The Many Facets of Me: Multiple Account Management on Reddit

Donghee Yvette Wohn
New Jerey Institute of Technology
wohn@njit.edu

Chien Wen Yuan
National Taiwan Normal University
tinayuan@ntnu.edu.tw

John Scott Siri
New Jersey Institute of Technology
jss82@njit.edu

Abstract

In this study, we examined why people have multiple accounts on Reddit and how they are used. Based on interviews with U.S. Reddit users (n = 21), we found that having multiple accounts was not always for anonymity purposes. While certain accounts were disposable to engage in stigmatized or deviant activities, other reasons for having multiple accounts included utilitarian purposes, such as storing content, organizing information, or gaming the system for attention. Users also maintained multiple accounts as a form of online impression management to keep distance between different online communities, avoid harassment, and experiment with different identities. Moreover, they helped with boundary regulation, such as disassociating online from offline identity and identity synchronization – linking identities across different social media platforms.

1. Introduction

Social media affords sharing content and accessing what other users put out. Many users utilize this as an opportunity to keep up with friends and connect with people that share common interests, lifestyles, and situations. Reddit, in many ways, is no different but has some unique properties as far as social media goes. It is a forum of forums (each forum is called a subreddit) and each subreddit has its own community with its own rules and subculture. Users are able to participate in any number of subreddits to whatever capacity they feel comfortable with, such as subscribing for quick access or actively engaging in producing contents. Subreddits are diverse in purpose and have topics ranging from memes about Stewart Little, learning German, to functioning as an outlet for suicidal people.

Past research has shown that people create temporary pseudo-anonymous accounts on Reddit, also known as throwaway accounts [1, 2, 3, 4]. On the official Reddit mobile application, there is an account switcher selection for multiple account use.

Having multiple accounts for desired anonymity, privacy, and utility is referred to as multiple profile management (MPM) [5]. How and why they engage in such strategic practices in the context of Reddit, however, has received less discussion. In this paper, we examine how Reddit users with more than one account 1) manage content, 2) establish impression management, and 3) enforce online and offline boundary management.

Research about how users engage in self-presentation and boundary management on social media has long been a topic of interest (e.g., [6, 7, 8]. While much previous work focused on such practices under one social media account (e.g., [9, 2]), a study featuring how the usage of multiple accounts on Reddit is timely and important because it extends and showcases the ways with which users participate in and adapt to the virtual environments and how they affect the ways they present their identities. This research is valuable to our understanding of social interactions on social media platforms and provides insights into how people may use technology to manage their interactions with other people online and offline.

2. Related Works

2.1. Online self-presentation and impression management

Self-presentation is a purposeful attempt through which individuals orchestrate ways to display self-images before real or imagined audiences using verbal and nonverbal communication [10, 11]. The major purpose is to influence how audiences perceive and treat them. How people decide when to reveal which aspect of self may depend on individuals goals, such as maintaining self-esteem, receiving social acceptance, or increasing instrumental gains [12, 13]. Additionally, opposing needs such as openness and privacy concerns may also come into play when individuals make decisions about what to present in

HÏCSS

front of others [14, 15].

Other than individuals personal concerns, situational factors and the relationships they hold with the interactants also have an impact on individuals self-presentation. According to Goffman [11], people display different kinds of behaviors depending on where and with whom they are. Individuals appearances are contingent upon the setting or social context and the audience or the social group who witness the performance and interact with the individuals may be different in various social contexts. As an interactive act and from a relational perspective, audiences evaluations, responses, and perceptions of such impressions thus offer feedback to individuals subsequent behaviors [10, 16]. Therefore, sets of social norms and practices are shaped accordingly. We note that the terms impression management and self-presentation are two sides of the same coin; we use them interchangeably (e.g., [17, 13]).

As participation in social media and online communities has increasingly become a significant part of our social lives, managing self-presentation across all these sites and platforms is a strategic deliberation of how and what to present about self and a negotiation of private and public lives [18, 7]. While offline self-presentation is bounded by social contexts and audience groups, in the current social media landscape, the line between front stages and back stages becomes more and more blurred [19, 20, 21]. Situated actions may also become more difficult as the boundaries across sites and social networks are not as clear cut as they used to be [22], thus creating problems in managing impressions. Research on impression management and self-presentation has largely discussed the practices on social media or personal websites [7, 6]. Results show that individuals present themselves differently and establish favorable and credible impressions on these sites depending on their goals and who the audiences are [23, 24, 25].

Recent studies on multiple site usage showed that some users try to distinguish their social networks through compartmentalizing SNS use [5, 26]. Other scholars found that separate friend lists were used to segment the audience and manage personal disclosures for self-presentations on a site [27]. With the digital boundary implemented by compartmentalization, be it by site or by sub-groups of the audience on a site, users can separate multiple audience groups, which allows them to control what information is disclosed and to whom. In other words, this strategy helps individuals maintain a consistent image by controlling what the audiences can see. What receives less scholarly attention is another strategy of maintaining ones impression on social media: holding multiple

accounts, or in a sense, creating multiple identities or personas.

