

The Establishment and Collapse of Character Design

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Abstract. The polished image of netizens on social media can confer numerous benefits. Drawing on Goffman's Dramaturgical approach, this study analyzes the rationale and repercussions of crafting idealized personas on social media platforms. This approach is evident in the way individuals curate their online presence. Enhancing one's image can boost personal confidence in social interactions; however, a falsified portrayal can lead others astray, affecting social trust. In people's daily lives, this understanding helps us to better comprehend and navigate interpersonal relationships through nuanced social interactions. The Internet cannot fully capture the essence of individuals, and attempts to gain a comprehensive understanding of a public figure solely through online means are often futile. For individuals, any received information should be thoroughly analyzed, moving beyond the idealized facade that others present, examining the underlying substance, and assimilating only credible and genuine information. By applying the theory of dramaturgy to analyze social images both on stage and behind the scenes, one can objectively assess the true intentions behind the creation of social personas. Those seeking greater benefits may resort to excessive packaging to deceive the public, necessitating more discernment and critical thinking in social interactions to prevent being misled.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal interactions within the context of new media blend the virtual and the real, allowing individuals to exist differently in virtual networks and in real life. "Performance-based survival" has become a hallmark of users' online existence. The virtual nature of the Internet also provides people with additional platforms for performance and means to achieve their ideal selves. The polished image of netizens on social media can bring numerous benefits, such as accolades from others, the gratification of vanity, and an enhancement of social status. Dramaturgy first appeared in the 18th century, focusing on playwriting as well as the art and techniques of stage performance. Even within sociology, no unified technique or research tradition has been established. From a sociological perspective, this approach explores the connections between life and theatre [1]. Although identity theories are found across various schools, they are primarily centered on the concept of interaction. Identity theorists who draw upon Goffman's drama theories,

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symbolic interactionists, postmodernists, idealists, and actor-network theorists all strive to understand and explain the formation and expression of identity by examining the outcomes of interactions, though their conclusions vary significantly [2].

Drawing on Goffman's Dramaturgical approach, this analysis examines the reasons and impacts of establishing idealized personas on social media. The Dramaturgical approach is evident in how individuals curate their image on social media platforms. Goffman's mimetic theory studies everyday life by drawing an analogy with drama. This approach investigates the techniques individuals use to create impressions in the minds of others. Goffman described the process of employing various techniques and methods to influence others and establish a favorable impression as "impression management." Sociologist Goffman introduced the "drama approach" to the study of interpersonal relations, likening society to a vast stage. On this stage, each member of society occupies a certain position and adheres to a socially prescribed script, thereby creating and maintaining their social identity and sense of self. People's behaviors in specific settings can be divided into two categories: 'front-stage behavior' represents the actions that a person in a given social role is expected to perform in accordance with the social norms of that role; "backstage behavior" encompasses relaxation, rehearsal, development of further performance strategies, and self-criticism of one's front-stage actions. This article explores why individuals craft themselves in social interactions on the grand stage of society and life, the benefits they gain from impression management, and the societal impact of these related issues.

2. Theoretical framework

According to Goffman's dramatic perspective, people cannot simply apply front-end behavior to the back-end, or vice versa. According to his view, the front stage relates to behavior in public contexts, whereas the back stage refers to private or non-public activity. People, on the other hand, should demonstrate proper actions that follow social standards in various circumstances and social roles. These norms describe the anticipated behaviors, expressions, and interactions in certain social roles. To depict the force of movement, performers used a variety of dramatic tactics. It is possible to clarify and expand on the four primary techniques: script, staging, performance, and interpretation. These are organized in a sequential fashion and are handled as separate processes meant solely for analytical reasons. Experience has shown that social movements may employ two or more technologies at once. Furthermore, as sports theater is a new and developing phenomenon, everything involving technology will have an impact on the advancement of other technologies [3].

According to Goffman, interpersonal interactions occur when individuals play for one another rather than act as their true selves. This is because people intentionally act in public, masking who they are in order to fit in with society. A mask is a type of character face mask that is a front-end behavior following recognized social customs, standards, and values. Goffman believes that a "mask" is not equivalent to a deceitful tool, and there is a difference between the two. Therefore, the excessive false influence of online platforms is not in compliance with regulations. The three stages of the personal branding process are as follows: creating a brand image in the first place, developing brand communication in the second, and assessing the process's outcomes in relation to the accomplishment of professional objectives in the third phase [4]. Beautified packaging of personal image gains personal confidence in social interactions, while false packaging of personal image misleads others to make judgments and reduces social trust.

