

Me, myself, I Exploring radio personalities' display of identity on social media

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Abstract

Digital technologies have sparked a renewed focus on radio personalities. Radio personalities are, by virtue of their profession, performers, and social media offers a stage on which to enact their professional and personal identities. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor, this study explored the way radio presenters display their personal and professional identities online. This research evolved from the difficulty that seems to exist in the interplay between a personal online identity and an online personal brand. The qualitative study was embedded within an interpretative and constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with radio personalities of a commercial radio station in South Africa and were triangulated with content analysis of the presenters' social networking profiles. The findings extend existing scholarship by suggesting that radio personalities display differently configured online characters. The study makes a theoretical contribution by highlighting that radio personalities' actions on social media should be informed by a strategic marketing approach in achieving individual and business goals.

Keywords

Radio personalities, personal identity, professional identity, social media, Goffman's theatre metaphor, dramaturgy

Opening act

Digital technologies and social media platforms have transformed the way we live. Judging by its popularity and rapid growth, these technologies hold the key to unlocking networking possibilities in the interpersonal communication and marketing place. Social media platforms have become so deeply embedded in our daily lives that we rely on them for every need – from updates on daily news and critical events (Kapoor et al., 2018) and connecting with relatives and friends and forming new connections (Riccio, 2013), to post-purchase evaluations (Green, 2016), self-branding (van Dijck, 2016), and personal presentation (Horky et al., 2021). This holds true for the way in which we consume, but more specifically produce, media content.

For radio stations, social networking sites are vital for reaching their audiences, and they provide radio presenters the opportunity to extend their on-air personalities. Bonini (2012, p. 82) considers social networking sites as an “umbilical cord connecting listeners to producers while the radio is off”. Technological shifts and media convergence have had effects on the way radio personalities are performed – both on-air and online. Emotions and opinions are no longer invisible or private; they are measurable (Bonini, 2012). Radio personalities disclose personal information on social media platforms in order to bridge the gap between their on-air and off-air personalities; however, “the borders between the work as a radio presenter and the work on one’s self are increasingly blurred within the organisation” (Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 302). Radio presenters must establish authenticity, whilst also displaying characteristics of ordinariness, everydayness, and relatability. However, finding a balance in the display of the on-air personality and the online identity seems challenging.

The study reported in this paper analyses radio personalities’ interactions and the impressions given in an online space through a dramaturgical lens of online performance. By exploring radio presenters’ display of their online identities, one can gain a deeper understanding of how on-air personalities represent characters of themselves online. The findings may provide insight to presenters and management alike about the importance of a social media strategy, to benefit both the stations’ and the presenters’ reputation in an online space.

Setting the stage for the featured act:

The main artists in the theatre of the mind

On-air personalities are of critical importance to a radio station’s programming success (Stiernstedt, 2014) since they influence if, and how, the audience interacts with the radio station (Spangardt et al., 2016). Stiernstedt (2014) considers them key resources for allocating audiences, for integrating brands into content, and, most importantly, for creating bonds and long-standing relationships with audiences. This notion of creating meaningful connections with the listeners is also evident in the works of Bosch (2022), Crider (2016),

Fleming (2006), and Zunckel (2021). Crider (2016) has done extensive research into the ways radio personalities present themselves on the air. He has constructed a model to explain the unique culture in which radio presenters create and perform their on-air identities.

Savage and Spence (2014) moved the focus online and conducted a study of radio host credibility as an outcome of presenters' social media activities. The expansion of radio to an online space inevitably led to radio presenters having to promote themselves online – expanding radio's mandate from broadcasting only to both broadcasting and networking (Bonini, 2012). The transition from radio (as an invisible medium) to an online space (which is highly visible) changed the radio landscape in many ways. Radio is no longer a one-dimensional platform that is regarded as a "blind medium" with a blind audience (Bosch, 2022) where the sender and receiver do not have "eye-contact". Listeners can now actually see the source of the sound (radio presenters), while radio personalities can see the audience they interact with (Bonini, 2012).

On-air performances and content productions have become more regulated and rule-governed than before (Stiernstedt, 2014). This is important since social media management comprises elements of storytelling, which, in essence, is also guided by a set of rules (Bonini, 2012). Programming managers are strict in terms of on-air and online performances – understandably so, especially in the light of radio's success being measured in terms of listenership and revenue (Crider, 2016). It thus comes as no surprise that radio stations give directives by means of a social media policy on what, and what not, to post on social media. However, very few presenters receive help from their programme managers on how to manage their personal online identities and online personal brands. Instead, they are being directed or controlled as to what they should say or who they should be, as was also evident from the study of Stiernstedt (2014). Marwick and boyd (2010, p. 114) investigated how content producers navigate "imagined audiences" and found that some techniques of audience management resemble the practices of "micro-celebrity" and personal branding, both strategic self-commodification. In this study, it was found that micro-celebrity can create tension, on the one hand, and a perception of inauthenticity, on the other. These authors also state that the desire to have a personal brand conflicts with the desire for self-expression (Marwick & boyd, 2010). This supports the notion of Delpont and Mulder (2021), who found that a lack of training in social media communication and a lack of knowledge about the basic principles of personal branding are some of the challenges radio personalities experience when managing their online personas. More guidance, besides a social media policy, is thus needed for displaying online identities that represent ordinariness, everydayness, and relatability.