In the case of Reddit, where all subreddits of miscellaneous topics coexist on a site and a searchable log of post history that others can access, neither compartmentalization nor establishing several friend lists are viable for users to manage their separate (and possibly conflicting) identities and self-presentations. There is an assortment of ways users could react to the posted content and drive conversation in complex ways [28].

MPM has been documented as an alternative strategy for social media users to manage their privacy and different identities in terms of social boundary regulation [29, 5, 1]. The major motivation to hold multiple identifiers is to regulate others' access to private personal information, which may vary according to different audiences, such as work, family, and acquaintance networks. Other motivations include identity management (e.g., professional vs. private identities), utility (e.g., types of information consumption), and norms (e.g., conformity to standard usage or conventions) for users to maintain multiple accounts [5]. The benefit of keeping one's privacy through multiple accounts is a freedom of disclosing serendipitous personal or controversial information free of online consequences [1].

With accounts representing different profiles, each account represents an independent identity with an explicit boundary, through which individuals decide their goals for disclosure and self-presentations [1, 5]. Self-presentation on social media has evolved beyond just selectively posting messages and status updates about self to include participating in different forums or online spaces as a way for individuals to construct and present different facets of themselves. Social media platforms constitute more diverse variations than broadly known social network sites like Facebook [30, 1]. Platforms like online forums, social news sites, or live streaming sites enable users to interact with others. It is worth scholarly investigation into how self-presentation is conducted on such sites.

While most previous studies focused on the use of social needs and repercussions revolved around MPM, our study intends to extend previous work by broadly investigating users strategies and practices of MPM, specifically on Reddit because the sociotechnical characteristic of Reddit structure prevents users from negotiating sites and friend lists as compartmentalization for self-presentation. Our first research question states:

RQ1: How do people engage in multiple profile management on Reddit? What are some purposes for

them to do so?

2.2. Boundary regulations as impression management strategy

As the boundary between online and offline turns more and more blurred, self-presentation has become a tricky issue and can be practiced through various strategies in the current social media landscape. Without geographical or temporal boundaries, the internet enables individuals to present themselves to the actual and imagined audiences with control over the amount and type of information disclosed. Face-to-face impression management is constructed under various constraints, such as physical characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, attractiveness) and the shared knowledge of social backgrounds in front of an actual audience[11, 10]. It is relatively difficult for individuals to present themselves and create impressions in ways inconsistent with their traits in face-to-face impression management [31]. In contrast, online environments enable individuals to engage in manipulations of how they want others to perceive themselves [19, 20].

The asynchronous and anonymous nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC) makes it easier for individuals to withhold information undesirable to a certain group of audience. In Goffmans sense [11], self-presentation depends on both individuals conscious awareness of the audience and interactive participation by them. The sense of spatial or temporal boundaries of the audience may no longer hold in CMC. Who the audience is and will be in mediated platforms have become obscure due to the reduced verbal and nonverbal cues of audience members in CMC [32]. Individuals, therefore, rely on their imagination to envision who the audience is and will be and construct their selective self-presentations accordingly [33].

However, social media platforms like Facebook anchor online social networks with offline ones through real social identity (e.g., profiles, photos, or posted messages), geographical locations, and interconnected social networks, which may place more constraints on the flexibility of mediated self-presentation than other CMC tools like email or instant messengers [34]. The size, composition, accessibility, and cue availability of interactants are difficult to assess on social media platforms, rendering it impossible to determine the actual audience [33]. On the other hand, the affordances of recordability, data persistence, and retrievability of CMC make it likely for people to reveal their identity and more difficult to manage their impressions on the audience, especially the audience that can exist in the future [24]. Indeed, users were found to dramatically underestimate their audience size for their Facebook posts [35]. Intertwining physical and virtual spaces may also yield contradictory behavioral expectations and norms for self-presentations [20, 15].

What complicates the situation is the context collapse situation on social media platforms where individuals networks of friends, family members, colleagues, and acquaintances coexist on the same and across different sites [36]. The collapse of miscellaneous audience groups into a single context introduces potential conflicts and contradictions between multiple presentations of self. To regulate the blurred boundaries, scholars identified strategies for dealing with collapsed contexts on SNSs, such as curating audience lists on a site, compartmentalizing audiences across platforms, censoring information about self, or holding multiple accounts [27, 5, 26, 37].

