Posting, blocking, double profiles: audience segmentation on Facebook

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Abstract:

As social network sites are becoming more populated and users more diverse, impression management on these sites has become more complicated. Users face challenges as they attempt to perform a unified identity to a diverse audience. The article discusses some of the strategies Hungarian teenage users of Facebook apply to deal with this situation. Drawing on data coming from two focus group interviews and a representative survey (N = 612) with Hungarian secondary school students, strategies of selecting 'friends', curating posts, blocking and deleting 'friends' and creating double profiles on Facebook are discussed. It is concluded that there are significant differences in the use of these strategies according to different user groups as off-line inequalities influence online impression management in different ways.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to advance our understanding of strategies of audience segmentation on Facebook. As Facebook users construct their identities on the site they face the challenge a diverse audience poses. What are the strategies they use to deal with this situation? Are there differences in the use of these strategies according to different user groups? Although identity construction on social network sites has been widely studied (see literature review), strategies of audience segmentation have not yet been systematically described.

To answer the research questions posed above, I analysed data originating from both qualitative and quantitative sources. Focus group research and survey method were combined to study the social media use of Hungarian teenagers. The majority of studies on the use of social network sites has focused on the North American context(cf., Rains & Brunner, 2015) and have frequently relied on data from non-representative samples of university students. The representative survey conducted among Hungarian secondary school students allow us to generalize the results across this population and offers us insight into the social media use of a previously understudied group.

2. Literature review

In early studies of the Internet, the virtual world of public speaking was often interpreted as a free, unrestricted terrain for identity construction (Turkle, 2005). This was usually explained by the lack of constraints resulting from the physical presence of others and by the opportunity of remaining anonymous. However, since the appearance and spread of social network sites (SNS), "networked communication platforms" where users have "uniquely identifiable profiles" (Ellison & Boyd, 2013), anonymous use has been on the decline.

These new, so called "nonymous" places(Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) anchor identities to off-line realities in significant ways (Wittkower, 2014).

Identities on these sites are intersubjectively and dynamically constructed with the help of content provided by the profile owner, his or her social network and the system itself(Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Zwier, Araujo, Boukes, & Willemsen, 2011; Hong, Tandoc, Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2012).

SNSs have rightly been studied as sites for identity construction. Researchers, especially those focusing on online identity practices, very often interpreted people's behaviour in this environment in terms of Goffman's dramaturgical model(Siibak, 2009; Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009; West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010; Wittkower, 2014). Goffman (1959) in his seminal work claims that people aim to create a positive impression on others by putting on socially acceptable roles. However, he also argues that we perform these roles for certain audiences and for the success of our performance we need to keep these audiences separate.

"*When audience segregation fails and an outsider happens upon a performance that was not meant for him, difficult problems in impression management arise.*" (p. 85.)

Users of social network sites have become increasingly heterogeneous, thus the audiences of the identity performances on these sites tend to become mixed in the form of diverse 'friends' and 'followers' who potentially consume and shape the multimodal messages shared with them. Users face the threat of "context collision" (Boyd, 2006) as they attempt to perform a unified identity to a diverse audience.

There are further technological affordances that can act as a form of constraint when choosing the kind of identity to perform. Boyd (2014) mentions four of them: persistence, that is the durability of content; visibility, that is the potential audience; spreadability, that is the easiness of sharing; and searchability, that is the ability to find content. Thus, the identity, which is usually performed in the offline world in a given time and place, for a given audience, can become available for the potentially boundless time, space and audience of the online world. Audience segregation is not easily achievable under these circumstances.

The most widely used and global social network site is Facebook (FB). Although it has been criticised for being almost exclusively in the focus of research, it is also acknowledged that the majority of research in this field is centred on the USA(Rains & Brunner, 2015). We need to know more about differences in FB use according to nation, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, age, educational background etc., especially as Facebook users are becoming increasingly heterogeneous as new, global generations are continuously entering the site.

To tackle these problems this paper poses the flowing questions: What strategies do Hungarian, teenage members of Facebook use to deal with the diversity of their 'friends'? What patterns of demographic differences in behaviour among Facebook users are discernible?