The complex interplay between a personal online identity and an online personal brand has led us to investigate, through an exploratory study, the way radio personalities display their professional and personal identities online. The outcomes of this research will

feed into a follow-up study on radio personality in which a model for informing a branded online identity will be developed.

Enacting identities on social media

Understanding self-presentation behaviour is complicated but important for forming outside impressions – especially in a world which increasingly becomes more digitally connected. Crider (2016) argues that presentation of an image is a large part of how radio personalities form connections with their audience. The online identity formation process requires the radio personality to create a character of him- or herself that is consistent with the self that he or she display to the world – an identity that the audience can relate with. Narrative identity is a closely related aspect of identity theory, according to Crider (2016), and “people construct identity through narrative” (Crider, 2016, p. 43). Whereas radio personalities in the past were confined to a role of a talk-host or “announcer” behind a microphone, social media has extended and transformed this role into radio personalities becoming “anchoring points within the text” (Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 292) that “structure the relationships between producers and audiences” (p. 296). They are now content creators and translators who, according to Bonini (2012, p. 76), “connect two worlds – niches and mass culture”. They are in essence performing the role of producer, narrator, or storyteller, and therefore contribute to creating the radio narrative by producing interactive content. According to Vila (2003), a character is created when one is performing the role of narrator.

In our quest to understand the interplay between radio personalities’ personal online identities and online personal brands, we extended the literature review to the journalism field, since journalists are, just like radio presenters, storytellers by profession. Within the journalism domain, various studies have been conducted of the role of company branding and personal branding in online spaces (Bossio & Sacco, 2017; Brems et al., 2017; Molyneux & Holton, 2014). These studies clearly illustrate that a need exists for journalists to be guided on how they should present themselves and manage their identities in online spaces. Following is a short presentation of the most significant outcomes of each study.

Holton and Molyneux (2017) conducted research into the impact of branding practices on American journalists’ personal identities. This particular study found that journalists do not know how to balance their personal and professional identities through social media, and that guidelines are needed for managing professional and personal online identities. In a more recent study, Horky et al. (2021) investigated social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for 15 people in Germany from three different areas (sports, media/entertainment, and politics). The study indicated that people present themselves as different social characters on social media networks: “an authentic businessperson, and a private person at the same time” (Horky et al., 2021, p. 19). In an Australian study, Bossio and Sacco (2017) explored ways that journalists represent and

negotiate their personal and professional identities in social media environments, and how these representations are impacted by professional, organisational, and institutional influences. This study revealed that representing a personal and professional identity online might be especially difficult for journalists, where representation of a particular character is an important part of professional practice (Bossio & Sacco, 2017). Brems et al. (2017) investigated the tweeting behaviour of journalists in the Netherlands and Flanders to explore the way they use social media to present themselves, and to determine the dilemmas they were facing. The findings indicated that journalists particularly struggle with being factual or opinionated, being personal or professional, how to balance broadcasting their message with engagement, and how to promote themselves strategically.

While these studies shed some light on the self-presentation acts of journalists, questions remain about how radio presenters use social media while managing their personal online identities and online personal brands. We therefore explored the display of professional and personal identities on social media, including the roles that radio personalities perform on their social networking sites. Uncovering these performances will guide us in developing a model (follow-up research previously referred to) to simplify the complex issue of managing the interplay between radio presenters' personal online identities and online personal brands in creating a branded identity. This study incorporates elements of dramaturgical sociology to explore how radio presenters act out their identities online, specifically on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Subsequently, three research questions were posed: *How do radio personalities display an identity on social media? What performance roles do radio presenters play in their interactions on social media? What roles do Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play in forming and shaping the performances of radio presenters?*

A triple play of professional, personal, and online identities

Social media has expanded the traditional notion of identity, with people now having online identities in addition to real-life identities (Dickinson, 2018). Miriou (2014) suggests that online identity is constructed through interaction with others. The context in which this interaction takes place impacts the dynamics and changing nature of online identity (Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019). In social media contexts, professional identity refers to representations of the professional activities, organisational connections, and institutional norms that a person might present through text or image on social media platforms, while personal identity is regarded as comprising the activities, events, opinions, and relationships that might represent an individual's life outside their professional activities (Bossio & Sacco, 2017). Radio personalities, for example, act out their professional identities while being on air, but also interact with their audience by means of competitions, request shows, online discussions, WhatsApp, and Telegram messages, among other things.