On Reddit, social networks and audience groups embedded in different subreddits coexist on a site. Social boundaries are thus difficult to navigate and regulate. Some consequences may follow as a result of blurred social boundaries. For example, an employee may get into trouble by showing their interest in subreddits of contradicting opinions about the policy or standpoints to those of their employer or company. It may jeopardize their career by revealing such personal interests through their Reddit post/review history. Given the situation, MPM is a reasonable practice for users to control how they are seen from the "source" (i.e., creating a specific persona/account with a consistent self-presentation) as it is more difficult for them to control the audiences on a site with complex collapsed contexts using just one account. Though MPM does not always lead to true anonymity (especially when other social media sites are brought into reference), it provides extra barriers towards tracing a user [38]. Few studies take this situation into consideration and examine how boundary regulation is conducted. We are interested in understanding how the unique practices of MPM on Reddit are influenced by peoples needs to regulate social boundaries online and offline. We propose our second research question:

RQ2: How do Reddit users manage their online and offline social boundaries with different groups of audience through managing multiple accounts?

3. Methods

We developed a protocol for in-depth semi structured interviews. The protocol included questions about participant demographics, their involvement on Reddit, and how they used multiple accounts on Reddit. Some

questions were: "Do any of your accounts have a particular function?" "How do you use each account?" and "Can you explain to me why you use multiple accounts rather than just one?"

Participants were recruited through posts on various subreddits, focusing on 20 large university subreddits in different regions of the U.S. Participants had to be over the age of 18 and have used more than one Reddit account in the past 6 months. 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with 4 of the interviews being college students who were personal connections but not close friends of one of the authors (e.g., sibling of friend, someone living in same dorm, friend of friend). The four interviews were initially intended to be practice interviews but due to the high quality of the data, we decided to retain the data for analysis. The rest were strangers. The interviews were conducted through Discord, Skype, or phone, and were audio recorded.

The interviews lasted between 20 to 40 minutes. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 32 years (M= 20.81, SD= 3.04). Sixteen participants identified as white, four as Asian, and one as Hispanic. Fifteen participants identified as male, five as female, one was unidentified. The number of accounts a participant had ranged from 2 to 20, with most having two or three.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For analysis, we conducted a bottom-up, thematic analysis [39] based on our research questions. First we selected participant responses that pertained to the RQs and put them into a meta matrix using a spreadsheet, with participants as rows and questions as columns. One of the authors did the first round of data organization by summarizing the main concepts presented in the quotes. These were then discussed with the other authors. Over several weeks, we went back and reorganized the themes, working iteratively until we all agreed on thematic structure. Salient themes were identified and we did another round of axial coding to connect the themes reported in the Results section. Finally, we extracted "best quotes" to feature as direct comments of the participants.

4. Results

4.1. General Practices

Visibility of content on Reddit is primarily managed by a reputation system called 'Karma' that allows users to vote for or against posts. While not considered to be a particularly reliable system for showcasing true preferences, it is what decides the arrangement of content on the website [40]. There are various sorting options available that allow users to see the top posts in a time period of their choosing as well as sorting by controversial (see posts and comments with many upvotes and downvotes) or new (posts and comments that were added recently) content. A feed is comprised of popular posts on subreddits an account is subscribed to.

Some participants had hierarchies of accounts on Reddit. Several of our users mentioned the use of a Main account (known as a Main) and Alternate accounts (known as Alts), with the Main being the account that is used most of the time and Alts being switched to for a particular purpose. Others used multiple accounts loosely, with multiple Mains.

A *throwaway* account has been defined as a pseudo-anonymous account that is disposed of after its purposeful use [1]. However, throughout the study, there were instances of people describing pseudo-anonymous accounts with a more permanent use as throwaway accounts. In other words, some users called additional accounts *throwaways* but they were actually not disposable, suggesting that the academic understanding of the term is literal, but its colloquial use appears to be broader in scope.

Throughout the course of the study, there was a frequent assumption by our participants that users on Reddit generally used multiple accounts. Our participants said that they thought most people had multiple accounts and considered the use of more than one account to be normal. This suggests that the use of multiple accounts may be a very common occurrence and accepted norm on Reddit, though this may just be the perceptions of the participants.

4.2. MPM For Content Management

The main reasons participants held multiple accounts (RQ1) were for content management and impression management, both of which are common applications in our data. Reddit affords several ways of content management. First, subscriptions are used to provide easy access to desired subreddits and to fill the user feed with popular posts. Also, the reputation system (Karma) allows users to sort the content they and others see on a subreddit by upvoting posts they liked and downvoting those they disliked. Last, users were able to save posts and commented threads they wanted to revisit later. When participants with multiple accounts used these features, they often had different goals for use in conjunction with their accounts, which we outline below.

4.2.1. Managing what they see in their feeds

Our participants used multiple accounts to curate what they see in their feeds by subscribing to different sets of subreddits. Using multiple accounts, participants set up different virtual environments for different types of content. This was fairly common with Not-Safe-For-Work (NSFW) accounts and accounts of unique topics or purposes, such as content related to the participant's career or memes. *"It would be very embarrassing if I were to pull up porn on my phone in public,"* said P4 (Male, 20).

