens, media images and marketing pictures.
Becoming a stereotype is easy, and it seems to be a necessity to be aware of what we show on Facebook, in order to control the our image, and to avoid judging people on their appearance. We are unable to communicate the same way with our different social groups, so how can we know if the way we act corresponds to how we want people to perceive us ? We sometimes show ourselves with some kind of exhibitionism, but does the intimacy that we share through Facebook tend to get confused with extimacy ?

The people who are the focus of this study are individuals between 18 and 34 years old, corresponding to the *Y Generation* . Its name derives from the question *why*, which characterizes these young people. Their particularity is being connected : they are born with the Internet, or grew up with it, and are used to new technologies. They are the most high-tech equipped age range, and also the largest part of Facebook's users. Nowadays, young people tend to stay at school longer than 20 years ago, they also have difficulties establishing their independence and finding a job, because of the economic context. These things contributes to the late arrival of these young people in the working life of these young people in working life, who tend to stay teens for longer.
This generation does not spend a lot of time in front of television, as their parents did, but they do spend a large part of their time in front of the screens of their computers and phones. They are surrounded by images, coming from several media, therefore, they are used to certains forms of representations concerning the body, related to attitudes, but also appearances. These stereotypes can be standards for part of this generation, who is also influenced by fashions. In these conditions, it might be difficult for someone to follow their own opinion and tastes, which are already influenced by other factors.

The media, like television, cinema, advertising, magazines, and video clips, tend to classify people by their appearance or their attitude ; they have served to reinforce stereotypes, and thus to influence people. This leads to standards of almost everything, including the body. Everyone is dependent on his point of view, his subjectivity, formed since infancy, and influenced by his environment, his relatives, his friends, the way he was educated, his parents, school, etc. It is very difficult for someone to grow away from his point of view, to avoid judging people on their appearance.

One's Facebook profile is a mere façade, an incomplete summary of a person. It is impossible to sum up someone in a single page, because everyone dœs not act the same way with everyone. Our identity is complex and multifaceted, and even the Facebook user cannot really control the way he is seen by people. However, he can control what he consciously choose to show. Most of the time, Facebook users show themselves happy, smiling, sociable, as if their life was a pink paradise. It is a way to improve their image regarding their network, but also to get a high self- esteem. Yet, Facebook can also make people indulge in certain forms of excess, such as narcissism.

Facebook is like a stage, and some people tend to make a spectacle of themselves. They give a virtual show to their social network by posting pictures, status, self-portraits, etc. Most of the time, the Internet user only has one Facebook profile for multiple interactions. Hence, he's forced to homogenize - and therefore to change - its identity for several people. A profile is a patchwork which is constantly being redefined, like a personality, influenced by other people's own personalities. We usually want to be seen in a positive way, and Facebook is a good tool to make people believe that our life is interesting, wonderful and so on. Some individuals seek the « perfect profile » for themselves, and in the eyes of their network. This performance of « being perfect » on Facebook can lead to self-alienation.
Some people show themselves almost naked on the Internet, including Facebook. Part of this is a result of the influence of the media, and how Facebook encourages its users to communicate. They give the impression to unveil their private life in a virtual and - *almost* - public space, and therefore, they can give an image of themselves that does not fit the way they actually want to be seen. The question is : are they aware of this ? Can something be done to help them to communicate better ?

The profile of a Facebook user defines the contours of a virtual person, and the way he wants to be seen. Self-portraits and activity on Facebook identify one facet of one's personality for a varied public. Yet, we do not communicate the same way depending on the people we are talking to. Is it possible to measure the difference between the way the Internet user see himself / herself, and the way he / she communicates ?
A part of the *Y Generation* is sensitive to advertising representations of the body. They sometimes imitate these representations without measuring their impact, or their sexual innuendoes. However, the difference between what web user shows on Facebook and how he wants to be seen can be under control : it can be a game. Therefore, Facebook can be a space for exchanges within a community, which enables users to highlight their personality in others' eye, as well as in their own.

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