To answer these questions data originating from mixed method empirical research have been analysed.

3. Research methodology

To understand teenagers' motivation behind their Facebook use and at the same time to be able to differentiate between different demographic groups of Facebook users, a mixed method approach based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology was chosen. Focus group research focusing on motivation for social media use was combined with the analysis of data coming from a representative survey focusing on practices on social media. Data collection was carried out in Hungary, in 2013.

In the first, exploratory phase of the research we conducted two focus group interviews with Hungarian teenagers[1]. The interviews focused on their motivation for social media use. Recruitment of candidates was carried out by Forsense Market Research and Strategic Consultant Institute (www.forsense.hu), based on the selection criteria given by the researchers. Participation was voluntary, under 18 students participated with their parents' permission, participants were anonymized throughout the research process. A small compensation in the form of a gift voucher was offered for the time of the students.

One of the groups consisted of six younger students, aged between 14 and 16, while the other had six older students aged between 17 and 19. The groups were heterogeneous according to gender, and type of school. About half of the participants were male, the other half female, and about half of them came from more academically

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[1] Contribution of colleagues to the research is described in detail in the Acknowledgement section.

oriented secondary grammar schools, while the other half came from more practically oriented secondary technical schools. All the schools were situated in the same, middle-sized, Hungarian countryside town.

In the second phase of the research, a questionnaire of 93 items was prepared. The selection of items was informed by the analysis of the focus group interviews. Besides 13 demographic variables[2] which acted as independent variables in the analysis, we asked in detail about the respondents' social media use, focusing particularly on FB, which, as it turned out, was used by 97% of our respondents. The questionnaire was prepared by the researchers and it was administered by Forsense Market Research and Strategic Consultant Institute. It covers a wide array of Internet use, this paper only discusses data which are relevant in order to answer the research questions posed by the author.

Forsense applied computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). For choosing the participants stratified, random, multi-stage cluster sampling was used. Students were chosen from the three regions of Hungary: Western, Central and Eastern Hungary. The whole population consisted of 1082 schools. In the first stage 15 schools were chosen from each of the regions through random sampling, in the second stage 12 to 15 students were asked to participate with the permission of their parents, from each school. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, no compensation was offered.

During the survey students were asked to enter their FB accounts and answer certain questions with the help of the information there.

In the third phase of the research, data analysis was carried out with the help of SPSS data analysis software. The independent demographic variables were cross-tabulated with a number of dependent variables in order to look for significant relationships among the variables. Significance was tested with Pearson's chi-squared test. Results were interpreted with the help of insights gained from the focus group research.

4. The sample

A large number of researches on SNSs are carried out among college graduates. We deliberately chose another age group, and asked secondary school students (roughly aged between 14 and 19). These young people are at an age when experimenting with identity performance is of crucial importance. In a transitory age between childhood and adulthood they have ambivalent relationships with the adult world (Erikson, 1968). The generational diversity of their FB 'friends' is supposed to pose a special challenge for them, which makes this age group especially worthy of study.

The sample consisted of 612 secondary school students from the three regions of Hungary. 292 (47.7%) of our respondents were male, 320 (52.3%) were female. 92.6% of the respondents were between 14 and 19 years old at the time of the data collection. The rest of the respondents (7.4%) were older, the maximum age was 23. Over six percent (6.4%) of the respondents attended vocational schools, 38.9% attended secondary technical schools, while 54.2% attended secondary grammar schools. 6% of the respondents claimed Roma ethnicity. Roma is the largest ethnic minority group in Hungary.

5. The networked public of Hungarian teenagers

Let us now see what characterises the "networked public" (Boyd, 2014) of Hungarian teens.

Table 1. Number of FB friends (N =595, active users of Facebook)

How many FB friends do you have?						
number of friends	0-200	201-400	401-600	601-800	801-1000	more than 1000
percentage of respondents	10	23	21	16	12	18

The sample mean is 677, the sample median is 567 'friends'.