P11 (Female, 20) said that she did not want to see memes when looking for crochet and beauty products, and vice versa. Subscribing to different subreddits with separate accounts let her have curated feeds without mixing everything up.

4.2.2. Storage

We also found our participants use multiple accounts as a way to save content for later engagement and viewership. However, they ran into a problem where the saved content was harder to get to because it was split across several different accounts. A common strategy was creating or designating an account they had as the primary storage account. P6 (Male, 18) said, *"Well, as a matter of practicality and there's obviously, you know, practical benefits to doing that, um, just from a management level, it's easier to keep everything in one place.*

It is possible that the storage account eventually becomes too huge and impractical to search. When this happened, the participants retired that designated content storage account and created a fresh designated content storage account. The participants would still occasionally visit their prior storage accounts when looking for older content, but would only save new content to their current designated storage account.

4.2.3. Manipulating what others see

While content management is perceived as an individual practice, Karma on Reddit makes it possible to manage what content other people see [41]. By upvoting and downvoting content, participants help sort and shape what others see since content with more upvotes appears at the top [42]. Having multiple accounts allows users to have more than one chance to impact the reputation system. Some of the participants realized that they had increasing potential to bring awareness to content that they wanted to influence by using multiple accounts to upvote or downvote content.

P6 stated that he would do it in situations where he thought particularly important, such as risks and threats other users might be unaware of. According to P6, it is more possible for other users to become aware of dangers or important information that would affect them.

However, not every user was as selfless when manipulating what other users saw. P9 (Male, 20) admitted, *"I usually upvote myself, you know, get that early lead on the new page. And then when people realize that you've got a lot of upvotes, they upvote it because you know, people like to follow each other. And then the next day I know I'm on the trending page, so that's kinda the main purpose."* P9 added that he had over 15 accounts and was planning on creating a script to automatically have all of their accounts upvote the posts he makes.

4.3. MPM for impression management

4.3.1. Creating distance between different communities

Multiple accounts were used to create distance across different communities to prevent users from being judged by members of different communities. P7 (Male, 21) said: "The third one I made specifically was to ask a question about a homework assignment I had, that I posted on a Catholic subreddit because it was for a theology class and I didn't really want that linked with my other accounts. I didn't want people in the Catholic subreddit poking around my main." P17 (Female, 22) thought that some Reddit users would look down on things that were feminine or girly and judged her for taking an interest in those things. Making a new account addresses that fear because it manages the impressions by keeping her interests separate. Likewise, P15 (Male, 22) was using multiple accounts to mitigate judgment from talking about his conservative political opinions. When he was first using Reddit, he did not have more than one account and posted his political opinions related to his pro-life stance on Reddit. Later, somebody traced his Reddit history and pulled it up in a comment thread where politics was not being discussed and attempted to dissuade other users from listening to him. This incident prompted P15 to make a separate account for politics to prevent negative judgment established with his Reddit post history.

4.3.2. Avoiding harassment

Participants used multiple accounts to prevent harassment. P8 (Female, 19) once posted something political which led to an angry user private-messaging her. After this incident, she decided to make an account for exploring political

and social opinions and kept it separate from her main as a preventative measure against all future harassment on her main account. She also used a separate account to participate in subreddits where being a woman would elicit harassment: *"I wanted to kind of delve into the incel community, um, without like any like people trying to figure out who I am and I wanted to know to be able to talk with some of these people, um, without getting doxxed,"* she said.

4.3.3. Pleasure from role playing
While not a prevalent practice, some participants used multiple accounts to fulfill different roles and act in different ways. Some users would create an account to do a specific type of interaction (like debating or trolling) for a short amount of time. Some would create accounts but only use them when wanting to debate or explore different subreddits. *"When I'm feeling in a debating mood, I'd go on my anonymous account and I would post all my opinions there to vent about something,"* (P16, Male, 19).

4.4. MPM for online and offline boundary regulation

4.4.1. Disassociation from offline identity
Many participants utilized multiple accounts to disassociate their offline identity from their online identity. This was solved by creating a Throwaway, where the user felt free to talk about topics they did not want to associate with their offline self.

P12 (Male, 19) managed an extremely complex set of boundaries; he had an account that was strongly linked to himself as a student, an account that he used as a moderator and a public figure at University X, an account that was completely disconnected from anything about himself offline, and an account that he used to speak with other people on the LGBT spectrum. *"One of the reasons...was because I am on the LGBT spectrum and I wasn't comfortable with coming out to people. That's how my first alt was made. Um, I didn't want to be associated with me as a person yet..."* Also, when he wanted to criticize the school, he needed another account to vent because he was a school employee and was concerned his superiors would see it if he used another account. Using different Reddit accounts allowed P12 to differentiate online and offline boundaries for different interactions and perceptions of himself.