The literature reflects an array of different opinions regarding the separation and blending of online identities. Baer (cited in Douglas, 2017), Batenburg and Bartels (2017), DeCamp et al. (2013), and Zuckerberg (cited in Kirkpatrick, 2010) argue that the separation of professional and personal lives in an online space is impossible. Contrary to this view is van Dijck's (2016) notion that the need for a multiple, composite self has increased since public communication moved to an online space. van Dijck (2016) argues that people put on staged performances during their daily behaviour where they purposefully employ the distinction between public and private discursive acts to shape their identity. Some scholars hold the view that the secret to blending professional and personal online identities is to share information that reveals a dimension of one's character, belief system, and life, and in so doing, an individual connects with other human beings and makes them count (Baer, cited in Douglas, 2017).

A central construct of this study is that of dramaturgy, which suggests that society is made up of individual performances put forth by everyday actors. A dramaturgical perspective aids studying the context of communication within various situational factors and interactions. Radio personalities are on-air performers who are acting in the theatre of the mind: radio. Social media has extended this stage to an online space where radio presenters are not only performers with an on-air personality, but now also with an online identity. Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor would therefore offer a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the radio personalities' identities through social interaction and presentation of selves in an online world.

Goffman's theatre metaphor

Sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of social interaction (theatre metaphor) is used as a theoretical framework in which radio presenters are conceptualised as performers who are acting on a stage in front of an audience. Radio personalities are communicating and presenting the self in a one-to-many style, as if on stage, to an audience of others. In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) views all human interaction as a grand play (Kivisto & Pittman, 2013) in which the world is a stage and the individuals the performers.

The concept of performance is an essential part of identity formation (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) suggests that people perform certain aspects of themselves for an audience, and that both these parties contribute to the construction of the performer's identity. The identity is thus seen as being dependent on an audience and the recognition it receives from an audience, as well as a social situation. In a radio context, performances can be either public (when radio presenters engage with audience members on air or publicly on social media) or privately (when radio presenters interact with listeners off air or send them private messages on, for example, Messenger, WhatsApp, or Telegram).

The primary performer, according to Goffman (1959), is the person who engages the audience, while actively attempting to present a self to others in an interaction. Online, this is often achieved by means of a personal Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram profile. This study considered the likely performance space of a radio presenter (primary performer) to be his or her own personal profile or Public Figure page on social media.

Regions of interaction, according to Goffman (1959), are those spaces that are used as a stage for one's performance. The front stage or front region refers to the area where the primary performance is taking place. Goffman (1959) states that people engage in front-stage behaviour when they know that others are watching. Front-stage behaviour is shaped partly by the setting, the particular role an individual plays in it, and physical appearance. In the context of this study, the setting refers to online stages such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (whilst the radio presenter is on air as well as when not performing in studio), while the role being played refers to the specific role that radio presenters wish to portray during their online performance or act. Physical appearance refers to imaging and physical characteristics. The back-stage region is where the performers prepare their front-stage performance and decide what information to act out during the play (Cho et al., 2018). In this performance space, individuals let their guard down and are themselves (Goffman, 1959). In contexts where radio presenters prepare for their programmes or communicate privately with listeners (off air or via private messages on social media) they engage in back-stage behaviour (Bonini, 2012). However, when communicating with listeners via Facebook messenger, WhatsApp, or Telegram (where other members of the audience cannot see or participate in the conversation), it is important to note that this private interaction should be treated as front-stage behaviour, since all interactions on social media, whether public or private, leave a permanent digital footprint.

Up close and personal with the actors: Exploring the actors' performances

Approached from a qualitative perspective, an interpretivist (Patton, 2002) and constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed understanding identity through the interpretations made by radio personalities, and by perceiving identity as constructed through the interactions radio personalities have with their audience on social media.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with ten radio presenters of a commercial radio station in South Africa. A commercial radio station was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, commercial stations have a bigger footprint than their community counterparts – subsequently reaching a large number of listeners. Secondly, the sharing of irresponsible or incorrect content has a bigger influence on revenue, audience reception, advertising, shareholder interest, and reputation due to their corporate nature and tremendous reach. During the interviews, the presenters were asked to reflect upon their interaction on social media in a personal

and professional capacity. The interviews would contribute greatly towards an understanding of the presenters' display of their identities online.

