

## Chapter 24

# Self, Self–Presentation, and the Use of Social Applications in Digital Environments

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the use of social applications in the process of the constitution of the self and the production of the self-presentation in digital environments. It examines two modalities: (1) the use of social applications that promote the comparative analysis of actions, speeches, and performance repercussions taken place in the digital environment, and (2) the use of applications and systems that enable the retrieval of the users' social information in a systematic, sequential, and historical perspective. It also discusses how these applications present users with different methods of monitoring, controlling, visualizing, and planning information that is published not only by individuals themselves but also by the interacting individuals in the social digital environment.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The investigations concerning the process of constitution of the self and its relationship to the dynamics observed in social environments have always been considered central concerns by social analysts seeking to understand the characteristics

and peculiarities of the human condition (Burkitt, 2011; Leary & Tangney, 2003; Mischel & Morf, 2003). These investigations resulted in the creation of scientifically grounded strategies and procedures that introduced a number of ways to approach the phenomenon. However, due to the presence of new online social practices and new possibilities of *self-presentation* in digital environments, made possible by computer-mediated

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communication, alternative theoretical articulations have been demanded for the understanding of the construction of the self in a technologically mediated world.

Currently, we are living a particular social experience derived from a revolution in forms of communication and sociability, particularly the arrival of the virtual spaces created by the propagation of the Internet (Lemos & Levy, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Urry & Sheller, 2006). Immersed in this augmented world composed of both virtual and real elements, the contemporary human being increasingly appropriates new informational equipment and social practices, which provides an alternative reality, with different rules, dynamics and unique communication opportunities. In considering this, a wider range of possibilities through which to experience new existential and cognitive territories is revealed. Thus, we need to understand how digital technology users are building and living their representational schemes, references of identity and social experiences in their daily practices. Indeed, we need to understand the constitution of the mediated self through the use of last generation technological devices and digital environments: the *technoself*.

We intend to discuss these processes of constitution of the self and, in particular, the production of the *self-presentation* based upon the analyses of two practices that take place in a digitally networked environment and enhance the forms of impression management: (1) the use of social applications that promote the comparative analysis of actions, speeches and performances repercussions executed in the digital environment<sup>1</sup>, providing better control of references and social cues that are transmitted by the users to their audiences, and (2) the use of applications and systems that enable the retrieval of the users' social information<sup>2</sup> in a systematic, sequential and historical perspective, making it easy for the (re) construction of discourses, memories, experiences and narratives about oneself.

## **2. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SELF: BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS**

In general, we may perceive the existence of two approaches that focus on understanding the complex phenomenon of the constitution of the self. The first approach concentrates its efforts on the analysis of the intra-dynamic processes that constitute the cognitive, emotional and behavioral apparatus of individuals. Using this perspective, the combination of these processes shapes the awareness of an essence and, more specifically, of an individual unity recognized by the subject and by others as such. It is the perception and recognition of a private self, consisting of a constellation of features (beliefs, attitudes, values) and internally located processes (perceptual, emotional, cognitive) that help the individual to regard him/herself as an entity in the world and to be situated relative to other people and things in the social environment (Augoustinos & Walker, 2007).

The second approach is particularly concerned with the understanding of the processes that shape the self in a relational perspective in which the interpersonal dynamics provide the ground for its formation. According to this perspective, the self is observed not as an entity solely focused on its private establishment but also, and mainly, on the symbolic aspects formulated and reformulated over the interactional exchanges. The self is socially constituted and changed continuously (Atkinson & Housley, 2003).

To analyze the constitution of self in digital environments, we will focus our discussion on this second approach, which highlights the public and relational aspects of self associated with the production of *self-presentation* and impression management.

### **2.1 The Relational Nature of the Constitution of Self**

Since the late nineteenth century, there has been a consistent proposal for the understanding of

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