Similarly, P8 (Female, 19) posts on the University X subreddit with an account many people of her offline communities recognized. P8 created a separate account

connected to her gaming interests from her offline identity. P10 (Male, 18) had one account associated with his Snapchat and created another anonymous account to prevent doxxing. Additionally, P19 (Female, 19), who had 20 accounts, created multiple accounts so she could post pictures of herself on subreddits like RoastMe (a subreddit dedicated to making fun of the users themselves) without it being associated with her other identities.

4.4.2. Keeping personal inquiries separate
Getting answers to questions a user has is a common practice on Reddit. Participants like P7 (Male, 21) had multiple accounts that were usually disconnected from any other social media accounts and their own identity so that they could ask embarrassing or personal questions and get access to information otherwise difficult to obtain. For example, P18 (Male, 19) had a sexually-related medical question but did not want to have posts or comments related to a possible medical condition diagnosed for him because of concern for stigma: *"Let's say I didn't go to the doctor and um, I have a question that I would want to be answered that's kind of embarrassing. I wouldn't want it on my personal account, which I mainly use for moderation, which is the reason why I use the second account."*

P6 had an issue related to a friend that was caught in a tough situation and wanted advice about how they should handle it. The second account prevented anybody from discovering who the participant was offline or on other accounts while still getting advice. Had P6 used the same account he would risk struggling to explain how he talked about a personal situation publicly on social media. *"I think if he would have found out that I was using him as an example and I was asking questions about him, he would've been embarrassed and I would have had an embarrassing time talking about it with him,"* P6 said.

4.4.3. Creating connections with other social media
One of the key aspects of multiple accounts and boundary management is the ability to manage connections among different social media accounts. Posts on Reddit can be shared on social media, and users' social media connections can see, share, comment, or direct message the user, creating more ways of interactions. Our participants in the study shared some of their Alt accounts on other social media while keeping others separate. *"...I used to post a lot of nail art [on one Reddit account] and had the same user name as my Instagram...I encountered people who*

come to me on Instagram and be like, 'Hey, I saw your reddit post, nice nails'. (P11, Female, 20) In P11s case, a shared identity across the platforms made her more recognizable across the nail art community. However, we also learned from other participants that having separate Reddit accounts may assist boundary regulation but it may increase difficulties in account management as they may lose track of which accounts were connected to other social media and which were not.

4.4.4. Isolating deviant behaviors
Participants who wanted to engage in discussions and interact with other users about unprofessional or deviant behaviors oftentimes had accounts that were separate from other accounts and disassociated from their other social media accounts and offline identities. They did not want authority figures to see that they were engaging in an unprofessional or deviant (and sometimes illegal) behavior.

For example, P10 (Male, 18) sought to illegally pirate textbooks but did not want it to be associated with other accounts or his offline identity because of the negative consequences attached to it. *"I posted on like r/piracy to get some, uh, you know, get a link to a free textbook or pirate a textbook or something. Um, and of course I wanted that to be just a sort of alt account and not associated with anything else because it's technically illegal,"* he said.

5. Discussion

MPM [5] has been a theoretical concept to explain why people have multiple accounts. Indeed the Reddit users we interviewed were using multiple accounts to construct different profiles. However, there were also reasons behind having separate accounts that were not necessarily linked to having distinct profiles but were more utilitarian in nature.

We first found that users leverage multiple accounts to manage the content as subscriptions. Some accounts were used to store different subreddits that may reflect users' past interests and concerns. The evolution of identity over time is particularly interesting in reference to multiple accounts. Occasionally participants would move from using one account to another. Sometimes it happened when the storage account they were using got too full and difficult to navigate and other times it happened when they wanted a new account to represent themselves. When the participants moved on to new accounts, they would usually keep their old one intact. While this was not explored in-depth in this study,

some of the participants mentioned that it was strange to think of their old account, sometimes because it was very different from themselves now. Another participant appeared to get a sense of nostalgia when on an older account of theirs. Exploring how older accounts serve as relics of a person's past identities and recollections is an interesting direction for future research on self-presentation.

We found our participants developed unique ways to manage their self-presentations with multiple accounts. For example, P7 used multiple accounts to game the system by upvoting his posts for self-branding. P12 kept multiple identities apart by assigning each account a specific purpose. However, using more than one account requires a user to switch between the accounts they use and keep track of the account they are currently on. A distinct reason why our participants felt the need to use multiple accounts to manage impression is due to fear.