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2   These were the following: gender; age, type of settlement; other household members; having or not having their own room; father's highest education; mother's highest education; number of years at school; type of school attended; grade point average in the previous term; religion registered at birth; religiosity (religious and follows the teaching of his/her religion, religious in his/her own way; not religious); ethnicity (considers himself/herself Roma or not).

The majority of these 'friends' are probably peers, but peers themselves do not constitute a homogenous public. Two especially interesting groups can be identified: those with whom teenagers are in a romantic relationship and those who they used to be in a romantic relationship with, that is, their ex-partners. Almost all of the respondents, who had a boyfriend or girlfriend at the time of the research, had their romantic friend among their FB 'friends'. The presence of ex-partners among FB 'friends' is also high, 63 % of the respondents said they are still FB 'friends' with their exes, while 18 % said they are not friends with them on this site any more. (The rest of the respondents either did not have exes or their exes did not have FB accounts). The presence of romantic friends and exes among FB 'friends' influence these relationships in diverse ways (see also Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty, 2011; Gershon, 2011). In the following excerpt from the focus group discussion the moderator asks the participants what they think about posting photos on which they wear bikinis. The responses illustrate the diverse influence of the presence of boyfriends on the posting behaviour of girls.

Excerpt 1.[3]
— *Moderator 1: In bikinis, girls?*
— *Alexandra: If I look good on it.*
— *Ann: I have one like that on. [on Facebook] Damn now, I was in Italy.*
— *Rita: I can't. My boyfriend would take my head off.*
— *Moderator 1: How about you? What would your boyfriends say?*
— *Alexandra: It's my right to post whatever I want.*
— *Betty: He would be proud.*

Other generations are also present among the teenagers' FB 'friends'. This includes adults, among them such authority figures as parents and teachers(Karl & Peluchette, 2011).

Table 2. Who is among your Facebook 'friends'? (N =585, number of respondents with at least one FB 'friend')

Is this person among your FB friends now?	
person	**percentage of respondents who said yes**
boyfriend/girlfriend	59
ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend	63
father	37
mother	52
at least one teacher	75

Three quarters of the respondents reported having at least one teacher among their FB 'friends'. Forty-five percent of the respondents said that their fathers and 59 % said that their mothers have Facebook accounts. Thirty-seven percent of fathers and 52 % of mothers were 'friends' with their children. However, 8 % of fathers and 7 % of mothers, although on Facebook, were not FB 'friends' of their children. That the presence of parents can be experienced as problematic is illustrated in the following typical excerpt from the discussion in the focus group:

Excerpt 2.
— *Moderator 1: Parents? Who has them among their friends?*
— *John: In our family, my father is on Facebook. Lately, I felt as if I created a Frankenstein monster because he really got a taste for it!*
— *Moderator 1: Did you help him?*
— *John: Ahem, I created it for him. He only has relatives and the gardening staff. My siblings and my mother are also on there [on FB]*
— *Moderator 1: And then, you said, you felt that it is a bit too much sometimes?*
— *John: Yes, it is too much!*

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[3] Moderator 1. is the author of this article, focus group participants have pseudo names reflecting their gender. Excerpts were translated into English from the original Hungarian by the author. Author's comments are given in square brackets.

Let us now examine which independent variables have an influence on the presence or lack of presence of adults among the respondents' FB 'friends'.

Students from the Central and Western regions of Hungary are more likely to have their parents among their FB 'friends' than students from the Eastern region. One possible explanation for that is that Central and Western Hungary are more economically developed, than Eastern Hungary. As our data showed parents from these regions are more likely to have FB accounts. It is thus not surprising that they are also more likely to be FB 'friends' with their children.

Interestingly, children living in single parent families are also significantly more likely to be FB 'friends' 'with both mothers and fathers than children living in two-parent families. FB in this case may serve as a major tool for keeping in touch with the parent outside the household.

With regard to teachers, the following independent variables had a significant influence on the likelihood of a teacher being among the FB 'friends' of the student: gender, age, mother's educational background, and type of school attended. Girls, older students, students with mothers having either only elementary or university education, and students attending secondary grammar school are more likely to have teachers among their FB 'friends' than the others. These groups probably have a better relationship with the educational sphere, a more positive attitude towards school than the other groups (Table 3. outlines the details).