The actors

A purposeful-criterion sampling strategy was employed, and the following three criteria were set: the radio presenters had to be active on social media – in other words, they had to have a social media profile on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter; they had to post at least once a week on these profiles; and they needed to demonstrate a willingness to participate in the study. The sample size was determined by theoretical saturation. Ten participants (five males and five females) participated in the research.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Humanities Research Ethics and Innovation Committee of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). Informed consent was obtained from all participants as well as the station management. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms were assigned to the presenters to protect their identities.

Getting to know the characters

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect the data. The radio personalities were interviewed individually, and we asked them to share how they present their various identities (professional and personal) in the online world. The questions that directed the interviews were: *How do you use social media? What is the goal of your social media profiles? What is the nature of your social media footprint? How do you describe your personal and professional identities on social media?* The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each and were fully recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent.

Analysing the performances

Transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews were analysed by means of inductive content analysis. Elements of dramaturgy applicable to the research questions were analysed, which included the following: performing identities; the roles of primary performer; and Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as regions of interaction. The qualitative analysis of the presenters' social networking sites – spanning a month-long period – permitted methodological triangulation, as their social media posts enabled validation of the qualitative data through cross-verification and applicability. This step was important, since there is a difference between self-reported usage of social media platforms versus their objective use (Davidson & Joinson, 2021). Since the face-to-face interviews were conducted during October 2020, we analysed posts of the same month for the content analysis. We

were specifically interested in the various roles that the presenters portray on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, while the units of meaning centred around characteristics of the presenters as well as presence and positioning of images.

The main act

As stated previously, the main objective of this study was to explore radio personalities' performance of identity on social media. In answering the research questions stated previously, the following elements of Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor needed to be considered: performing identities; primary performer roles; and social media as regions of interaction. In the next few paragraphs, the results are discussed along with supplemental quotes from the interview transcripts.

Performing identities

The analysis of the interview transcriptions and presenters' social media posts resulted in the examination of what versions of identity are being presented on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and on which of the three social networking sites such versions are present. In response to RQ1, *How do radio personalities display an identity on social media?*, two broad categories were discovered. Radio presenters display identity through acting out their professions or performing aspects related to personal interests. This confirms van Dijck's (2016) notion of people employing the distinction between public and private discursive acts to shape their identity.

Acting out professions

For some participants, their profession as radio presenters was a strong identity marker. Whereas most of the presenters display their profession as radio personalities on their social networking sites, their motives differ. For one participant, it is to extend his radio programme online after it has ended on air: "The show doesn't stop at XX:00". This notion is in line with Bonini's (2012) claim that when the radio show comes to an end, the programme continues on the web. Another participant only posts professional content out of fear that personal posts would get her in trouble. Deborah uses social media strictly for work-related purposes and posts mostly professional posts on her personal profile on Facebook: "We have a very strict social media policy; I have been reprimanded before". This is in line with the findings of Kapoor et al. (2018), who indicated that employees refrain from posting controversial content online, fearing negative consequences. Besides being radio presenters, three participants also have other full-time professions and want to be taken seriously by their online audiences (including clients). As such, they keep their posts strictly professional and work-related.

Four of the participants' professional identities as radio presenters are displayed on their Facebook Public Figure pages. They regularly interact with their audience by performing acts related to their profession as radio personalities. They promote their shows online and post images of themselves broadcasting. They also invite the audience to participate by listening/engaging in conversations. In one of her Instagram posts, Gabby says: "Listening to radio is way better for you than SO much TV".

According to Goffman (1959, p. 19), a person "may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it". The interviews and content analysis of social media platforms revealed that the presenters take their professions seriously – this is evident from the number of posts reflecting work-related aspects. The sincerity with which radio personalities approach their performances is evident from this study and underscores the fact that they believe in their roles as radio professionals. They engage with their audiences by highlighting aspects of their programmes the audience can identify with. They extend their roles as radio personalities to an online space, where they form connections and interact with their audience – ensuring their act is not one-directional, but transactional. Through their interactions on social media, they invite the audience to become active co-actors in the theatre of the mind.

Performing personal interests

Alongside using social media platforms for work-related purposes, many participants discussed in the interviews how they portray their personal identities online. Whether exercising in the gym, walking their dogs, or socialising with family and friends, posts about personal interests in radio personalities' daily lives are a meaningful way to enact a personal identity. The radio presenters frequently post content such as images, comments, or both, about their personal interests to which their audience can relate. Themes include fitness, exercising, healthy living and eating, sports, family matters, photography, fashion, as well as the impact music has on their lives and broadcasting careers. By sharing personal information, the presenters reveal a dimension of their characters, belief systems, and lives, and in so doing, they connect with other human beings, which is important in identity construction (Baer, cited in Douglas, 2017; Crider, 2016; Spangardt et al., 2016; Stiernstedt, 2014). The revealing of personal information could also be seen as a "marker of authenticity", according to Marwick and boyd (2010, p. 126).