A major theme of social surveillance and a fear of social sanction emerged. Participants voiced fear that other people treating them differently because of how they behaved in the subreddits they involved. The implementations of multiple accounts were to prevent aspects of themselves from being associated with other potentially contradictory ones. Many participants engaged in self-censorship and created multiple accounts so as to avoid embarrassment and judgment; others had experienced harassment before so they decided to create alt accounts. We found that there is a spectrum of managing multiple accounts, from manipulating self-presentations to create optimal impressions on others who belong to different networks and communities to enforcing boundaries within virtual spaces and between online and offline spaces to avoid cyberbullying.

Holding multiple accounts is a preemptive prevention from uncomfortable or problematic situations especially when their online identities can be connected to their offline ones. One benefit of social media like Reddit is that anonymity is ensured. One major benefit of anonymity on social media platforms, especially those with stigmatizing experiences [2, 43], is to freely express self. Likewise, the potential for pseudo-anonymity enabled by having multiple accounts is suggested to minimize fear users feel when posting controversial or embarrassing content related to themselves. This could potentially widen channels for self-presentation and public communication for people on social media.

In addition to the curation and storage needs for managing multiple accounts, we also found that social and relational regulation of boundaries was another major underlying mechanism of MPM. Studies

pointed out a unique phenomenon on social network sites, context collapse, has made the social networks otherwise impossible to coexist in real life all collapse on the same mediated platform, rendering the social boundary on social media platforms blurred and tricky to manage [36]. Previous studies discussed how social media users leverage different sites (e.g., professional ties on LinkedIn and relational ties on Instagram) or separate friend lists on a site (e.g., general followers vs. "Close Friends" on Twitter) to address this issue by creating digital boundaries for selective self-presentations and separating their front stages and back stages [27, 33]. However, the structure of miscellaneous subreddits on the Reddit site not only further complicates the phenomenon of context collapse but makes the technical boundary of separating sites and audience groups difficult. In other words, on Reddit, Goffman's metaphor of front stages and back stages may not hold because each subreddit is a front stage to users and the transparent log of post and activity history makes back stage an irrelevant concept. Holding multiple accounts allows users to create identifiers and manage a consistent impression on their audience on each front stage they present themselves. To our participants, it is important for each persona to have a standalone stage to perform without interfering with one another. A major motivation is to avoid potential social sanctions resulting from conflicting values of different online and offline social groups as reported above. The disappearance of back stages in the era of hyper-connected social media landscape demands users to engage in incessant, strategic self-presentations. Our study has established such a phenomenon but does not examine some potential social or emotional consequences. It is worthy of an in-depth investigation for future studies.

In contrast to MPM, we found a phenomenon of identity synchronization. While there were participants with multiple accounts made specifically to prevent association across identities, there were also participants who intentionally connected them. Our participants sometimes connected other social media accounts to their Reddit account by using the same username on Reddit as on other social media (like Instagram or Discord). This bound these accounts together in a loose way, where the user-managed the content on both sites with an awareness that what was posted on one account would affect the reputation of the other accounts. When this happened, a cohesive common identity was formed from these accounts, creating a synchronization of identity across multiple platforms. Identity synchronization requires a higher degree of boundary and impression management to control the

impact of reputation associated with the shared identity. This additionally could lead to positive influence from user recognition across multiple platforms, especially helpful for micro-celebrities on social media platforms. A focused study of management strategies and potential social consequences of identity synchronization would be beneficial to understand the dynamics between users, their identities, and likely the connections they make with other users on a multi-platform scale.

Our study observed contrasting needs by users regarding holding multiple accounts. It is important to note that while most Reddit research has focused on its support of anonymous interactions, not all reasons for having multiple accounts are to preserve anonymity. Some users considered it a boundary management strategy for regulating audiences, contents, and various sides of self. Others specifically wanted to connect all these different accounts/personas/identity, potentially for self-branding and identity enhancement. The current feature of switching across multiple accounts on mobile Reddit may not be enough to cover such diverse user needs. As found in our study, users manage multiple accounts for collecting, curating, and storing contents. In addition to the instrumental purpose, a social purpose of controlling audiences and maintaining self-presentations is another motivation of holding multiple accounts. Currently, there is no technological support that allows users to navigate across multiple accounts and their correspondent purposes. Better identifiers of the functionality of each account may facilitate easy switch across usages. If there was an easy way to create multiple accounts within one login, it could enable users to manage their accounts more efficiently. Especially for users who were creating new accounts to represent new interests and changing identity, the fact that they did not delete their old accounts indicates a desire to preserve artifacts of their old self. The current account structure of Reddit does not support the evolving identities of its users.

On the other hand, while it is important to support users' anonymity on the site, creating simpler ways to manage "visibility" may be just as important for users who seek publicity for their reputation and personal brand. A clear and straightforward way of enhancing self-disclosures should be a goal of Reddit. For example, it is possible to streamline connecting and linking other social media platforms to Reddit and afford multimodal content to display on the site.

