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Julia Weiss and Antje Glück

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Julia Weiss and Antje Glück¹

“The LinkedIn Self”: How Personality Influences Self-Presentations of LinkedIn Users

While the professional network site LinkedIn has gained an immense popularity not only among recruiters but also among job seekers, there is so far little research about factors influencing the presentation of one's self on LinkedIn. This study investigates what selves are presented on LinkedIn, and how this relates to the Big Five personality traits. A mixed-method explanatory design was used to collect primary data. The design consisted of an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In total, 72 questionnaires were analysed, and nine interviews were conducted. A correlation analysis aided in the identification of the relationship between personality traits and the real or ideal self on LinkedIn. The findings suggest that LinkedIn users present their real self more frequently than their ideal or false self. The study identified a correlation between agreeableness and the presentation of a real self on LinkedIn. This raises questions about recruitment processes and a job candidate's actual personality.

Keywords: Professional Networking Services (PNS), LinkedIn, Self-Presentation, Impression Management, Personality

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INTRODUCTION

Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, social interactions increasingly take place online (Hardof-Jaffe et al. 2020). This also applies to those seeking jobs or companies looking for employees. In consequence, professional networking services (PNS) have gained a growing importance within the job recruitment process, and this, in turn, obliges a constant examination and monitoring of self-presentational behaviour on social networking sites (SNS). The online platform LinkedIn caters most noticeably towards the need of self-promotion on the professional level (van Dijck 2013). In this regard, LinkedIn is offering an online space for professional interactions and networking. LinkedIn constitutes an essential tool for recruiters as well as job seekers since more than a decade. Launched in 2003, the PNS has become highly popular particularly amongst recruiters in the United States, China, India, Brazil and the United Kingdom (Apollo Technical 2022). Virtual recruitment has gained popularity among 89% of organisations, with 77% of recruiters using LinkedIn to do so in 2022 (Thakkar 2022), and currently, more than 59 million companies worldwide are represented on LinkedIn (LinkedIn 2022a). In the United Kingdom, LinkedIn plays a major role for job recruitment: It has more than 33

¹ Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK. Email: AGLueck@bournemouth.ac.uk

million users nationally; of whom the majority is between 25 and 34 years old (Statista 2022).

However, despite its growing relevance, research on self-presentation on LinkedIn is scarce. Though the topic of self-representation has been studied, research has been carried out mostly with regard to Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. This focus, however, neglected more segmented social media such as LinkedIn in the professional domain. Additionally, little research interest was given to self-promotion on social media platforms. Earlier studies about online networks mainly concentrated on the structure of networks, issues regarding privacy on social networking sites (SNS), impression management, identity, or the building of connections (boyd and Ellison 2007; Paliskiewicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016). While personal SNS allow users to portray more freely, PNS (or Professional SNS), in comparison, operate with certain standards or uniformity of self-presentation (Sievers et al. 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Managing Impressions and Self-Presentation: A Conceptual Review

Impression management describes the study of how people attempt and manage or control the perceptions others have formed or will form about them (see Drory and Zaidman 2007, Paliskiewicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016). It is also called “self-presentation” (Leary and Kowalski 1990, p.34). Impression management comprises two main components: This is, firstly, the motivation of people to create a positive impression perceived by the public and secondly, how individuals attempt to construct the impression others should perceive (Leary and Kowalski 1990; Drory and Zaidman 2007). In doing so, it interlinks the aims of achieving authenticity in their self-representation as well as increasing their trustworthiness, credibility, esteem, and power (Jung and Sosik 2003). It was Ervin Goffman (1971 [1956]) who offered a first comprehensive account on self-representation in his theory of identity management. Goffman highlighted how people aim strategically to present characteristics which they believe others will approve. This includes the presentation of the self in face-to-face communication and how individuals provide their audience with a part of the self, which they assume is expected of them.

Pleasing an audience but also to transform the idea of who we are to an outside world towards the perfect self are core motivations of presenting the self (Baumeister 1982). An individual seeks to portray itself in a way which is beneficial to the person and, therefore, idealise the self-presentation: “[...] the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him and the situation in a particular way, and he may seek this judgement as an ultimate end in itself [...]” (Goffman 1971, p.32). Further motivational goals of presenting the ideal self might also be to convince the audience that the self which is presented is the real self (Baumeister 1982). However, the presentation of the self is rather driven by the person's aim to present themselves in a favourable way and thereby make an impression on others (Baumeister 1982).

Self-presentation on SNS has the advantage compared to face-to-face communication, that individuals have the option to correct their presentation, for example, through editing a post, in order to achieve the preferred impression (Turkle 1999; Liu and Baumeister 2016). This intentional management of the impression is the expression the individual “gives” (Goffman 1971, p.14). As of Goffman's (1971) theory of self-presentation, this can also be applied to the communication and self-presentation in SNS, since technology extends new ways to communicate with each other (Liu and Baumeister 2016; Merunkova and Slerka 2019). The image of self which users present on SNS depends on the audience they share it with and therefore, users have the option to choose which self they present (Hardof-Jaffe et al. 2020; Zheng et al. 2020). Also, Schlenker and Pontari (2000) discovered that crowds can influence an individual's self-presentation. Moreover, user adapt the style of self-presentation for each audience “Since each form of self-communication brings along a specific concept of audience [...]” (van Dijck 2013, p.200).

Self-presentation on LinkedIn

LinkedIn allows users to connect with each other for business purposes, to create a professional network and opportunities for employment can also be shared (Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016). It is internationally amongst the fastest growing professional networking services (PNS) (van de Ven et al. 2017). LinkedIn as largest PNS in the world has by now gained around 875 million members globally (LinkedIn 2022b). Previous studies of PNS were mostly concerned with the content and design of profiles (Brandenberg et al. 2019). However, they mainly focused on Facebook (e.g. Back et al. 2010; Seidman 2013). In order to better understand the behaviour of individuals in managing impressions online, it is worth to analyse PSN such as Xing (Germany) or LinkedIn (Kuznekoff 2013). Indeed, in a professional recruitment environment it is of vital importance to be able to judge the veracity, validity, and authenticity of the professional self-presentation (Sievers et al. 2015). However, there are to date only few studies existent about user behaviour on LinkedIn, which focus mostly on LinkedIn's digital architecture (Papacharissi, 2009; van Dijck 2013), age differences in usage (Krings et al. 2021; Pardim et al. 2022), gender differences in PSN presentation styles (Eimler et al. 2012; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz 2018), the effectiveness of argument, textual and visual elements in LinkedIn profiles (Chiang and Suen 2015; Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016; Domahidi 2022) or subjectivity in LinkedIn recommendations (Rui 2018).