Whereas most of the presenters regard their broadcasting careers as their profession and act out this career by displaying a "professional identity" in social media, Paul regards radio presenting as a hobby and showcases this as a personal interest on his social networking sites. This can be attributed to the fact that he has another job in the professional sector, which serves as his main source of income.

Goffman (1959, p. 56) suggests that people want to portray idealised versions of themselves and want others to see them in the "best possible light". The presenters created a positive impression of themselves through posts about topics deemed relevant to their

personal identities. The presenters' personal interests are portrayed predominantly on Facebook and Instagram. This is in line with the notion of Davidson and Joinson (2021, p. 9) that these two platforms are "typically socially oriented platforms".

Through the analysis of social media posts, it became apparent that radio presenters rely on other social media users to help form and shape identities. This finding underscores the notion that people form meaning through interactions with others, as is evident from Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor and Miriou's (2014) notion that online identity is constructed through interaction with others. The element of interaction is also evident in the research of Marwick and boyd (2010, p. 123), who suggest that "identity and self-presentation are constituted through constant interaction with others" – pointing to the collaborative nature of self-presentation. Interaction was reflected by the radio personalities' responses to posts made on their social networking profiles. Examples of this included Lebo mentioning always "consider[ing] the audience", while Steve said that the listeners "play a very important role" in online interaction.

The tricky trio: Me, Myself, I

The following section is described in accordance with the theoretical concepts pertaining to the three different forms of "social media identity", as identified by Bossio and Sacco (2017, p. 529), namely the "transitional" identity (creating separate personal and professional social media accounts), the "branded" identity (having a public account that is associated with a particular media organisation and displays only professional activities), and the "social" identity (blending professional and personal online identities). Seven of the presenters indicated that they enact their personal and professional identities separately on social media by presenting personal characteristics on their personal profiles and professional acts on their Public Figure pages. This mirrors van Dijck's (2016) notion of constructing a multiple, composite self. Of the seven presenters, three presenters display the so-called "transitional identity" that Bossio and Sacco (2017, p. 529) refer to in their study by creating separate personal and professional social media accounts. Paul, Sarah, and Victor each have a personal profile on Facebook, but they also have a professional page where they brand their business. Four of the presenters all have a personal profile on Facebook, but also a Public Figure page that is associated with their profession as radio personalities, and thus they have a "branded identity". In the case of the other three presenters, it is difficult to separate their personal and professional identities, and they inherit the so-called "social identity". These cases mirror the viewpoint of Baer (cited in Douglas, 2017), Batenburg and Bartels (2017), DeCamp et al. (2013), and Zuckerberg (cited in Kirkpatrick, 2010) that it is not possible to separate professional and personal identities online. It is also consistent with the findings of Bullingham and Casconcelos (2013), who suggest that people re-create their offline selves online, rather than adopting a different persona or constructing a different identity. The two selves are not different, but actually the same

entity in different contexts. One's identity does not change online, but is informed by the offline self (Bullingham & Casconcelos, 2013). It thus becomes a matter of *Me, Myself, I*.

Research questions two (RQ2: *What performance roles do radio presenters play in their interactions on social media?*) and three (RQ3: *What roles do Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play in forming and shaping the performances of radio presenters?*) provide a dramaturgical framework through which to consider the types of identities formed and behaviours witnessed on the presenters' social networking sites.

Primary performer roles

The radio personalities constructed numerous versions of themselves online. The semi-structured interviews and the presenters' social media profiles and posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram revealed the emergence of six primary roles.

The fitness/health fanatic

Six of the presenters perform roles of individuals who are fitness/health conscious. Mandy's posts on her personal Facebook profile testify of her love for fitness. She acts out her love for exercising by sharing what she is doing in the fitness class and tagging people who join her for fun fitness classes. Lebo loves sport and refers to himself as "The Sports Guy" on one of his social media platforms. Besides being a sports presenter for a media outlet, he also has a personal interest in running, rowing, cycling, and golf. Neil regularly shares posts about his exercising routine and meal plans or recipes. Steve loves to run, exercise in the gym, and play golf. He likes to engage his audience in his fitness role by making regular mentions of his teammates, sponsors, and trainers. One example of this is "@X please tell the mountains to take it easy on me!" Gabby and Demi portray their health-conscious ideal selves to their online audience, since they believe that health-related topics are always trending on social media. Recipe-sharing forms a great deal of Gabby's posts on her personal Facebook profile, whilst Demi likes to share healthy eating habits with her audience.