Table 3. Variables influencing the presence of adults among FB 'friends' (N=585)

Independent variables	Values	Percentage of those who have this person among FB 'friends'		
		teacher	father	mother
gender	man	68*	37	50
	woman	81*	36	53
age	max. 16	66*	43	52
	above 16	80*	33	51
region	Central	73	43*	55*
	Western	71	37*	57*
	Eastern	81	29*	42*
mother's education	elementary education	78*	37	54
	secondary education	68*	34	53
	higher education	79*	39	50
type of school attended	vocational school	51*	48	61
	secondary technical school	72*	32	53
	secondary grammar school	79*	39	50
family type	two parents	76	33*	43*
	single parent	74	49*	69*

Note. $*p<0.05$

6. Segmenting the audience

As it became clear from the focus group interviews the presence of romantic partners and exes, teachers and parents, in short the diversity of the audience, can become uncomfortable at times and there are a number of strategies students apply to deal with this situation. The empirical data gathered allowed for the analysis of some of these strategies in detail. These are the following:
— Selecting your FB 'friends'
— Selecting who can see your posts
— Blocking/Unfriending
— Double profiles

In the next section, these strategies are discussed one by one in the light of the focus group discussions and the survey data.

7. Selecting your FB 'friends'

One option for decreasing the diversity of the audience would be a strong and careful selection of FB 'friends'. This strategy, however, would go against the raison d'être of the site itself (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).As we could already see, teenagers tend to have a rather diverse mix of FB 'friends'. The privacy setting of 88% of the respondents allowed everyone to send them a friend request; only 12% limit it by allowing only 'friends of friends' to send requests. According to the focus group discussions, refusing a friend request rarely happens, the only exception being requests coming from complete strangers, but even these requests are sometimes accepted if some connection (e.g., school attended) can be identified. Requests are especially difficult to refuse if they come from authority figures like parents or teachers.

8. Selecting who can see your post

A second option could be limiting the visibility of the FB profile by using the options offered by the privacy settings of the site. The default setting of Facebook is 'share' which results in the public availability of posts, but users can change the privacy settings so they can exercise control over who can see their contributions to the site. This strategy can thus serve as a way to segment the diverse audience. It is, however, not generally used by our respondents.

The privacy setting of the next post was set as *public* for 24% of the respondents; it was set as '*share with friends*' for 65%; it was set to *customize* by choosing who can see the post for 8%; while 2% had it set as share with '*only me*'. These respondents probably used this last option to archive important posts for later use. There were, however, significant differences between respondents.

Table 4. Public availability of posts according to different variables

Independent variable	Values	Percentage of those whose next post is set as public
gender	women	21
	men	28
region	Central	17
	Western	27
	Eastern	29
mother's education	elementary education	36
	secondary education	23
	higher education	18
type of school attended	vocational school	53
	secondary technical school	25
	secondary grammar school	20

Note. $p < 0.05$

Out of the 13 independent variables that were looked at, gender, region, mother's educational background and type of school attended proved to be in significant relationship with the privacy setting of posts. Boys, students from the Eastern and Western regions of Hungary, students whose mothers have lower education, and those who attend vocational schools are less cautious about or aware of whom they share their posts with. They exercise less control over their audience than girls, students from the most developed Central region which includes the capital city, students whose mothers have higher education, and those attending secondary

grammars schools. These, presumably more privileged, students use privacy settings more consciously, limiting their visibility by using this method(see also Micheli, 2016).The fact thatfemale students were also more cautious about the public availability of their posts may be explained by the fact that they also reported being victims of abuse on FB more frequently than male students.

It is worth noting that the groups who show less concern about the public availability of their posts are also the ones who post most often (Rétfalvi, 2014).

9. Blocking/Unfriending

A more radical strategy for the segmentation of the audience is deleting friends. FB offers two slightly different options for that: 'blocking' and 'unfriending'. As our interview subjects did not differentiate between the two options in the focus group discussions, we did not do it either in the survey, but simply asked whether they had ever deleted certain people from their 'friends' lists (see Table 5).