In her cross-platform study of Facebook and LinkedIn, van Dijck (2013) identified differences in identity construction: "While using one's Facebook profile to create a leisure persona [...] one may keep up a completely separate professional profile on LinkedIn" (van Dijck 2013, p.21). Hence, LinkedIn users are advised not to display any kind of expression of self but rather to market themselves as professional, as otherwise it might reflect negatively on their professional reputation (van Dijck 2013). Identity in SNS can be conveyed by self-presentation in the form of pictures, videos, texts or other cues (Starcic et al. 2017). Florenthal (2015) identified several key motivations when analysing students' LinkedIn usage: communicating interpersonally, seeking information about companies, and advancing their professional career. Generally, the motivations identified as key themes for the broader use of SNS are the usage for entertainment purposes, to present the self, to maintain old friend- or relationships but also the identified motivations stated above (Kim 2018). The reflections above led to the first research question: *RQ1*: How do individuals believe they construct their self-presentation in LinkedIn profiles?

Concepts of the Self

While online spaces allow the creation of multiple selves including anonymous identities (Turtle 1999; van Dijck 2013), PNS such as LinkedIn require by their nature the use of truthful information (such as a real name) rather than a fictional one (LinkedIn 2021). However, despite its claim of authenticity, profiles on PNS retain the character of constructed personas of selves, which "[...] represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming [...]" (Markus and Nurius 1986, p. 954). These selves can be understood as salient because they can indicate future behaviour or offer perspective on present self-perceptions (Markus and Nurius 1986). Michikyan et al. (2015) explored an approach to categorize the facets of multiple selves' facets in SNS into a real (or actual) self, ideal self and a false self. This has not been investigated for LinkedIn user selves. The following sections examine the two concepts more closely.

Ideal and False Selves

Through the choice not to disclose negative aspects of personality and thereby establish a certain positive self-image, online users exercise control over the impression-making process (Merunkova and Slerka 2019). Goffman (1971, p.44) indicated that individuals tend "[...] to offer their observers an impression that is idealized in several different ways." Similarly, van Dijck (2013) confirmed this prioritization of an ideal version of self for social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook. The possibility of users to alter profiles to present a desired image on

social media (Schroeder and Cavanaugh 2018) includes presenting less personal information and excluding unpleasant facts in order to avoid embarrassment, reducing the visibility of an authentic self on a profile (Bronstein 2014). On LinkedIn, self-presentation is supported by mainly positive information contributing to a professional impression of the user through “an idealized version” (Kuzenkoff 2013, p.17). However, maintaining an ideal self-presentation on SNS might be more challenging over the long time. First, external factors such as comments or posts from other users on one's profile can hardly be controlled (Back et al. 2010). Secondly, when acquiring a job through PNS, an individual might be pressured to maintain the façade, and possibly from this reason opt for a rather authentic presentation (Sievers et al. 2015). However, Sievers et al. (2015) failed to consider the presentation of a false self on PNS, which Michikyan et al. (2015) found to be driven by providing disinformation, the need to explore and the motivation to impress others or compare themselves to others.

True or Real Selves

By a true or real presented self, individuals are able to express their actual qualities or natural behaviour (Schlenker and Pontari 2000). Prior research about Facebook suggests that individuals tend to portray more likely their real selves rather than an idealised personality (Back et al. 2010). Indeed, presenting an excessive number of positive qualities about one's self might actually have a negative effect because the person could be perceived as pretentious and less positively (Zheng et al. 2020). Self-presentation online provides individuals with the opportunity to portray an unrepresented self (Turkle 1999), described by Rogers (1951 cited by Bargh et al. 2002, p.34) as the: “true self [and is from the other selves distinguished] [...] as actually existing psychologically (i.e., a present, not a future version of self), but not fully expressed in social life (i.e., not the actual self)”. In this context, personality types also matter. Introverted individuals have been found to be more likely and comfortable to express their true self in online situations (Marriott and Buchanan 2014), while displaying more shyness in face-to-face communication. Contrary to this, Sievers et al. (2015) identified that authentic self-presentation rather links to the personality traits extraversion (opposite of introversion) and openness. Other factors which impact the presentation of a true self include a more truthful self-presentation online in face of unfamiliar individuals not known from prior face-to-face interactions (Bargh et al. 2002; McKenna et al. 2005) or an equally similar representation on- and offline (Marriot and Buchanan 2014). Following these ideas, a second research question was developed: *RQ2: Which are the factors that influence and shape the form of presentation of the self on LinkedIn?*

Personality and Personality Traits in PNS Self-Presentation

As personality traits we understand traits of a person consistent over time and across situations, which reflect “people's characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours” (Diener et al. 2019, p.836). It allows a rough assessment of the personality of individuals and is, subsequently, of relevance for the process of personality inferences during job recruitment over PNS. Amongst the few studies about LinkedIn, van de Ven et al. (2017) examined whether LinkedIn users personality traits can be predicted from their profile. Van de Ven et al.'s (2017) study suggests that higher trait extraversion allows a higher chance to be recruited. Further research focuses mostly on self-presentation across social media. While motivational aspects hardly matter as a predictor for self-presentation in SNS, prior research suggests that personality of the user shapes the online self-presentation (Banczyk et al. 2008). Several traits of an individual's personality seem to be dominant for the collaborative use of SNS, among them are openness (to new experiences) and extraversion (Correa et al. 2010). Other traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism are also relevant in this context (Seidman 2013). These five traits are significant personality dimensions and usually known as “Big Five” (Rammstedt and John 2007; Diener et al. 2019).

The trait extraversion describes the need to be accompanied by others and to engage in social interactions (Marriott and Buchanan 2014). Previous research established a positive correlation between the use of SNS and extraversion (Correa et al. 2010), which contradicts earlier

findings about introversion (Bargh et al. 2002) and can be explained with the missing anonymity in online networks. The trait neuroticism, which displays being insecure and emotionally unstable, is found to be partially linked to the use of SNS (Marriott and Buchanan 2014) in a complex relationship (Michikyan et al. 2014). Michikyan et al. (2014) reported a correlation between people with high neuroticism traits and an ideal self-presentation on Facebook, because these people might find it difficult to express themselves in real life. Another study on Facebook by Seidman (2013) discovered an association between agreeableness and the actual self, which could be due to agreeable individuals using Facebook to nurture already existing relationships. By presenting the actual self as agreeable, individuals are able to avoid conflict. Agreeable individuals are characterised by friendliness and are trusting (Marriott and Buchanan 2014). Additionally, conscientious individuals on professional SNS may be extremely cautious to create a flawless and professional profile (Sievers et al. 2015), which was also found to be the case on not professional SNS such as Facebook (Seidman 2013). Preliminary work on SNS has tended to focus on the use of SNS in relation to an individual's personality traits, but there is much less information regarding how an online self and its presentation might be related to personality traits (Marriott and Buchanan 2014; Michikyan et al. 2014). This research aims to contribute to filling this gap. The following research question and hypotheses were formulated:

RQ2.a: Is there a relationship between personality and the kind of self-presentation on LinkedIn?

