

How Comfortable are McMaster Undergraduate Students with Sharing their Identities on Instagram?

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Abstract

Social media has become a communication surrogate, replacing everyday interactions with online exchanges. This societal shift has transformed applications, such as Instagram, into totems of modern communication and identity creation. At the in-person level, identity negotiation is constrained by our physicalities and internalized perceptions of others, but when we enter into an online space, every aspect of our identity can be edited and fine-tuned; the only constraints are your imagination. In these new sites of online communication, identity can be negotiated and renegotiated in a multitude of different ways depending on what personal information the user chooses to conceal or reveal. Using the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism with a focus on Dramaturgical theory, our research aims to uncover how undergraduate McMaster students manage their identity performances when disclosing their personal information, beliefs, and online activism; by understanding how students are utilizing their main Instagram accounts, we can discern how students feel about Instagram as a performative space. In order to acquire our data, we are using a qualitative methodological approach, specifically a minimal-risk online survey to be distributed among undergraduate McMaster students; the results of our survey are still pending, as are our findings. After acquiring our results, we hope to gain a better understanding of university students' relationship with social media and what constitutes beneficial/detrimental personal information. Essentially, we hope to uncover which identities are being further concealed/ revealed on Instagram, as the discrepancy between the two may hold some normative implications for our society. In this presentation, we will be further outlining our research process, and explain the significant insights we hope to acquire through our survey.

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