Social performance study of virtual image on social media

Lily Lai[1,a,*]

[1]*School of Art Design and Media, Sanda University, Shanghai, China*
[a]*phoenixannie@126.com*
[*]*Corresponding author*

Abstract: At a time when the whole world is preparing to enter the metaverse life, people on various social media platforms can realize the ideal role setting through technological means, ranging from the choice of avatar to language expression habits, audio and video dynamic images, etc. However, contradictions inevitably arise between the real self and the virtual image. In this paper, we will explore and discuss the contradictions between people's real selves and virtual characters on social media from the perspective of Social Performance Study, and try to study the solutions from the intersection of sociology and performance disciplines.

1. Introduction

Social media is increasingly becoming a part of modern life especially with the rise of smartphones, which have moved from metaphor to reality as the "digital organ" of people. According to the Reuters Institute, 54% of users admit that they basically get all kinds of information from social media. In the process of obtaining information, people show their ideal personality or image through various channels such as text, pictures, audio and video on social media, and the entire creative process from virtual image to character portrayal reveals the significance of social performance [1] (Figure 1).
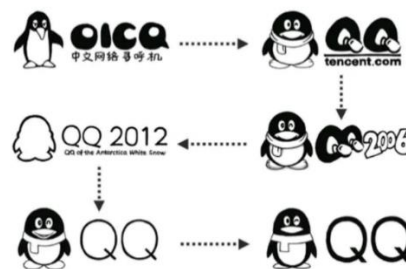

Figure 1: Tencent QQ

The use of avatars on domestic social media platforms can be traced back to the earliest instant messaging software Iencent QQ(Fig.1), which was designed as a virtual character using the characteristics of a penguin's appearance. Obviously, the virtual characters are mostly commonly used in film and television production, such as the blue character in the film Avatar (Fig.2) whose name is directly from the original electronic image. There are also virtual characters in interactive online video

games, such as the popular multiplayer video game "League of Legends", there are currently 180 million players right now which makes the role setting of the virtual character very important [2].

Figure 2: Avatar film (2009)

If we look further into the NFT (Non-Fungible Token) market, projects that are considered "blue chips" (blue chip NFTs are usually well-known, stable, and considered a good long-term investment, with creative and unique features (Figure 3), unlike the early NFT avatar projects that only sold pictures, later project owners are increasingly focusing on scene building and extensive empowerment. One project called Boom gala directly helps its NFT holders to build the basic components of their metaverse so that they can move into the metaverse fully furnished. The holder will not only get the avatar, but also the right to use the corresponding 3D image and apartment [3].
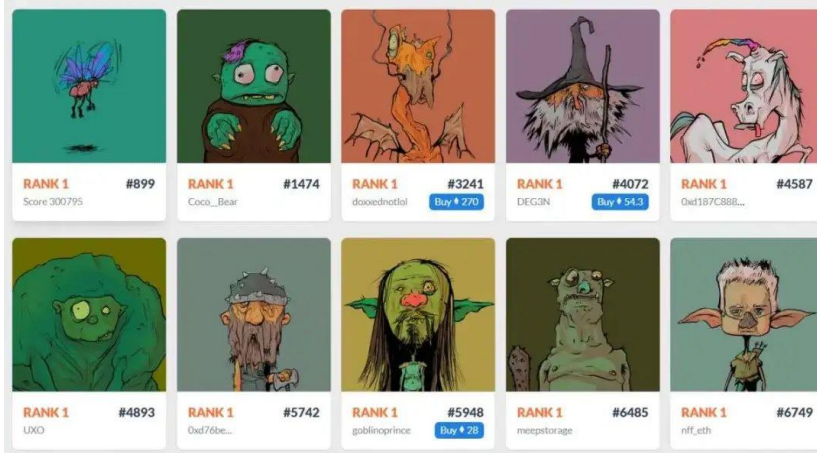

Figure 3: Goblin town NFT

When everyone is preparing to enter the metaverse life, it is often disorienting between the virtual image and the real life.so we have to start again with the social performance study about roles and images. People are torn between their self-image and their ideal social roles at home or in the office, with superiors or subordinates, internally or externally. They always shift back and forth between their personal images and social roles. Sometimes they even forget themselves and are completely bound to the requirements of the social self- [4].

2. Literature review

Everyone on social media is trying to present themselves with their respective ideal images. People generally tell each other what role they are playing by means of gestures and cues in interaction with others and it is with the help of such a presumed foundation that people can effectively interpret others' gestures and cues in order to confirm what role they are playing and then find ways and means

of communicating with them. Impression management, also known as self-presentation, refers to the ways that people use to attempt to control how they are perceived by others[5]. By conveying particular impressions about their abilities, attitudes, motives, status, emotional reactions, and other characteristics, people can influence others to respond to them in desirable ways [6].