Null hypothesis = H₀

H₀1: There is no correlation between extraversion and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.

H₀2: There is no correlation between agreeableness and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.

H₀3: There is no correlation between openness and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.

H₀4: There is no correlation between neuroticism and an ideal self-presentation on LinkedIn.

H₀5: There is no correlation between conscientiousness and an ideal self-presentation on LinkedIn.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a mixed-method approach was used, which required quantitative and qualitative data collection (Creswell and Creswell 2018). This was based on criteria of efficacy and follows a pragmatic philosophical stance (Denscombe 2014). The study builds on a sequential explanatory design. The mixed method design combined online questionnaires with interviews, following Florenthal's (2015) research approach. A mixed method approach enables the researcher to balance the weaknesses of one research method with the strengths of the other (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004), allowing "[...] a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself" (Creswell and Creswell 2018, p.213). While the quantitative data collection informs the qualitative research method (Doyle et al. 2016), the qualitative data, in turn, will contribute to explain the quantitative data (Bryman 2015). A pilot test was conducted with two participants.

The study deploys questionnaires because these allow collecting opinions of a large and salient sample of participants (Matthews and Ross 2010). It measures personality and perceptions of their self-presentations on LinkedIn. The questionnaires were conducted anonymously and online (Bryman 2015), except for the participants' decision to state their details at the end of the questionnaire for further participation in the study. To establish categories for the data analysis, closed-ended questions were

mostly used for the questionnaire rather than open-ended questions, in order to consume less time in answering and to increase the reliability of results (Fink 2003; Denscombe 2014). Several instruments were used and adapted for the development of the questionnaire. First, the Self-Presentation on Facebook Questionnaire (SPFBQ) (Michikyan et al. 2015) has been modified in its scale by replacing the word "Facebook" with "LinkedIn". Furthermore, the Likert scale format of Michikyan et al.'s (2015) study was deployed to assure the validity of the results (see Appendix B). To measure personality traits a short version of the Big Five personality dimensions, the BFI-10, by Rammstedt and John (2007) was adopted as multiple-choice questions. Through the BFI-10 the participants' agreement level of personality traits was measured (Rammstedt and John 2007). As with the previous measurement scale, its Likert scale format was used as in the original research (see Appendix B). The last part of the questionnaire consisted of questions regarding the participants' LinkedIn use, but also employment information.

Interviews have been deployed as follow-up to the questionnaire, to allow probing questions (Bryman 2015). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used on the base of a pre-planned interview guide (see Appendix E; Matthews and Ross 2010). They served to explore people's lived experiences of their self-presentation on LinkedIn and to understand what they infer from them (Seidman 2019). Due to restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, online real time interviews (e.g., Zoom video calls) were conducted instead of face-to-face interviews, which allowed a wider geographical range and inclusion of participants who could not be interviewed otherwise (Cole 2017). Interviews were well-suited to discuss more sensitive and personal information since participants were asked to answer questions in relation to their personality, behaviour and self-presentation (Guest et al. 2013). The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The researcher was able to ask follow-up or prompt questions to a participant's response (Matthews and Ross 2010). Additionally, results from the questionnaire were discussed more in detail with participants (Creswell and Plano Clark 2010).

For the questionnaires, a convenience sampling method was used due to the limited time of the research project (Matthews and Ross 2010). The study draws on LinkedIn's capacity to sharing questionnaires with a network (Denscombe 2014). The participants were sampled via Facebook and as well as LinkedIn groups and Instagram to reach a wider population and received reminders. The questionnaires were completed by 76 participants, with an age range of 18-64. This wider age range was chosen with view on previous studies (e.g., Florenthal 2015 or Michikyan 2015), which solely focused on emerging adults or students. Participants for the qualitative part of the research design, the interviews, were selected purposely from the questionnaire participants (Creswell and Plano 2010). Interviews were conducted with seven women and two men aged 18 or over and a LinkedIn user. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and the participants had to provide their informed consent.

The data from the questionnaires hosted on JISC online surveys was exported for further analysis into SPSS. Four responses were excluded from the data set (72 questionnaire responses were analysed), because they did not meet the criteria of being a LinkedIn user. Additionally, connection sizes were changed manually in numeric variables and when, for example, no exact number e.g. 100-200 was given the mean of both (here 150) was used. Furthermore, missing data were dealt with by marking it as missing in SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the quantitative data from the questionnaires (Matthews and Ross 2010). Spearman's Rho correlation test was run in SPSS 27 to test the developed hypotheses, which assessed the relationship between variables relevant to this study (Matthews and Ross 2010; Field 2018). The alpha level was set to .05. The interviews and the qualitative questions of the survey were analysed through a thematic

analysis, to find themes or patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). The data was transcribed. For the purpose of this study the interview participants were referred to as P1-P9. Potential ideas were identified (Ibid., see Appendix A).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results of the questionnaire and discusses them in accordance with key themes from the qualitative data collection. It is worth noting that 80.6% (N=58) of the survey participants were female (see Appendix C). As there was no balanced number of male and female participants, no assumption could be made on differences or commonalities in self-presentation behaviour by gender.

RQ1: How do Individuals Believe they Construct their Self-Presentation in LinkedIn Profiles?

Real self, ideal self and false self were measured by the extent to which participant presented them on LinkedIn by utilising an adaptation of the Self-Presentation on Facebook Questionnaire (SPFBQ) developed by Michikyan et al. (2015).

Figure 1: Compared Means Table

Compared means					
	real self	ideal self	false self: deception	false self: exploration	false self: compare
Mean	3.6278	3.1875	2.0868	2.3750	2.9444
N	72	72	72	72	72
Std. Deviation	.70195	.92857	.75312	.76081	.89338

Figure 1 compares the means from the real self, ideal self and false self: deception; exploration and compare. The five mean scores were computed from the 17-item scale (see Appendix B) which the participants answered. Participants believed to present the real self (M= 3.63, SD= .70) more often than the ideal self (M= 3.19, SD= .93) on LinkedIn. The results illustrate that participants also presented their real self significantly more than their false self: deception (M= 2.09, SD= .75), false self: exploration (M=2.38, SD= .76) and false self: compare (M= 2.94, SD= .89) on LinkedIn. Participants also reported to rather present their ideal self than their false self: deception, false self: exploration and the false self: compare. Therefore, the false selves were the least shown selves among the participants on LinkedIn.