Table 5. Deleting friends

Have you ever deleted the following person from your friends' list?	
person	**percentage of respondents who said yes**
boyfriend/girlfriend	22
ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend	41
parent	17
teacher	20
friend	43

There can be many reasons behind 'blocking' or 'unfriending' someone. As it became clear from the focus group discussions, life on SNSs often follows the dynamics of off-line relationships: off-line quarrels can end in the participants deleting each other while reconciliation results in re-adding 'friends'. This explains why friends are deleted the most often. Numbers show that the presence of ex-partners can frequently become uncomfortable too. The on-line presence of someone can become uncomfortable either because she/he can see content that the teenagers really want to address to others and would not like that person to see, or because the person in question comments on their posts in a way which they feel is embarrassing for them in front of their other FB 'friends'. This second problem, in relation to the presence of parents, is illustrated by the next excerpt from the focus group interviews.

Excerpt 3.
— *Moderator 1: And Michael, you said that you blocked your parents?*
— *Michael: My mum. I had a picture out and she commented such things that …*
— *…[others joining in the conversation]*
— *Michael: What disturbed me really was that she always commented when I was up [on FB] and things like that. And then I said that I had had enough of that.*
— *Moderator 1: What was her reaction?*
— *Michael: Nothing, she was blocked, so she was blocked. Now she cannot do anything.*

Once again, it turned out that this strategy is not used by everyone and if we look more closely at the numbers, we can discover significant differences between certain groups.

Significantly more girls (27%) have deleted a parent than boys (10%) (p=0.02). This could be explained by potentially stricter control over girls' online behaviour by parents or more sensitivity to this control. Girls presumably respond to this control by deleting the parent.

The percentage of those who have deleted a teacher is significantly higher among students claiming to belong to the Roma ethnic group (50%) as opposed to non-Romas (19%) ($p = 0.05$), and among those teenagers who said they were religious and followed the teaching of their church (40%) as opposed to students claiming to be religious in their own way (23%) or not religious (14%) ($p = 0.04$).

Roma is the largest ethnic group in Hungary making up about 8% of the total population. It is a heterogeneous but vulnerable group frequently suffering from different types of discrimination in the society. Roma students' frequent deletion of teachers could be explained by a more conflict ridden relationship between school and students, or an increased desire to hide some aspects of online identity from certain authority figures.

In 2008 17.9% of the Hungarian population said that they were religious and followed the teachings of their religion; 48.3% said that they were religious in their own way; 5.7% of the respondents could not decide and 27.9% said they were not religious(Földvári, 2014). The first, most religious group often send their children to schools run by the Church instead of state schools. Stricter religious control in these schools may explain why students, who claim to be religious in this institutional sense, felt the need to delete some of their teachers perhaps in order to hide certain aspects of their online identities from them.

10. Double profiles

Perhaps the most radical way of segmenting the audience is the creation of more profiles, each with a different audience. This strategy is also used with some frequency. In the following excerpt from the focus group interview, the rationale behind this strategy is explained.

Excerpt 4.
— *Rita: Both of them [her parents] are there [on FB]. I blocked Dad. [she laughs]*
— *Moderator1: Why did you block him?*
— *Rita: Because he didn't know that I was together with a boy and I didn't want him to find it out, and I blocked him.*
— *Moderator1: Has he noticed? Has he said something?*
— *Rita: No, that's why I blocked him. To prevent trouble.*
— *Ann: And then you introduced him personally instead?*
— *Rita: No, because I have another Facebook account and there we are 'friends'. [General laughter]*
— *Moderator1: You have two profiles.*
— *Rita: Yes, and on one of them I sent him a friend request and there we are 'friends'.*
— *Moderator1: How do you manage the two profiles, how do you split them? What do you do on one of them and what on the other?*
— *Rita: He doesn't usually look at it. Now that we are 'friends' it doesn't catch his eye that I have two [profiles]. On one of them we are 'friends' and that's it. He doesn't know that I have another one anyway.*

Again, there can be more reasons behind the creation of double profiles, one of which is the desire to separate different segments of the audience. Thus, teenagers sometimes create a profile that is visible for their parents, while they use another one which their parents do not know about, and where they keep in touch with their peers. Youngsters in romantic relationships occasionally use fake profiles to check the trustworthiness of their partners. Others use fake profiles to tease or bully acquaintances.