To Goffman, the self is not a fixed thing which resides within individuals, but a social process. For social interactions to go smoothly, every interaction needs to project a public identity hat guides others 'behaviors. Individuals participate in social interactions through performing a "line" or "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which they express views of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants. especially himself. Such lines are created and maintained by both the performer and the audience. By enacting a line effectively [7]. a person gains positive social value or "face. "John Dewey pointed out that habits were not merely passive underlies that limit activity to certain well-worn grooves4He described social institutions, customs and norms as habits that develop in society over time. Habits he insists are energetic they drive us to action. And he stressed the fact that it is the habits of society that are the active agents not us. We are not acting according to habit. Habit is acting itself out through us. Charles Cooley described "looking glass self" as our reflection of how we thought we appeared to others He takes into account three steps when using the " looking glass self The first is how one imagines one looks to other people, the second is how one imagines the judgment of others based on how one thinks they view them, the last is how one thinks of how the person views them based on their previous judgments[8].

Rooted intellectually in Hegelian dialectics and process philosophy, George H. Mead, like John Dewey, developed a more materialist process philosophy that was based upon human action and specifically communicative action. Human activity is, in a pragmatic sense, the criterion of truth, and through human activity meaning is made. Joint activity, including communicative activity, is the means through which our sense of self is constituted. Most influential ideas of Mead were the emergence of mind and self from the communication process between organisms, also known as social behaviorism. For Mead, mind arises out of the social act of communication. Mead's concept of the social act is relevant, not only to his theory of mind, but to all facets of his social philosophy. His theory of "mind, self, and society" is, in effect, a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of a social process involving the interaction of many individuals, just as his theory of knowledge and value is a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of the experiencing individual in interaction with an environment. "Over the past half-century, the definition of performance has been expanded, an expansion driven first by pioneering artists and then by increasing cross-cultural interactions at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. Later, this definition was expanded by the Internet, an Internet that has increasingly blurred the boundaries between the virtual and the real life." Richard Schechner noted in a public speech at the Shanghai Theatre Academy in 2004--a year before the Richard Schechner Centre for Performance Studies was established in China. Society is a combination of people, especially a person who lives in an urban community where the vast majority of his actions are watched by others. People would generally want their performance to have some effect on those who are watching as long as they are aware that there are audiences. Then a contradiction between self and role, inner essence and outer image, actually makes people enter into performance. To be precise, this is called Social Performance [9].

3. Methodology

Social Performance Study is an interdisciplinary subject based on sociology, psychology, communication and performance study, which is especially important to guide social performance in this complicated modern society. Social performance study is derived from the Performance Study jointly advocated by Victor Turner and Richard Schechner which is different from the artistic

performance on the stage. It consists of four parts: being, doing, showing doing, and explaining showing doing. The premise of social performance studies is that we live in a "performance-oriented" era, but there is still a misunderstanding of the word "performance" in the public mind, and the term "performance", which is a neutral word, is often confused with words like "hypocrisy" or "fake show". It is a very big misunderstanding that performance seems to be a trick of a liar. In fact, people have been actors from the beginning of having memories and everyone is performer as well as the audience of other social performances whether if performance is to achieve the purpose of entertaining themselves or others [10].

4. Discussion and results

4.1. Image and reality

It is believed that there are two ways to perform in social performance study: the first is the "pleasing" way, that is, I act how others want me to act, and the second is the "personalized" way, that is, I act how I want to act. This is the primary contradiction between the self-image and the social role setting. Ideal images from virtual avatars to language habits, audio and video can be set up through technological ways on social media. A reticent male in daily life transforms into a humorous, funny and understanding guy, and girl suffering from body anxiety shift into an extrovert and hot type. What's more, people may be modified into completely different ones with opposed images on the age or gender. In any case, the setting of social media images is increasingly blurred with the boundaries of real life, and from the perspective of social performance study, the primary contradiction seems to be fading in the life of the metaverse. Whether the paradoxical distance between the two should be larger or smaller is of course a different choice for each person. In the field of theatrical performance, the director can use character analysis and repeated rehearsals to help the actor educe the gap between himself and the character, while in social performance, the positioning of the character itself is to place interpersonal relationships in a state of adaptability, and to specify people's activity which is compatible with his social identity. It's believed that these internal factors are much more important and difficult to shape compared to external images. The famous cartoon (Fig.4) symbolizes the liberation of one's Internet presence from popular prejudices. "You can be whoever you want to be. You can completely redefine yourself if you want. You don't have to worry about the slots other people put you in as much. They don't look at your body and make assumptions. They don't hear your accent and make assumptions. All they see are your words [11]. "