The family guy

Three male presenters consider their roles as fathers important. Their posts portray their roles as fathers and they feel that by portraying these roles, they manage to connect with their audiences who also value family. This is in line with Douglas (2017) notion of online identities being formed by connecting with other people. It was a highlight for Neil when his daughter uttered her first few words. Steve regularly posts photos of his family (spouse and child) on Instagram and Facebook. One of his posts reads: "It's always an adventure with these two!" Paul takes pride in his child's drumming career and shares his love for music.

The businessperson

The role that Paul performs on social media is that of a businessman. Since he works full-time in the professional sector, he wants people to take him seriously. His posts focus on financial wellness and security. He likes to connect with his audience in this role. As such, his Instagram bio states that, besides being a businessman, he is also a companion to his clients. Victor exercises a profession in the creative arts. He takes his business very serious and refers people on social media to his website. Demi is an eco-entrepreneur, businesswoman and founder of two companies. In this role, she likes to share knowledge and tips on how to become a successful businessperson.

The beauty queen

Two of the female presenters stage themselves as beauty queens on social media. Demi and Gabby are keen to share health and beauty tips on Instagram, which is interesting, since both presenters won several beauty pageants before joining the theatre of the mind. Gabby and Demi both indicated that the beauty pageants they participated in shaped their identities and performance on social media. Demi was one of the top-ten finalists in a national magazine's front-cover competition. She regularly posts images of herself in designer wear or videos about her skincare routine. Gabby shares make-up tips, studio photoshoots of herself, modelling work, as well as beauty tips on her personal Facebook profile. One of her comments on Instagram is: "Too much emphasis is being placed on skincare products. No amount of cleansers, moisturizers or serums will compensate for your lack of sleep, poor diet or genetics".

The girl and guy next door

The role that Demi plays in social media is that of the girl next door: "I want to have interaction with my audience". She engages by asking questions on her social media platforms: "My posts mirror the human factor. This is the online stage where you would find me, just me. I am real and approachable". Just like Demi, Lebo underscores the human element in his online identity: "Famous people can be human too. I had depression in 2015. My goal is to reach out", Lebo elaborated. These two presenters managed to share information that reveal a dimension of their true characters, belief systems, and lives, enabling them to connect with other human beings. This finding supports similar claims made by Baer (cited in Douglas, 2017), Crider (2016), Spangardt et al. (2016), and Stiernstedt (2014).

The influencer

The role that the majority of presenters act out on social media is that of the influencer. Seven of the radio personalities consider themselves influencers. According to Mandy, her messages are uplifting, motivating, and relatable. Lebo's posts are directed towards creating a positive mood and inspiring his audience: "I want to make someone's life better. I want to be real, relatable and inspirational to my audience". He regularly shares

inspirational quotes on his social networking sites and even creates his own: “celebrate all the small victories, even the smallest ones, they accumulate and create something huge”. Three female participants are also keen on sharing quotes. One of Demi’s quotes read: “Don’t let anything dim your light”. Deborah does not consider herself as an influencer per se, but her stories and inspirational quotes are motivating. She posts about kindness and grace. Gabby’s Twitter cover photo is a quote of Mark Twain: “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect”. According to Victor, he sees himself more as an influencer than a celebrity on social media: “Relatable content is important when one performs on social media”, he explained. Three participants all concurred that relatability is important when performing on social media. Sarah, for instance, regularly posts funny and inspirational quotes and mentions on one of her social media platforms that she is a lover of life and people. One of her inspirational quotes read: “When you can’t find sunshine, be the sunshine”.

Goffman (1959) suggests that we adopt multiple roles and multiple identities in our everyday life. This was evident in the research data. Neil, for instance, is a health-conscious person, but also the “family guy” that most families can relate with. Demi sometimes portrays the character of beauty queen, and other times she is the girl next door, or the great influencer.

The findings in this study challenge Zuckerberg’s notion of having a single, authentic identity. Instead, it underscores the findings of Horky et al. (2021), as well as Davidson and Joinson (2021), that people display multiple presentations of self across multiple platforms. Horky et al. (2021, p. 20) describe this phenomenon as having “multiple *social media personalities* who display differently-configured *social media characters*”. The authors believe that this phenomenon is not only the case in Germany, but that this behaviour seems comparable to people’s behaviour in other countries (as indicated by the research of Holton and Molyneux, 2017, and also this study).

By analysing the presenters’ social media posts, it became evident that they aimed to display a sense of normalcy. This was particularly reflected in the way they present themselves online through their personal interests. This mirrors the findings of Stiernstedt (2014) who suggested that radio personalities display characteristics of ordinariness, everydayness and relatability. This notion of relatability was a strong identity marker in the various roles the presenters perform on social media, specifically in relation to the role of influencer. This was also the role most presenters wish to perform on their social media platforms.