The Real Selves

Figure 2: Item for 'Real Self'

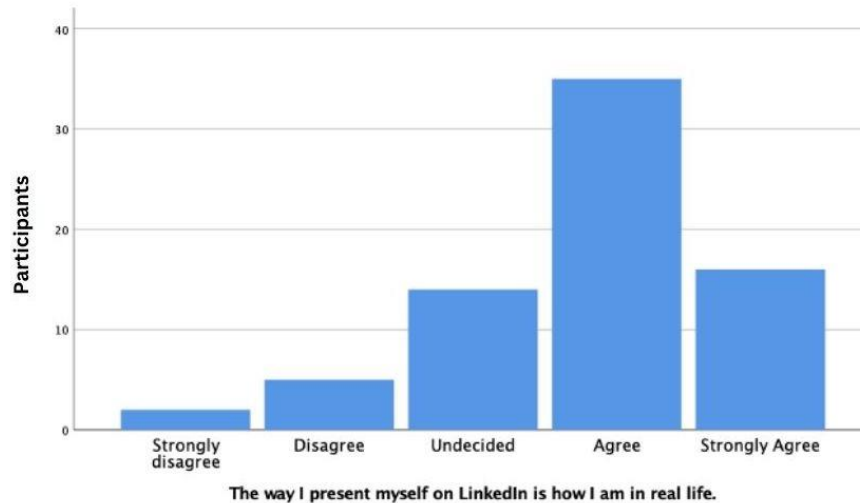


Figure 2 shows one of five items measuring the construct of 'real self' on LinkedIn (see Appendix for other figures). 70.8% of participants (N= 51) agree/strongly agree that they believe how they present themselves on LinkedIn is how they are in real life. As P1 stated '[...] I would want them to perceive me as who I am [...]'. Furthermore, P3 and P4 explained that they rather present themselves realistically than idealised, respectively:

"I don't want to display somebody else or display a heroic or idealistic type of me. I'm trying to show what I can, what I'm good at."

"...it is forming an image, but as long as the image for myself is correct and represents my true personality enough, I think it maximises the chance that I would be happy in the workplace"

Most of the interviewees indicated that they want to portray themselves realistically, but on a professional level. However, this does not fully represent their authentic personality. For example, P4 alluded further on a real LinkedIn presentation "I think I present myself the way I am, in terms of professional interests and topics". This finding mainly supports Bargh et al. (2002), who concluded that it is important for individuals to be perceived online by others for who they really are. Although participants claimed to be perceived as for who they are, their real selves are rarely shown. Nearly all interview participants stated that they would not disclose highly personal information on their profile. This suggests that LinkedIn profiles may show limited aspects of the user's real self, aligning with Schlenker and Pontari's (2000) argument that individuals adapt their self-presentation to achieve a preferable impression made on the audience despite the intention to be truthful.

The Ideal Selves

Figure 3: Item for 'Ideal Self'

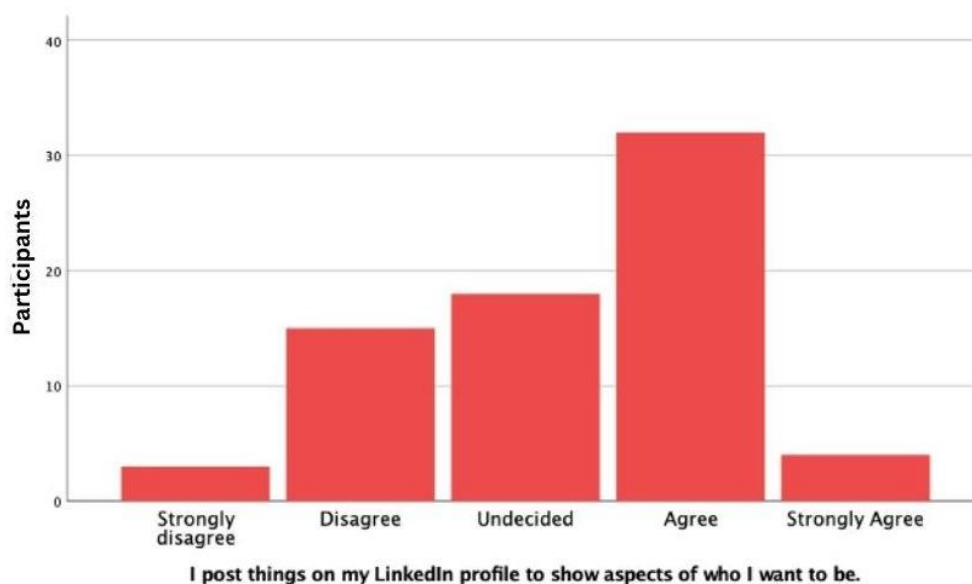


Figure 3 presents one of two items which measured the ideal self on LinkedIn. Half of the participants agree/strongly agree (50%, N=36) to showing aspects of how they want to be on LinkedIn and thus representing their ideal self. This is supported by the qualitative findings from participants who believe that LinkedIn users always show idealised aspects of themselves:

“I think people want to be seen as best version of themselves.” (P1)

“I feel like at times there is always the idealised version of themselves.” (P2)

One reason for an ideal self-presentation is perhaps that LinkedIn users want to impress potential employers, as P9 noted. With Baumeister (1982), this can be understood as impression that people want to convey to others by presenting themselves in a favourable manner. Furthermore, P2 elaborates that on LinkedIn is a “pressure to be perfect”. The interviewees stated that most users exaggerate certain skills or characteristics of themselves on LinkedIn.

The False Selves

False selves were significantly less found amongst the participants of quantitative and qualitative research. Data from the interviews indicated that participants considered presenting false information as not helpful for their self-image. These deviates from Michikyan et al. (2015) study about Facebook, where the false self: exploration was more often presented than the participants ideal self.