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Figure 4: The New Yorker

The interesting aspect of social media is that we can pick and choose a target audience for any posts that we make– let's supposed I posted a sexy picture of myself on Facebook, I wouldn't necessarily want family members to view that post, but rather I would choose the audience to be friends except family members (that I would've grouped beforehand). I would have just presented two different aspects of my social identity within the same platform, played two different roles, and I would have chosen to manipulate other peoples' impressions of me through my appearance and my manner. In a way, a social self-presented on the front stage is in compliance with social norms, depending on the psychological expectations of the audience, and that the performer tries to portray a masked self that might not a true reflection of the individual's inner self. To this day, many people still regard cyberspace as our "second life", our escape from reality [12].

4.2. Front and back stage

We know the regular stage is divided into front and backstage in theatrical performance. The area of front stage is that part of an individual's performance which defines the scene and storyline for the audience in a general way, and it's the expressive platform used by the actors intentionally or unintentionally. The composition of the personal stage is made up of various elements which can be distinguished as "appearance" and "manners" according to the function of the information expressed [13]. The boundary between the front and backstage is everywhere that we enter and exit the performance flexibly. "Backstage control" is a widely used impression management technique in which performers "put on" and "take off" masks when they leave the backstage to enter an area with audience or enter the backstage from front. By creating a backstage environment, a person can turn any area into the backstage.

The only part of the stage where we can shed our fronts and be ourselves is the backstage. The concept of backstage difficulties refers to a dilemma faced by a person who cannot effectively control the backstage in the presentation of activities. Whether a celebrity or an ordinary people, the image created over the years can be collapsed instantly after he shows others the real but unpleasant truth about the backstage. We are all playing various roles in our daily lives depending on the stage or social situation that we find ourselves on. The Internet, with its social networking sites, can be viewed as yet another stage where we can play a role. The difference, however is that on social media, we can play many different types of roles within the same platform, depending on who we are engaging with through a particular post, comment, or photo. Obviously oversharing of information about one's private life or the private lives of others appears to be an oft-noted phenomenon. More users want to present an idealized self on this social platform, then more spaces will be needed for backstage management [14].
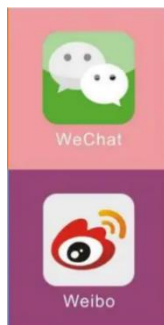

Figure 5: WeChat and Weibo

On the Weibo platform (Fig.5) the boundary between the front and backstage becomes blurred because the physical distance is broken. More users want to present an idealized self on this platform, more spaces would be needed for impression management. Even the communication that happens in

WeChat Moments can be considered as a performance in the virtual theatre, and some scholars have conducted quantitative analysis through questionnaires and found that people choose WeChat emojis to present themselves more specifically and strongly than the blurred text, which is more conducive to self-image building.

4.3. Script and Live

Professor William H. Sun has pointed out that people who were good at social performance would provide different performance styles according to different objects in different occasions. There can be two ways of character building in social performance. The first is to give whatever people want which corresponds to traditional society, while the second is to start on something new and different, corresponding to the emerging industries, so that people are completely unexpected, first stunned, and then convinced or surprised. This is like a drama, unpredictable (an unpredictable drama), which of course requires us to write a good script. A script can be described as anything containing settings, characters, dialogue, and stage directions. The (invisible) document consists of what each action scene looks like. Social roles are usually relatively stable and non-interfering, but after the network convergence, these spatial distinctions become less clear and stable personal identities are challenged. Especially during this pandemic, when lots of activities are turned to online, the boundaries of the space we are in become blurred and our living rooms may instantly become classrooms or political arenas for public discourse [15].