It is relatively easy to combine real-life situations and apply sociological theories, which will trigger more thinking on social issues and further achieve the goal of governing society. Analyzing the advantages and the disadvantages of beautifying personal influence on social

media from both personal and social perspectives can help us further understand the Dramaturgical approach. In other words, Goffman's sociological study of people's interactions through theatrical language completely validates the social system's important function as a playwright and the script expectations for actors, recognizing the social structure's limiting influence on individual acts. He distinguished between front-end and back-end performance, and he proposed impression management techniques, including corrected performance, idealized performance, and misinterpreted performance. People may use this as a source of positive motivation and guidance to effectively fulfill their societal duties. His concepts, such as "intentionally acting" and "people wearing masks", also capture the real face of human interactions in capitalist society. However, because of its numerous formalistic, subjective, and one-sided hues, his theory is also vulnerable to harsh criticism. This article conducts research at a more objective level, enriching the research in this field.

3. Case analysis: Zhai Tianlin academic fraud incident

3.1. Case description

Famous actor Zhai Tianlin answered questions from netizens during a live broadcast without knowing "what CNKI is", which raised doubts about the authenticity of his doctoral degree. Subsequently, Zhai Tianlin and his studio's response failed to quell the controversy, and institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Beijing Film Academy intervened in the investigation. After investigation, it was confirmed that Zhai Tianlin had engaged in academic misconduct, including plagiarism, in his thesis, which ultimately led to the revocation of his doctoral degree. Zhai Tianlin is an actor, so pursuing further studies in the academic research field after he made certain achievements in the entertainment industry would further enhance his public image and social status, and he would have greater personal influence. However, the fermentation of academic fraud incidents not only weakened his credibility in society but also implicated a group of people related to him or netizens who blindly followed the trend without knowing the truth.

3.2. Case analysis

Experiences of people who work in highly visible public positions—many of whom could be considered "public figures"—can be better understood with the aid of Goffman's framework. These individuals may find it challenging to find the back desk area, which offers a more private area for offline relaxation, and to disconnect from the front desk area [5].

Self-presentation is an individual's attempt to control behavior in order to project a preferred image in front of others. When creating an identity, the symbolic qualities that underpin the entire displayed identity are taken into account [6]. There are four main strategies for impression management in Goffman: idealized performance, misunderstood performance (such as the wealthy pretending to be poor), mystique performance, and remedial performance. One of the most crucial aspects of idealized performance is concealing. By hiding or just partially disclosing information that contradicts the desired picture, performers project an idealized version of themselves. Mystique performances require individuals to maintain a certain distance from the interacting party, avoiding their excessive behavior of seeing their own back area, thereby causing the interacting party to develop a worship mentality (such as what the star-chasing girl often says: "Be closer to the idol's works and farther away from his life"). Remedial performance is the practice of