Figure 4: Item for 'False Self': Deception

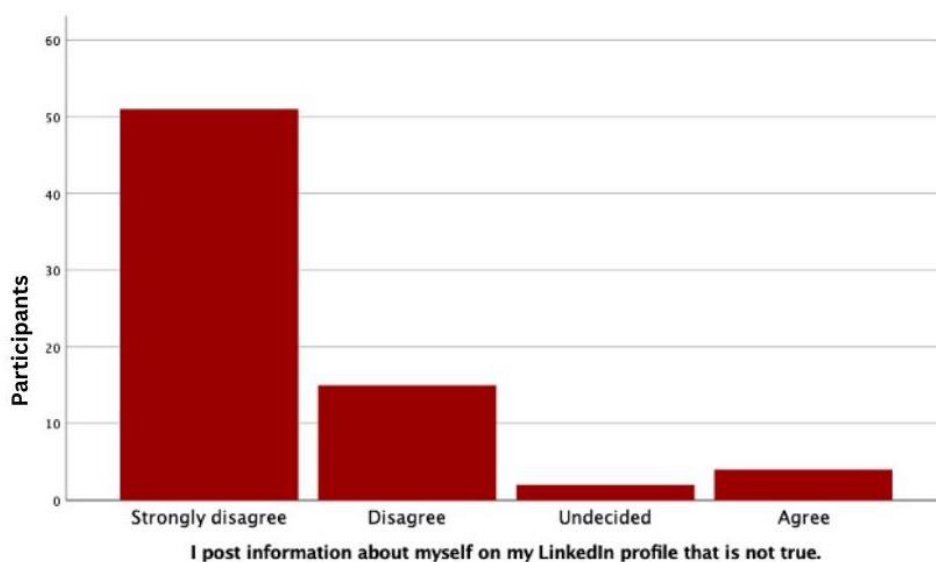


Figure 4 shows one of four items which measured the false self: deception on LinkedIn. 91.6 % of the participants (N=66) disagree/strongly disagree that they would not post information on LinkedIn which is not true. Eight out of nine interviewees expressed to consider lying on LinkedIn as damaging their image and difficult to maintain in real life:

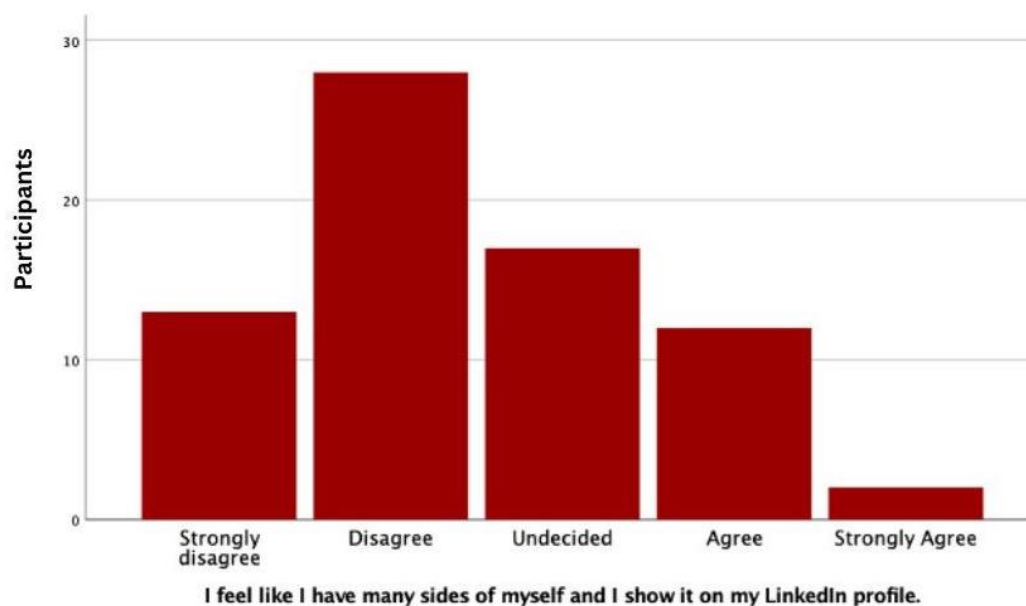
“...because everyone tells you you can just lie on your CV and you just can lie on LinkedIn, but then it's a struggle to remember these lies” (P6)

“Everyone who's going to hire you checked your degree and CV [and] I don't see a reason for lying on LinkedIn.” (P8)

As can be seen, some individuals aim for their professional identity to be consistent across online and offline (Florenthal 2015).

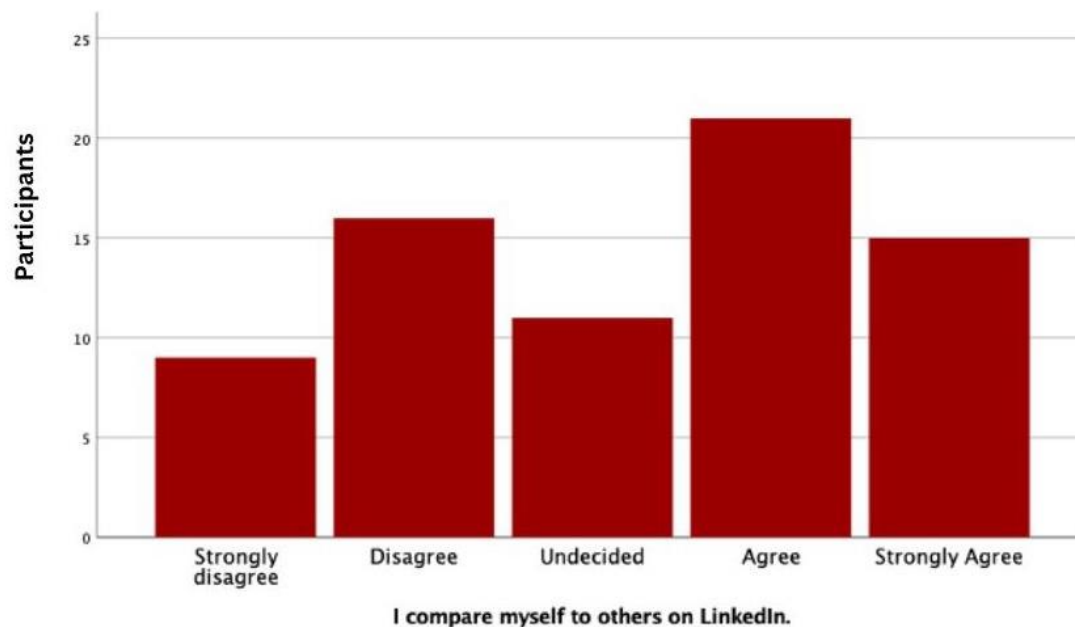
Figure 5 presents the false self: exploration tendency of participants. Just over half of the participants (57%, N=41) reported that they disagree/strongly disagree showing different sides of themselves on their LinkedIn profile. This result can possibly be explained by LinkedIn imposing a uniformity of presentation on profiles, and favouring consistency in presentation. P8 commented on this ‘[...] they all look the same, kind of uniformed’. Also, P7 noted ‘[...] pretty much everyone got a perfect profile on there [...]’; thus further supporting the idea of uniformed ‘perfect’ profiles. These findings confirm Sievers et al. (2015) notion of uniformity of PSN profiles due to less personal information being disclosed.

Figure 5: Item for 'False Self': Exploration



One of three items measuring the false self: compare/impress is presented in Figure 6 and shows that half of the participants (50%, N=36) agree/strongly agree that they compare themselves on LinkedIn to others.