Several limitations posed to our study result from our participant demographics. First, since most our participants were college students between the ages of 18 to 22, there is a chance that there are other types of usages of multiple accounts that

we did not include. Likewise, the majority of our participants were white and male. Although our sample reflected the general demographics of Reddit users (predominantly white, male, aged under 30) (https://www.techjunkie.com/demographics-reddit/), this still posed a generalizability question to our results. Additionally, the participants were predominantly Americans, limiting the perspective of the study to a U.S. frame of reference (this was particularly true in relation to politics). A more representative sample that covers multiple platforms would be ideal for future research.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the utilization of multiple accounts on Reddit. Throughout the course of the study, practices related to content management, boundary regulation, and impression management were discussed.

Multiple accounts were used to help navigate and sort through the content a user has access to. Accounts were used as designated storage for saved content and creating separate feeds for the user. Multiple accounts were also used to affect how content appeared by ways of influencing Reddit's reputation system, Karma. Systems of impression management were put in place by users for attempts to create distance between different communities, avoid harassment from other users, and experience the pleasure of roleplaying.

Our research highlights the capacity for multiple accounts to be used for the formation of complex relationships among a user's identities on Reddit accounts, other social media, and a user's offline self. This included attempts to disassociate accounts from their offline identities, keeping their personal inquiries separate from their main accounts, creating connections of other social media to Reddit, and isolating deviant behaviors. We found that having multiple accounts was not always for anonymity purposes and while certain accounts were disposable, or 'throwaway' in nature, the existence of multiple accounts signaled management of different interests and networks both across online platforms as well as online and offline identities. In particular, as users get older, multiple accounts represented the evolution of identity.

The research ultimately suggests future research opportunities in looking into the implications of the time and effort required for the maintenance of multiple accounts, the evolution of identity by way of exploring older accounts, cross-platform identity synchronization, and looking further into the possible benefits of having multiple accounts.

References

[1] A. Leavitt, "This is a throwaway account: Temporary technical identities and perceptions of anonymity in a massive online community," in *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, pp. 317–327, ACM, 2015.

[2] T. Ammari, S. Schoenebeck, and D. M. Romero, "Self-declared throwaway accounts on reddit: How platform affordances and shared norms enable parenting disclosure and support," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 2019.

[3] U. Pavalanathan and M. De Choudhury, "Identity management and mental health discourse in social media," in *Proceedings of the 24th International Conference on World Wide Web*, pp. 315–321, ACM, 2015.

[4] N. Schrading, C. O. Alm, R. Ptucha, and C. Homan, "An analysis of domestic abuse discourse on reddit," in *Proceedings of the 2015 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, pp. 2577–2583, 2015.

[5] F. Stutzman and W. Hartzog, "Boundary regulation in social media," in *Proceedings of the ACM 2012 conference on computer supported cooperative work*, pp. 769–778, ACM, 2012.

[6] S. Schoenebeck, N. B. Ellison, L. Blackwell, J. B. Bayer, and E. B. Falk, "Playful backstalking and serious impression management: How young adults reflect on their past identities on facebook," in *Proceedings of the 19th ACM conference on computer-supported cooperative work & social computing*, pp. 1475–1487, ACM, 2016.

[7] B. Semaan, B. Dosono, and L. M. Britton, "Impression management in high context societies:'saving face'with ict," in *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing*, pp. 712–725, ACM, 2017.

[8] Y.-C. Wang, M. Burke, and R. Kraut, "Modeling self-disclosure in social networking sites," in *Proceedings of the 19th ACM conference on computer-supported cooperative work & social computing*, pp. 74–85, ACM, 2016.

[9] B. Dosono, "Aapi identity work on reddit: Toward social support and collective action," in *Proceedings of the 2018 ACM Conference on Supporting Groupwork*, GROUP 18, (New York, NY, USA), p. 373378, Association for Computing Machinery, 2018.

[10] B. R. Schlenker, *Impression management*. Brooks/Cole Publishing Company Monterey, CA, 1980.

[11] E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959.

[12] B. R. Schlenker and B. A. Pontari, *The strategic control of information: Impression management and self-presentation in daily life*. A. Tesser, R. B. Felson, J. M. Suls (Eds.), Psychological perspectives on self and identity, American Psychological Association, 2000.

[13] M. R. Leary and R. M. Kowalski, "Impression management: A literature review and two-component model.," *Psychological bulletin*, vol. 107, no. 1, p. 34, 1990.

[14] T. Dienlin and M. J. Metzger, "An extended privacy calculus model for snss: Analyzing self-disclosure and self-withdrawal in a representative us sample," *Journal*

of Computer-Mediated Communication, vol. 21, no. 5, pp. 368–383, 2016.

[15] K. Greene, V. J. Derlega, and A. Mathews, "Self-disclosure in personal relationships," *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships*, pp. 409–427, 2006.