taking remedial measures to restore one's image when previous performances make mistakes or fail. "Frontstage" and "backstage" need to be rethought in light of the social self's diversity and the interaction order. In Goffman's nomenclature, these words are also referred to as front region and back region. An actor organizes her or his performance on the front stage, while in the backstage area, she or he practices in an attempt to hide from the public sight. The backstage area is where an individual presents their true self, which may include acting in ways they would never want to display in public, while the frontstage area is where an individual gives their best self to show the audience the desirable or admirable aspects of their personality.[7]. Zhai Tianlin, after the incident, issued a statement on social media platforms to restore his image, but this approach was of no help, and his reputation plummeted. Public figures should pay more attention to their image and abide by social norms. Participants will make an effort to exhibit their "idealized" self and portray themselves in the best possible light in an effort to live up to the expectations of the audience, adhere to social standards, and get favorable feedback. Therefore, they will highlight certain aspects of their personality while suppressing or masking other aspects. By shaping a certain personality and managing the impression they leave on others, participants can shape and influence the audience's perception of them. This strategy is referred to as "impression management" by Goffman [8]. Every graduation season, multiple domestic social media platforms once again hear a wave of voices condemning Zhai Tianlin. After Zhai Tianlin's widespread plagiarism incident in 2019, major universities took it as a warning and demanded to reduce the plagiarism rate of papers to rectify the academic atmosphere. The subsequent impact of this incident has also been prolonged to this day. Firstly, for graduates who are about to enter the workforce, it reminds them to pay more attention to academic integrity and academic standards, as they are directly related to their future employment opportunities. If academic misconduct is discovered, it is likely to have a negative impact on their career. Secondly, the incident also affected companies' evaluation of the integrity of graduates. Some companies pay more attention to the academic integrity of candidates during the recruitment process, which, to some extent, affects the employment experience of graduates. The practical significance of the Zhai Tianlin incident can be obtained by combining the theory of dramaturgy. Firstly, from the perspective of dramaturgy, we can better understand how people interact in their daily lives, how they shape their image in society through words and actions, and how this image affects their social relationships and personal development. Secondly, the theory of dramaturgy emphasizes the role that individuals play in society and how they interact with society through role-playing. This helps us understand how individuals adjust their behavior in different social environments to adapt to different role expectations. Again, the theory of dramaturgy emphasizes the importance of impression management and self-presentation, which is of great significance for understanding how individuals establish and maintain their social status and interpersonal relationships in society. In summary, the theory of dramaturgy not only provides us with a new perspective to understand human social interaction but also helps us to gain a deeper understanding of individual role-playing, self-presentation, and impression management in society. The Zhai Tianlin incident is undoubtedly a social event that can serve as a warning to people.

4. Suggestion

This article analyzes the current research status and proposes solutions from three perspectives. Firstly, relevant departments should increase their efforts to crack down on online counterfeiting, develop and improve legal policies for online platforms, maintain a good online social environment, and vigorously crack down on violations. Secondly, it enhances personal awareness of self-integrity. A good online environment mainly relies on

the users' self-awareness. Last but not least, audiences must enhance their analytical skills. The complexity of society itself is known to every social person. Although the network is online, personal information is exposed to the Internet to a certain extent in the age of big data, so we have to improve our awareness of prevention. Goffman made a distinction between several categories of everyday encounters, pointing out that some are more time- and space-limited than others and are hence referred to as "social situations". These social events "provide a structured social context" that facilitates the emergence and maintenance of limiting guidelines and standards, which in turn aid in the molding, influencing, and controlling of behavior [9]. Congruence between one's self-concept and the input one gets from the social groups that one belongs to is the individual's aim. As a result, the person must negotiate contextual meanings throughout any given social contact. Impression management theory covers the process of establishing and momentarily maintaining one's identity. This process is ongoing, and everyone participates in it whenever they join the social environment [10]. Goffman's drama theory is concerned with how people use symbols in their daily lives to pre-design or display images to others, i.e., how symbols are used for performance and success. Its research focuses on "interaction", or, as the author describes it, "the impact of a person's behavior in interaction with another when they meet directly". Therefore, the online image may not be entirely authentic, and individuals need to distinguish between false embellishments on and off stage.

5. Conclusion

Individuals are performers on the stage of life. On stage, we play a variety of roles, yet we are limited to playing particular roles in particular scenes. In such an instance, the performer will strive to moderate his or her impressions, attempting to make his or her conduct suit the reality of the moment and fulfill the audience's expectations of him or her. However, Goffman also highlighted how public personalities make use of symbols to gauge the opinions of the audience, get input, and modify their acts as needed. The process of interaction between artists and audiences is constituted by how performers manage their own impressions. This idea aids in our comprehension of the complexities of interpersonal relationships in everyday life when seen through the lens of micro-social interactions. Even in places where performance is needed, one should perform as sincerely as possible because a human's performance may be opposite to someone else's sincerity. The Internet cannot fully display individuals, and any attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of a public role through the Internet is often in vain. For individuals, the reception of any information should be analyzed comprehensively, breaking away from the perfect influence that the other party wants others to see on the surface. They should analyze its essence and absorb reasonable and authentic information, combine the theory of drama simulation to analyze social images on stage and behind the scenes and integrate the real purpose of creating social images of others from an objective perspective.

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