Figure 6: Item for 'False Self': Compare/Impress



Surprisingly, comparison (Festinger 1950) was not an emerging theme from the interviewees. Merely two of the interviewees reflected they compare themselves on LinkedIn with other users or their information on their profile. For example, P2 commented:

'[...] there is always a question of am I good enough, this person is doing so many great things.' (P2)

The 'Authentic Best version of Self'

During the data analysis in this study, an unexpected finding emerged. Participants expressed to follow in practice most often a middle ground between the real and ideal self, which I call the 'authentic best version of self'. This version is not yet documented in the literature. Interviewee P6 reflected about this balance of self-aspects:

"...75% is me truly on LinkedIn and there is this 25%, which is me over exaggerating it to make myself look good."

Furthermore, the research revealed that the participants are more likely to show multiple facets of themselves., P2 (22 years old) commented:

"I still don't properly know who I am and I'm still trying to take those steps to find out who I am as a person and how I want to present myself."

These multiple facets of self-presentation amongst emerging adults (18-29 years) were also observed by Michikyan et al. (2015). Moreover, the interviewees intended to be truthful on LinkedIn, while still presenting themselves in a professional light and showing their preferable side. P3 feels that she always has to tell the truth, but she only shares positive information about herself:

"I have the feeling that I always need to say the truth which is why I'm only kind of showing my positive parts of what I want to show, instead of balancing it by the negative ones."

P3 also commented 'You would never display your weaknesses'. Showing a weaker part of self on social media could lead to "self-verification", verification of the existing self (Zheng et al. 2020). This aligns with results by Schlenker and Pontari (2000) on traditional communication, who stated by effectively communicating to an audience a person likes to cause a desired impact, which does not imply that the individual transmits incorrect information, but rather targeted information for the audience. Results suggest that individuals do not show either an authentic version or an idealised version, but rather present different aspects of self in one profile or selves they possibly strive for to be (Markus and Nurius 1986). Marriott and Buchanan (2014) concluded likewise, that individuals do not present an idealised or a more authentic online version. However, the findings do not support the suggestions of van Dijck (2013) or Zheng et al. (2020) who indicated that online users present themselves idealised on social networks.

RQ2: Which are the Factors that Influence and Shape the Form of Presentation of the Self on LinkedIn?

Similarly, to Facebook, users are influenced by certain factors and also consciously construct their identity presented on LinkedIn. The following factors or motives were identified through the quantitative and qualitative research methods:

Audience Awareness and Selectivity

Through qualitative research emerged that the audience (users' connections) influences, but also shapes their self-presentation. This again confirms Goffman's (1971) theory of the importance of the audience in self-presentation. P4 considered her audience when posting or sharing information on LinkedIn, in terms of what her audience would find interesting or what they could benefit from, which also allowed her '[...] to build my image as a professional [...]'. Moreover, P4 pointed out that her LinkedIn connections are actively shaping her identity on her profile, by endorsing her skills (feature):

"This is the least developed part of my profile, which I haven't developed myself, but I allowed the people to shape it."

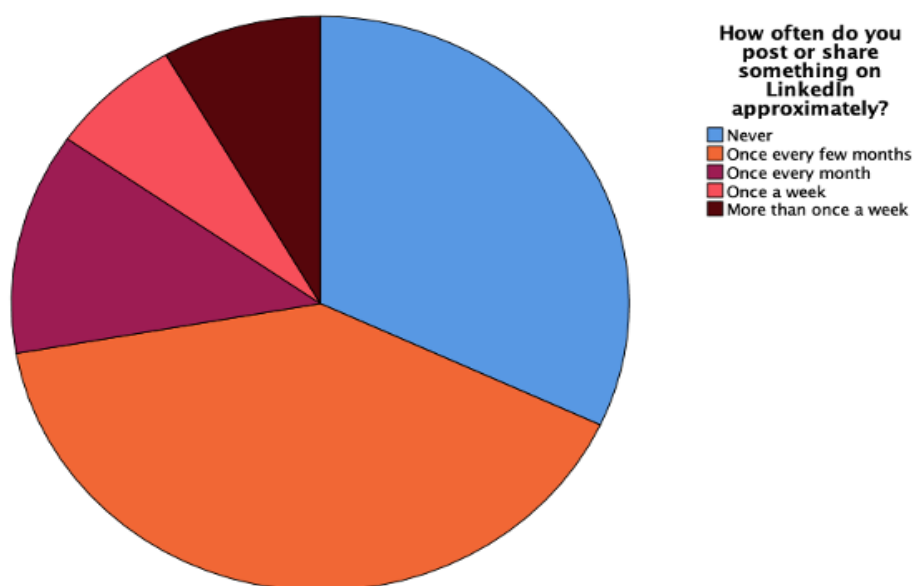
To know what content to share on LinkedIn P1 admitted that she was influenced by other users, when creating her profile 'Before I put anything up, I was just looking at other people's profile'. This is consistent with Schlenker and Pontari (2000), who outlined for traditional communication, that in order to make a favourable impression of the self on other people, the actions of others need to be observed. Interestingly, P1 reflected on posts she would share only with a certain audience, for example:

"... things I would post on Instagram, I wouldn't post on LinkedIn because I think LinkedIn is a more professional platform."

The type of online network let the user adapt or modify their self-presentation, which also supports Schwämmlein and Wodzicki's (2012) findings and thus ensure consistency (Paliszkiwicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016).

Many of the interviewees stated that they would not post about failures. P2 explained she refrained from doing so, because she is afraid about judgmental reactions which she could receive from her connections. Moreover, P8 commented 'I think LinkedIn is a quite good platform to keep people motivated, so I don't want to downgrade that'. This again confirms Zheng et al. (2020), who concluded SNS users rather engage in enhancing the self than verifying it. A common view among the interviewees was that they purposely select which information they share with their connections. This helps to understand the data from the questionnaire which revealed that participants engage rather less in sharing and posting information on LinkedIn. 72.2% of the participants (N= 52) indicated that they never or once every few months post or share something on LinkedIn (see Figure 7). P3 highlights that she would not post information which would portray her less positively '[...] I can say I wouldn't post it because I don't know what kind of consequences that would have'. This confirms audience influences in selection and posting behaviour of users (Merunkova and Slerka 2019).

Figure 7: Frequency of LinkedIn Users Posting



Not only can posts be selectively shared on LinkedIn but also the users' responses to a comment or posts are consciously planned. This is reflected by P3:

"...actually you can control everything that happens even if you're receiving a **** storm or I don't know bad comments, you can at least react with thinking twice what you're going to write."