At the time when the survey was undertaken, 9% of the respondents said that they had more than one FB profile, but when asked about the past as well, the number grew to 20%. 70% said that they only ever had 1 profile, 15% have had 2, and 5% have had 3 or more profiles.

Table 6. Number of profiles owned by different groups of respondents

Independent variables	Values	Percentage of respondents having one profile	Percentage of respondents who has or had two profiles	Percentage of respondents who has or had three profiles
grade point average in previous term	bad grades	64	16	15
	medium grades	76	18	5
	good grades	84	13	3
ethnicity	Roma	50	44	3
	not Roma	81	13	5

Note. p<0.05

A significantly higher proportion of Roma students and students who achieved a low grade average in the previous term reported having double profiles. The pattern is similar to the ones described above. Weaker results at school strongly correlate with the lower socio-economic status of the families(Széll, 2015). Thus we can again conclude that this radical segmentation of the audience is more typical of the less privileged groups of the society.

11. Conclusion

The analysis of the data proved that Hungarian teenagers have a wide array of diverse 'friends' on Facebook, including peers, romantic partners, and ex-partners, parents and teachers.

The majority of those whose parents have FB accounts are friends with their parents. Mothers and also single parents use FB more actively. There are exceptions too, parents who are not FB 'friends' with their children, which suggests that for at least some people, the online presence of parents among 'friends' would be uncomfortable for one or both sides.

Girls, older students and those attending secondary grammar schools and coming from highly educated families are more likely to have teachers among their FB friends. Some of them can potentially turn their cultural capital, brought from home into social capital through connection with teachers, potential mentors, in this way(Bourdieu, 1986).

These, presumably more privileged, students also use privacy settings more consciously, limiting their visibility by using this method(see also Micheli, 2016).Female students were also found to be more cautious about the public availability of their posts.

The more radical strategies of unfriending/blocking and creating double profiles are significantly more often used by some, presumably less privileged, often minority groups, like girls (deleting parents); students with bad grades (creating double profiles); Roma students (deleting teachers, creating double profiles); and occasionally strictly religious students (deleting teachers).

As we explained, there can be many reasons behind blocking/unfriending and using double profiles. The fact that less privileged groups use strategies of audience segmentation more frequently could be explained by a greater sense of vulnerability and therefore a greater urge to hide certain aspects of their digital identity from others.

Groups of higher social status thus tend to behave differently from groups of lower social status. The more conscious posting behaviour of students of higher social status suggests that they interpret FB as a basically public, front stage space, where they are constructing a carefully monitored public persona for the generalized other present in the form of a great diversity of friends. The frequent use of unfriending and double profiles by members of the lower status groups, on the other hand, suggests that they understand FB as a private, back stage space where they attempt to construct more private personas for specific others, the more carefully selected peers.

Further qualitative research on motivation behind use is needed to confirm this. It would also be important to extend the research to other social network sites as their different technological affordances might favour different strategies for the segmentation of the audience. It has also been noted that segmentation actually occurs not only within but also across SNSs as people use these sites for different purposes and construct different aspects of their identities on the different sites (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016).

This paper only discussed strategies of audience segmentation on Facebook. It would be equally important to look at users' identity constructions here too. Further research is needed to check whether the diversity of the audience leads to self-censorship constraining free identity performances resulting in more conformist, more socially acceptable identities on Facebook and whether higher and lower social status groups behave differently in this respect too.

However, we can already draw the conclusion that the construction of digital identity on Facebook is not free from constraints, and it seems that these constraints are stronger in the case of minority, disadvantaged groups. The online and offline world is strikingly similar in this respect.

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