In 2014 Amalia Ulman tricked us all (Fig. 6). This digital artist spent four months curating an Instagram profile that documented the life of a wannabe it-girl trying to make it in LA. We watched as Ulman's story unfolded, climaxing with a (fake) boob job and public apology. At the point when almost 90,000 followers were invested in Ulman's life, she announced that it had all been a hoax. The performance piece was titled "Excellences & Perfections" and it was an art world sensation. Not only had Ulman shone a light on social media's ability to dupe, she had also created what critics heralded as the "first Instagram masterpiece". In 2016, the piece was included in a group show at the Tate Modern, performing for the Camera, making her the first social media artist to enter into a top institution. Today, Excellences & Perfections stands up as more relevant than ever, foreshadowing our increasingly unhealthy relationship with Instagram and dubious notions of 'truth' online.
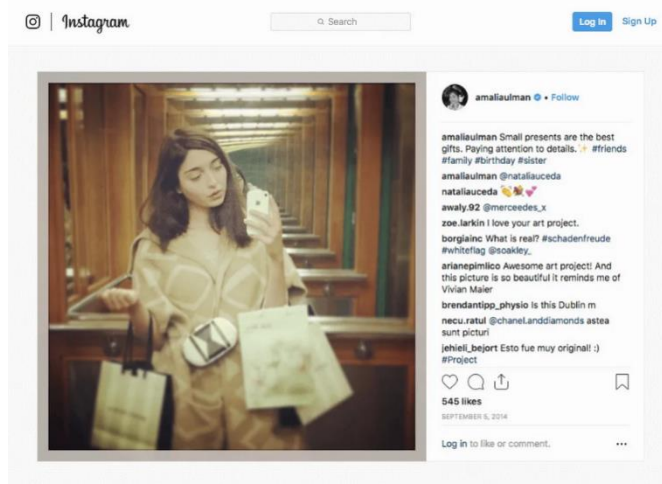

Figure 6: Amalia Ulman's Instagram

When the performer is faced with an unexpected situation, the lines and dialogues prepared long ago need to be handled flexibly according to the sudden emergencies. Great social performers will deal with these situations flawlessly based on experience or hit upon an inspiration, while those

clumsy ones would be full of mistakes. Collapse of persona on social media because of account switching is happening everywhere which we can call it bad performing from a good script.

In conclusion, just like you adjust your performance to the hall or stage on which you're performing, you should do the same with social media. Each social platform is a unique environment with its own rules and the type of content that performs better than others. Instead of putting the same message across all platforms, people can look at each one as its own creative outlet. Actually, social media management platforms have built-in analytic tools nowadays.

They help you create performance reports to share with your team or boss — to figure out what's working and what's not.

They should also provide the data you need to assess your social media strategy on both macro and micro levels, such as clicks, comments, reach, impressions, shares, saves, video views, video reach and more. It's true that to get the most out of a social media platform requires lots of trials and errors. But instead of approaching it with dread, people can treat it as a creative project. How can one surprise and delight the audience across these social platforms? Be creative and learn what works.

References

[1] Jonathan H. Turner, A Theory of Social Interaction, Stanford University Press, 1988, Hardcover ISBN: 9780804714631, P124

[2] Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. [J]. Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews, 1981, 10(1):60.

[3] William Huizhou Sun. Social Performance Studies: An Evolving Process of Endless Dualities[J]. TDR/The Drama Review, 2016, 60(4): 14-21.

[4] Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson, A History of Habit: From Aristotle to Bourdieu, Lexington Books ,2013, P223

[5] Charles Horton Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order, C. Scribner's Sons, 1902, P321-323

[6] George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self and Society, University of Chicago Press, 1934, P33

[7] Jisu K .The value of a shared experience: Relationships between co-experience and identification with other audiences and audience engagement behaviors on social media[J].Computers in Human Behavior,2024,152108050-.

[8] Joanna K . WhatsApp iconology: narratives on in-app photographic practices in (transnational) family communication [J]. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,2023,49(17).

[9] Sherry Turkle, Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in A Digital Age, Penguin Random House Audio, 2015

[10] Caleb Karaj C Prasad M B, et al. Does social performance contribute to economic performance of social enterprises? The role of social enterprise reputation building[J]. International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research,2023,29(8).

[11] Clara C Pester P Q Bautista J G D. The role of national culture as a lens for stakeholder evaluation of corporate social performance and its effect on corporate reputation[J]. BRQ Business Research Quarterly,2023,26(4).

[12] Aydan Marie Loka, Bjørndal Christian Thue. Youth athlete learning and the dynamics of social performance in Norwegian elite handball[J]. International Review for the Sociology of Sport,2023,58(6).

[13] Gangi F, Varrone N, Coscia M. Board cultural diversity and bank social performance: The mediating role of corporate social responsibility strategy[J]. Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility,2023,32(4).

[14] Larrabee M A, Jawabreh O, Saleh A M M. Accounting Information and Role It on Financial Reports Quality in Jordanian Hotels, and Social Performance as a Mediating Effect[J]. International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning,2023,18(7).

[15] Patrick N ,Marina C P .Discourse about national parks on social media: Insights from Twitter[J].Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism,2023,44(PA).