The presenters succeed in personalising and storifying content. This is in line with Bonini’s (2012, p. 83) notion that “the most successful communication on social media is personal in tone and content”. Their social media profiles are storytelling performances. They tell stories about their personal lives on their social networking sites in support of the versions of themselves they wish to portray while presenting their shows. This mirrors the findings of Crider (2016, p. 174), who argues that the success of a radio personality’s

social interaction with listeners depends on the “successful performance of a narratively constructed self”. They all performed a narrative creation of themselves. Through their stories on social media, the presenters selected a plot that aligned best with their life circumstances and thereby created characters to employ during their interaction on social media. These characters are displayed in the role of the fitness/health fanatic; the family guy; the businessperson; the beauty queen; the girl and guy next door; and the influencer.

By studying the radio personalities’ social media posts, it became evident that much construction is invested in their personal identities. For example, 60 pct. of the sample are fitness enthusiasts, whilst 70 pct. regard themselves as influencers. We can therefore assume that these characteristics are socially desirable attributes that might result in profitable branding options.

Acting areas

The third research question reads: *What roles do Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play in forming and shaping the performances of the radio presenters?* RQ3 is addressed through examining the presenters’ social networking sites as regions of interaction, as well as the affordances of each that make it appealing to the radio personalities’ performance needs.

Twitter as back stage

Only one presenter used Twitter as a main online stage, but she ascribes this to her journalistic background. The majority of presenters used Twitter more for information-gathering purposes, making it a back-stage area where presenters prepare for their main acts on Facebook and Instagram. This is consistent with the findings of Davidson and Joinson (2021), suggesting that Twitter seems to be a popular medium for news-gathering purposes. Twitter is thus not regarded as a zone of active performance and can be seen as an information space rather than a primary performance space. Radio personalities prefer bigger stages, such as Facebook and Instagram, which offer them more space and a variety of props. Our study contradicts the findings of Marwick and boyd (2010), who suggest that Twitter is regarded as a platform whereby information can be strategically concealed and on which individuals can portray both an authentic self and an interesting personality. However, their study only focused on Twitter and did not include other social media platforms, which might explain this contradiction.

Facebook and Instagram as front stage

When acting in the front-stage region, we deliberately choose to project a given identity (Goffman, 1959). Seven presenters chose Facebook as their favourite online stage, while two of the radio personalities were in favour of Instagram. Unlike Twitter, these platforms offer more tools and props to conduct a complete performance. In this regard, Lebo mentioned: “Facebook is the façade”. Facebook (Meta) owns Instagram, thus they share

features and functionalities, such as app-connecting capabilities, direct messaging, images, videos, and stories. These affordances enable the radio presenters to connect and engage with their audiences.

Design elements, online props, and wardrobe

Riccio (2013, p. 71) suggests that “images play a key role in online performance, where the body language and appearance available in face-to-face interactions is often not an option”. Images of Mandy and Lebo broadcasting either in studio or at an outside location always incorporate the station’s logo. Lebo and Steve posted on Instagram videos of themselves participating in the Cape Town virtual marathon. Gabby posted images and videos of herself, showing off designer wear, cosmetics, and skincare routines.

Only three of the presenters made use of professional imaging on their social media platforms. Steve trained himself in photo-editing programmes, including Photoshop and Canva Photo Editor: “Corporate identity is important. All my photos have the same look and feel and I make use of filters to create a dramatic storyline”, he explained. Similarly, Victor’s posts and photos have a certain look and feel. His journalistic background aided his performance in creating captions that compliments the storyline. Sarah also makes use of professional imaging in her online acts: “I have a corporate identity for my Facebook Public Figure Page”, she mentioned.

Social media offers performers a huge variety of props and wardrobes to incorporate into their online acts. On the online stages of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, presenters use emojis, hashtags, links, and captions to engage with their audiences. Hashtags, for example, are used when acting out professional identities, such as #bestjobintheworld, #radio, and #chasingdreams, as well as personal identities, such as #funfilled, #legday, and #livingtherealgoodlife.

