GOING PUBLIC: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY
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ABSTRACT
College students were randomly assigned to recall recent personal events for either online posting or a private diary. “Online” memories were more elaborate, expressive, self-revealing, and positive than “offline” memories. The findings shed light on the unique characteristics of autobiographical memory in the Internet era.

INTRODUCTION
Social networking sites have rapidly gained in wild popularity in recent years, particularly among teens and young adults. They provide a new means of constructing autobiographical memory in the modern technological era. The telling of personal life stories is now open to the public, with the intention of soliciting feedback from others.

Given their public nature, the “online” memories may deviate from private recall - as in the traditional pen-and-paper diaries - and exhibit unique characteristics. Such characteristics will allow the memories to serve as a tool of both personal expression and interpersonal communication.

First of all, online memories may highlight the uniqueness of the rememberer for the purpose of self-expression. This may be reflected in extensive details in the recounting of autobiographical events, and the expressive and lively description of the events (Serfaty, 2004).

The rememberers may present themselves in a positive light for the expression and communication of an ideal self (Chen, 2010).

Online memories may also be disclosive, where the rememberers share intimate personal information and reflect on their innermost feelings and thoughts, a process that is considered critical for achieving a sense of closeness and social bonding (Levinger, 1980).

Furthermore, online memories may tend to be dialogical, where the rememberers try to engage their audience in a conversation about their life stories (Miura & Yamashita, 2007; Serfaty, 2004). This dialogical process may be achieved through a variety of tactics, most directly by the rememberers/authors asking questions and seeking feedback from their readers.

In addition, online memories may focus more on here-and-now issues and concern less about the future, when compared with memories in private, which often serve to inform the future (Page, 2010).

We conducted a study to examine the characteristics of online memory in a controlled experiment. College students recalled autobiographical memories in either an online blog environment or a private diary environment. We expected online memories to be more detailed, more expressive, more self-revealing, and more positive, and that they would exhibit a dialogical intention and focus on here-and-now. In addition, we examined memory content in relation to participants’ personality.

METHOD
Participants: An ethnically diverse sample of 50 college students.
Procedure: Participants were randomly assigned to an Online or Offline condition. They each recalled two recent autobiographical memories, either within a blog template or in a diary (Means of the two memories were later submitted to analysis). Participants also completed a series of personality measures including extraversion and disclosiveness.

RESULTS
Online memories exhibited distinct characteristics compared with offline memories: They were more detailed, more expressive, more self-revealing, and more positive, and they exhibited a dialogical intention and focused on here-and-now. Furthermore, some of the characteristics are moderated by personality traits.

The unique characteristics of online memories are facilitative for the purposes of self-expression and social connection in the cyberspace.

DISCUSSION
Online memories may exhibit distinct characteristics compared with offline memories: They were more detailed, more expressive, more self-revealing, and more positive, and they exhibited a dialogical intention and focused on here-and-now. Furthermore, some of the characteristics are moderated by personality traits.

The unique characteristics of online memories are facilitative for the purposes of self-expression and social connection in the cyberspace.

In this technological era, having an autobiographical history is no longer constrained by one’s own memory but sustained by a wide variety of tools and diverse audiences. These tools provide not only new means of mnemonic representation and communication, but also introduce revolutionary changes to the mnemonic practices and socialization of our time. This area deserves more attention from memory researchers.

REFERENCES

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