Consistent with research by Liu and Baumeister (2016, p.80) some barriers of traditional communication, such as speaking and being nervous, do not exist on SNS because the user can choose what to share with the audience for "optimal disclosures". Nearly all interviewees consciously selected their profile picture, as P6 explained her profile picture is the 'first image' an employer will get from her. Furthermore, P9 stated that he selected a profile picture which was taken professionally and edited:

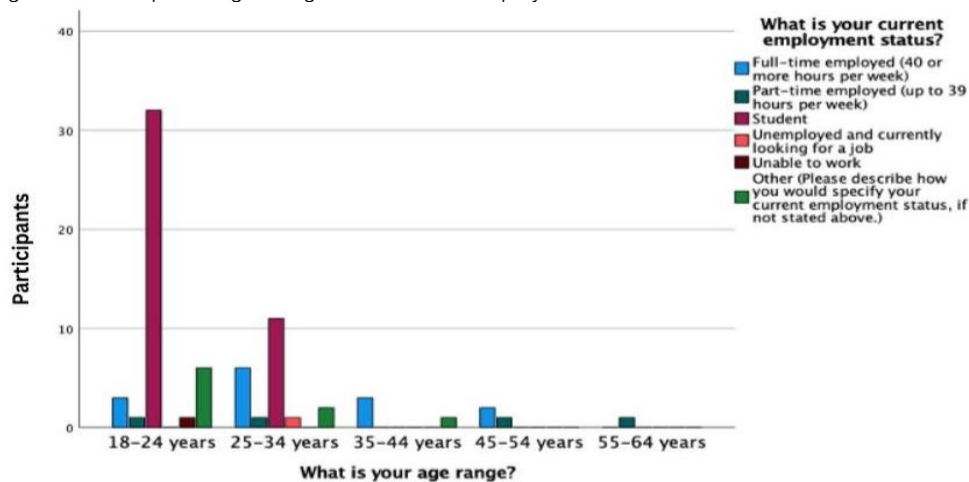
"The photographer sent me a few pictures and I just went with that one, because it was my favourite [and] He also removed the pimples from my forehead."

This is in line with findings of Liu and Baumeister (2016), that SNS users in order to make a positive or desired impression, can select which information they would like to disclose.

Career Stage

Most of the interviewees agreed that their current employment influences how they present themselves. Figure 8 below illustrates the distribution of participants' employment categorised in their age range. The majority of participants (59.7%, N=43) were students and 12.5% (N=9) were both students and employed ('other'). Furthermore, 32 students were among the 18-24 years old and the remaining 11 students were in the 25-34 age group. This also explains the age distribution of the participants with 59% of the participants, the majority, being between 18 to 24 years.

Figure 8: Participants Age Range with Current Employment



P6 describes that the effort she currently invests in her self-presentation on LinkedIn will be less once she reached her career goal:

“... I tell you now, as soon as I get my job, I properly stop using LinkedIn so much, because once I have the job I don’t need to constantly prove to potential employers that I’m an amazing person.”

Leary and Kowalski (1990) also suggested that job applicants (offline) will engage more in managing their impression, when interacting with an interviewer. It can thus be suggested that LinkedIn users looking for a job, will be more active in impression management. However, some interviewees stated that they were not influenced by their employment status in their self-presentation, as P3 explained she always has to present herself professionally no matter what her occupation is. On the contrary, P9 argued because he is currently a student his LinkedIn profile is not of great importance to him. Nonetheless, he wants to present himself as ‘[...] cool but also serious [...]’. Likewise, Zide et al. (2014, p.584) described that students at undergraduate level present themselves on LinkedIn “[...] in a way that is deemed as ‘cool’ to her peers [...]”, but after graduation they change the way of self-presentation to a more professional manner.

Platform Influences

A minority of the interviewees pointed to the restrictions LinkedIn’s interface imposes on the user’s decision to present themselves intentionally. Although ‘[...] everybody wants to be unique and different to others’, as P9 described, it cannot be fully realised, because LinkedIn shapes “normative behavior” (van Dijck 2013, p.212). Furthermore, P5 negatively acknowledged the platform’s recommendation to fill out all not yet provided information:

“...it forces you to fill out your profile [and] it’s asking me for more and more information what I’m not willing to share.”

P2 highlighted to be considered a professional on LinkedIn, information must be filled out in a certain format and as complete as possible. This also accords with findings by Ivcevic and Ambady (2012 cited by Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016), which indicated that a desirable image is created when all information in LinkedIn profiles is completed. P1

and P5 were concerned with the user-friendliness of the platform. In particular, P1 criticised that her displaying of skills on LinkedIn may not reflect her real abilities, because LinkedIn does not provide the option to choose different levels of expertise '[...] you can only put skills, but you can't show the range of how good you really are [...]'. This finding of user identities shaped by platforms has important implications for developing an authentic persona on LinkedIn.

RQ2. and Hypothesis Testing: Is there a Relationship between Personality and Self Presentation on LinkedIn?

The relationships between personality traits ("Big Five") and self-presentation were analysed and discussed. If the null hypothesis is accepted, there was no observable effect.

Figure 9: Null Hypothesis Table

Null hypothesis	Results
H ₀ 1: There is no correlation between extraversion and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.	Accepted.
H ₀ 2: There is no correlation between agreeableness and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.	<i>Rejected (in favour of the alternative hypothesis, there is a correlation between agreeableness and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn).</i>
H ₀ 3: There is no correlation between openness and a real/authentic self-presentation on LinkedIn.	Accepted.
H ₀ 4: There is no correlation between neuroticism and an ideal self-presentation on LinkedIn.	Accepted.
H ₀ 5: There is no correlation between conscientiousness and an ideal self-presentation on LinkedIn.	Accepted.

The correlation analysis shows that there was a statistically significant positive correlation, although not strong, between agreeableness and the real self on LinkedIn ($r_s=27$, $N=72$, $p=.023$). It can thus be suggested that users scoring higher in agreeableness show a greater presentation of their real self on LinkedIn. This can be explained by highly agreeable people being less likely to engage in confrontations (van de Ven et al. 2017). The urge to avoid potential conflicts might motivate LinkedIn users to refrain from presenting a false self or personality online. Another explanation is raised by Seidman (2013), who argues that individuals which are agreeable show authentic self-aspects on

Facebook, because they are less driven by needs of self-presentation. Nonetheless, the correlation between agreeableness and the real self found here is a new finding and has so far not been documented before on SNS.