The importance of script

As with any performance, the script is important in shaping performance, regardless of the stage on which the performance takes place. A well-executed performance can result in a standing ovation or an empty theatre. One of the participants mentioned that, although the radio station encourages them to post content online, she does not prioritise it and she needs to make an effort to act (post) online. Five of the presenters indicated that they need more guidelines from their Director (Station Manager): A male presenter suggested more training on how to perform on social media, while a female presenter said she needs assistance with photo editing and graphic designs. Steve asked relevant questions: “When will be the best time to perform (post)? Who is the audience?” Neil mentioned that it is important to know the rules if one wants to use social media correctly. Half of the presenters find it challenging to create content (storyline), while most of the presenters indicated that time constraints are the biggest obstacle to acting out their identities online. These comments confirm the views reflected in the

literature review that media professionals need more guidance on how to manage identities in online spaces (Bossio & Sacco, 2017; Brems et al., 2017; Holton & Molyneux, 2017). Although the radio station has a clear social media policy, a social media strategy which is clearly aligned with the station's business objectives may attract bigger audiences and greater financial rewards. Social media is, after all, a business and can result in monetary rewards for radio presenters and stations alike. In this regard, half of the presenters find the monetary benefits of social media appealing.

Closing act

The digital revolution has changed, challenged, and extended radio's mandate beyond its original role and functions. Digital technologies and social media have transformed the radio industry to expand from on-air only to online and social networking sites. Whereas radio personalities were in the past seen as performers broadcasting in the theatre of the mind, social media have brought a virtual and interactive dimension to the act by offering a platform on which to promote oneself online. While social media can be beneficial in the creation of online identities, it can also impact negatively on radio personalities' careers or radio stations' reputations – resulting in negative repercussions. In this study, we explored radio presenters' performance of identity on social media by applying Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor to extend the current body of knowledge regarding media workers' online identities to inform the development of a model for integrating personal online identities and online personal brands.

The qualitative inquiry enabled us to conduct a deep analysis of the presenters' performance of identity in an online space. The interviews provided insight into their various roles on social media, as well as the regions of interaction with specific reference to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The radio personalities use social media in a pre-meditated and planned manner, in order to construct identity. Most of the interactions on social media are planned performances that expose the truth behind the professional and personal identities. The radio personalities seek to stage themselves both as "professionals" and "private persons" in an intricate mix that enhances the "authenticity" of their personal brands.

The way they performed on social media reflected the characters being constructed. The study revealed that radio personalities perform various roles or characters on social media, and thus the results indicate that it is possible to blend professional and personal identities and act out more than one role on social media. Many of the presenters perform a particular role by sharing information that reveals a dimension of their characters, belief systems, and lives, and in so doing, they connect with other human beings and make them feel that they count. This underscores the important notion of radio broadcasting as a social act. Furthermore, it underscores the interactive mode of identity construction, as cited in the works of Goffman.

In this study, the radio personalities move between front stage and back stage in relation to their professional and personal identities. It was evident that the presenters are more likely to enact professional as well as personal identities on Facebook and Instagram than on Twitter. This could be ascribed to the fact that both Facebook and Instagram offer the performer more space (word count) and props (functionalities) to perform. The image-sharing and app-connecting affordances of Facebook and Instagram as front stages bring dramatic elements into the performance and aid in the development of a dramatic narrative or storyline. The presenters' social media posts all share a dramaturgic structure. The presenters share frequent and regular updates, and especially Facebook and Instagram provide a flood of information. The presenters display cross-media interaction by connecting their social media platforms and enforce communication flow between them. In addition to this is the fact that what is being mentioned on air is extended on social media.

Suggestions for future research

The findings from this study underline the fact that radio personalities' utilisation of social media should be informed by a strategic marketing approach. As this study forms part of a bigger research project, a follow-up study will entail the development of a model for informing the management of the interplay between a personal online identity and an online personal brand. Station management, in particular, could benefit from the results of this study by not treating social media policy as a separate entity in the programming department, but integrating it with the rest of the station's marketing strategies. By having a clear social media *strategy*, and not just policy, radio presenters and radio stations alike will have a better chance of achieving both their individual and business goals. It will also support presenters in building a strong online presence. Just as consistency on air is key, consistency online is important in growing a social media profile. A social media strategy that is integrated with the station's business goals will facilitate content creation and interface opportunities that resonates well with their audiences, providing listeners with the opportunity to sculpt and costume the characters (radio personalities) who perform in the theatre of the mind.

A limitation of this study was that it investigated radio personalities of only one commercial radio station in South Africa. However, we believe that a social media strategy could benefit all radio stations who have a digital footprint and social media presence – whether they are commercial, community, or public broadcasters. A future stream of research could focus on exploring the online identities of radio personalities working at community and public radio stations, with a comparative analysis between community stations, commercial stations, and public broadcasters. A comparative study could also be conducted into the online identity performance of female and male presenters. In addition, more research is needed regarding the interplay between radio presenters' on-air

personalities and online identities – or the interplay between personal and social identities. Identity is also seen as being dependent on an audience; therefore, more research is needed about the role audience members play in identity formation.

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