[16] B. R. Schlenker and M. R. Leary, "Social anxiety and self-presentation: A conceptualization model.," *Psychological bulletin*, vol. 92, no. 3, p. 641, 1982.

[17] J. Rosenberg and N. Egbert, "Online impression management: Personality traits and concerns for secondary goals as predictors of self-presentation tactics on facebook," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1–18, 2011.

[18] J. Kang and L. Wei, "Let me be at my funniest: Instagram users motivations for using finsta (aka, fake instagram)," *The Social Science Journal*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 58–71, 2020.

[19] M. A. Devito, J. Birnholtz, and J. T. Hancock, "Platforms, people, and perception: Using affordances to understand self-presentation on social media," in *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, CSCW*, pp. 740–754, Association for Computing Machinery, 2 2017.

[20] J. Vitak and J. Kim, "You can't block people offline: examining how facebook's affordances shape the disclosure process," in *Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social computing*, pp. 461–474, ACM, 2014.

[21] D. Y. Wohn and G. Freeman, "Audience management practices of live streamers on twitch," in *ACM International Conference on Interactive Media Experiences*, pp. 106–116, 2020.

[22] J. Grudin, "Partitioning digital worlds: focal and peripheral awareness in multiple monitor use," in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems*, pp. 458–465, ACM, 2001.

[23] Y.-H. Lee and C. W. Yuan, "The privacy calculus of friending across multiple social media platforms," *Social Media+ Society*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 2056305120928478, 2020.

[24] Z. Tufekci, "Can you see me now? audience and disclosure regulation in online social network sites," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 20–36, 2008.

[25] H. Jensen Schau and M. C. Gilly, "We are what we post? self-presentation in personal web space," *Journal of consumer research*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 385–404, 2003.

[26] R. Wilken, "Mobile media and ecologies of location," *Communication Research and Practice*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 42–57, 2015.

[27] J. Vitak, "The impact of context collapse and privacy on social network site disclosures," *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 451–470, 2012.

[28] A. Guimarães, O. Balalau, E. Terolli, and G. Weikum, "Analyzing the traits and anomalies of political discussions on reddit," in *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Web and Social Media, ICWSM 2019*, 2019.

[29] K. Raynes-Goldie, "Aliases, creeping, and wall cleaning: Understanding privacy in the age of facebook," *First Monday*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2010.

[30] M. Glenski, C. Pennycuff, and T. Weninger, "Consumers and curators: Browsing and voting patterns on reddit," *IEEE Transactions on Computational Social Systems*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 196–206, 2017.

[31] S. Zhao, S. Grasmuck, and J. Martin, "Identity construction on facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships," *Computers in human behavior*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 1816–1836, 2008.

[32] J. B. Walther, "Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction," *Communication research*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 3–43, 1996.

[33] E. Litt, "Knock, knock. who's there? the imagined audience," *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 330–345, 2012.

[34] J. Zywica and J. Danowski, "The faces of facebookers: Investigating social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses; predicting facebook and offline popularity from sociability and self-esteem, and mapping the meanings of popularity with semantic networks," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1–34, 2008.

[35] M. S. Bernstein, E. Bakshy, M. Burke, and B. Karrer, "Quantifying the invisible audience in social networks," in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, pp. 21–30, ACM, 2013.

[36] A. E. Marwick and D. Boyd, "I tweet honestly, i tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience," *New media & society*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 114–133, 2011.

[37] A. Lampinen, S. Tamminen, and A. Oulasvirta, "All my people right here, right now: Management of group co-presence on a social networking site," in *Proceedings of the ACM 2009 international conference on Supporting group work*, pp. 281–290, ACM, 2009.

[38] M. Backes, P. Berrang, O. Goga, K. P. Gummadi, and P. Manoharan, "On profile linkability despite anonymity in social media systems," in *WPES 2016 - Proceedings of the 2016 ACM Workshop on Privacy in the Electronic Society, co-located with CCS 2016*, 2016.

[39] V. Braun and V. Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative research in psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77–101, 2006.

[40] M. Glenski, G. Stoddard, P. Resnick, and T. Weninger, "GuessTheKarma: A game to assess social rating systems," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 2, 11 2018.

[41] W. H. Lim, M. J. Carman, and S.-M. J. Wong, "Estimating relative user expertise for content quality prediction on reddit," in *Proceedings of the 28th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media*, HT 17, (New York, NY, USA), p. 5564, Association for Computing Machinery, 2017.

[42] E. Gilbert, "Widespread underprovision on reddit," in *Proceedings of the 2013 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, CSCW 13, (New York, NY, USA), p. 803808, Association for Computing Machinery, 2013.

[43] N. Andalibi, O. L. Haimson, M. De Choudhury, and A. Forte, "Understanding social media disclosures of sexual abuse through the lenses of support seeking and anonymity," in *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*, 2016.