Contrary to prior expectations, this study did not find statistically significant correlations for hypotheses 1, 3, 4 and 5. Regarding the personality trait of extraversion, the data about LinkedIn users did not confirm earlier research, which identified extraversion as related to an authentic self-presentation both online on Facebook and offline (Seidman 2013; Michikyan et al. 2014). Similarly, the relationship between openness and an authentic self as suggested by Sievers et al. (2015) for XING could not be confirmed in this study. This could be due to having deployed a different methodological approach, or simply taking platform differences into account. Whereas general SNS allow individuals to be more experimental in the way they present themselves in favour of the ideal self (Correa et al. 2010), the trait of openness might have much less relevance for self-presentations on LinkedIn, which draw on a more authentic version on LinkedIn. In this regard, Facebook as SNS can be understood as more similar to 'casual' social interaction, whereas extraverted individuals may not always show their professional side in offline communication or interaction. In terms of a link between conscientiousness and an ideal self, no significant statistical effect was found, despite the trait may be related to an authentic self-presentation (Seidman 2013). Finally and surprisingly, no correlation between neuroticism and the ideal self was detected, what could be assumed to be due to neurotic individuals rather showing more aspects of their false self online (Michikyan et al. 2014).

The qualitative results indicate that nearly all interviewees believe that personality influences their identity presented on LinkedIn. P6 commented in regard to LinkedIn profiles '[...] I think anyone's personality would influence their profile, that is what makes all people so different'. In addition, the only partially significant findings on personality in self-presentation on LinkedIn might be due to the reason that individuals do not disclose a massive amount of private information on LinkedIn unlike the case on Facebook (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki 2012), which was confirmed by the majority of interviewees, as it is a professional network. For example, P4 linked this to her personality:

"... in terms of posting personal information, I don't really post too much about myself. I think that also kind of boils down to personality."

The findings suggest a highly complex relationship between personality traits and type of self-presentation, which appears to be associated with multiple aspects of the self. Furthermore, these data must be interpreted with caution because of the generalizability of the sample, which is limited by applying a non-probability method. The role of 'promotion factors' in their consumer engagement practices, this study adopted an approach of following the users (Caliandro, 2018) in their natural environment through a set of tracking devices. Specifically, screen recordings capturing participants' one-week online navigation were collected which allowed to explore their consumer behaviour in fine detail and therefore understand their practices in complexity.

CONCLUSION

This mixed method study followed two aims: Firstly, to investigate how and why individuals construct an image of or present themselves on LinkedIn, and secondly, to

examine the extent to which the user's personality affects the form of presentation on LinkedIn. Findings suggest a complex and varied picture of user self-presentation on LinkedIn. Results suggest that LinkedIn users would like to present themselves authentically to make a better impression on employers, but are unable to fully accomplish this, since they also want to present a 'perfect' version. Although, a false self-presented on LinkedIn, based on deceptive tactics, was the least likely to be employed by LinkedIn users. This implies whilst information in LinkedIn profiles may not always be authentic, it is honest. As users themselves decide how much they want to share or which information they want to withhold, LinkedIn profile information appears to be more controlled than, e.g., on Facebook (Michikyan et al. 2015), with less personal information being shared, leading to a less authentic presentation. Indeed, this contradicts findings by Sievers et al. (2015). Despite users present multiple facets of themselves, the platform imposes certain expectations on the profile holder's self-portrayal (Sievers et al. 2015), leading to often more homogeneous and uniform profiles which resemble online CV's (van de Ven et al. 2017). This uniformity may be explained through users need to select their style of self-presentation for a specific community (Paliszkiwicz and Mądra-Sawicka 2016). However, this

These findings have implications for both, individuals creating a profile on LinkedIn to market their employability, and employers seeking to recruit suitable candidates. Results confirm LinkedIn users attempt to build an authentic profile because they believe that they are expected to present themselves positively. Furthermore, results from the study raise questions about whether recruiters are able to assess the real personality of LinkedIn users or whether the presentation appears to be 'staged' or 'unnatural', raising the question to what extent LinkedIn serves as tool to assess a candidate's suitability for a position as LinkedIn profiles are created consciously. Therefore, conclusions about the actual personality of a job candidate result difficult (see van den Ven et al. 2017). The results also allowed to identify what factors influence self-presentations on LinkedIn. Four factors or motives could be identified through the interviews: audience, selection, career stage, and platform influences. Audience dependency was previously found to affect the extent of disclosure or information shared online (Merunkova and Slerka 2019; Hardof-Jaffe et al. 2020; Zheng et al. 2020). In terms of selection of content and information shared it is suggested that users work towards an idealised LinkedIn profile, with only the best moments published. Besides this, this study suggests that the current career stage affects the level of effort put into self-presentation on LinkedIn, as undergraduate students may be seeking more jobs through traditional channels (Starcic et al. 2017), suggesting them to be more passive in their self-presentation. However, this has not been empirically tested. As a final factor, platform features might exercise a "technology-directed" impact on users online behaviour (Duffy et al. 2017, p.8), hence it could be suggested changes in terms of platform design or guidelines, to provide users with a greater freedom of choice when presenting their identity, instead of providing guidelines for 'manufactured' profiles (for example, the current restrictive guidelines on users' choice of profile pictures in a specific format to be published (LinkedIn 2015). Not only could this limitation set by LinkedIn diminish personal creativity but also cultural norms - CVs in the UK, e.g., require no photo of the job applicant to avoid discrimination bias.

Among the "Big Five" personality traits, this study identified that only the trait of agreeableness allowed a prediction of an authentic self-presentation style on LinkedIn. However, no relationship was found between the remaining four traits of the Big Five. Neither extraversion nor openness showed a link to an authentic self-presented, raising the question whether extraverts might not see LinkedIn as a platform for authentic

presentation. Similarly, neuroticism and conscientiousness were not found to be associated with an ideal self. Hence, these quantitative results show a rather minimal effect of the personality traits assessed on users' form of self-presentation. The findings of this study suggest that LinkedIn and SNS such as Facebook are more similar than initially expected, as nuanced aspects of self-presentation on LinkedIn could be shown instead of solely an assumed authentic self-portrayal, but rather nuanced aspects of the self are shown. This was unexpected for PNS (Sievers et al. 2015), but not for SNS (Michikyan et al. 2015).

The findings of this study have some limitations: First, the small size of the sample and is biased towards students, with an underrepresentation of older age cohorts. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the tool of SPFBQ was developed for young adults aged below 30 years (Michikyan et al. 2015), while in this study 10 % of respondents are outside of this age range. Secondly, the deployed method of convenience sampling for the questionnaire does not allow to fully generalise the findings to the general population (Matthews and Ross 2010) due to potential bias in participant selection (Bryman 2015). Future research might focus on two aspects: Firstly, observing long-term effects of users altering their presentation on LinkedIn, and, secondly, developing a self-presentation measurement tool specifically for LinkedIn, in order to substitute for the tool used in this study, which had been originally developed for being used for analysis of Facebook.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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