

FACEBOOK'S ROLE IN CONSTRUCTING ONLINE IDENTITY

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Abstract: *This article looks at how Facebook helps shape the way we think about and present our identities online. It explores how the platform encourages users to be “real” by using their actual names and lives as part of their digital presence. By looking at Facebook’s features – like profiles, posts, and the news feed – the research shows people carefully managing how they appear to others, often influenced by likes, comments, and what the algorithm decides to show. The article explores digital identity construction through case study and platform feature analyses, focusing on authenticity, performance, engagement dynamics, and how people balance being themselves with presenting a version of themselves that fits social expectations. Drawing from research in media and social sciences, the article argues that while Facebook helps normalize online identity tied to real life, it also creates new pressures to manage that identity carefully. It ends by raising questions about what this means for how we see ourselves in the digital world today.*

Keywords: *online identity, digital/network self, Facebook, profiles, authenticity, performance*

Introduction

In today’s digital age, our online identity is nearly as important as our offline one. *Online identity*, i.e., the persona we present through social media profiles, posts, likes, and interactions, shapes how others see us, and increasingly, how we see ourselves (Boyd, 2014; Papacharissi, 2010). It is a complex blend of authenticity (how true our online persona is to our real self) and performance (how we consciously present ourselves to an audience), curated through conscious choices and shaped by the architecture of the platforms we use. This matters because online identity influences real-world outcomes. It affects our social relationships, professional opportunities, mental health, and even our sense of self-worth

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(Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Turkle, 2011). In a digital environment where visibility is currency, managing our digital persona is not just a social act – it's a strategic one.

While platforms like Instagram or TikTok often emphasize trends and visual storytelling, Facebook's model of identity has always leaned more heavily into the notion of real life. Its early insistence on real names and connections rooted in offline networks helped distinguish it from earlier internet spaces where anonymity was more common. As a result, Facebook has often served as a digital mirror of the physical self – a place where users are not just posting to perform, but also to document, remember, and validate their existence through daily life events, milestones, and memories. This merging of the personal archive with social performance brings unique tensions and questions around what it means to be authentic online.

Among the many platforms where identity is performed, Facebook holds a unique and powerful role. As one of the first social networks to enforce real-name policies and encourage connections based on offline relationships, Facebook has helped set the standards for what authentic online identity looks like (van Dijck, 2013). Its extensive reach, algorithm-driven content curation, and emphasis on personal timelines, tagging, and memory features have turned it into a key case for understanding how digital identities are constructed and constrained.

Thus, the research will explore the dynamics of online identity on Facebook through a combination of case study analysis and platform feature examination. Drawing on user experiences, public controversies, and academic critiques, it considers how the Facebook's tools, such as the news feed (the continuously updated stream of posts, photos, and activities shared by friends and pages), real-name enforcement (the policy requiring users to register under their legal or authentic names), and memory reminders (features that resurface past posts and events) – shape identity expression. The methodology combines close analysis of platform affordances (features that enable or constrain user actions) with user narratives and documented events to examine how identity – authenticity, performance, and engagement – is negotiated in a major digital space. In other words, affordances refer to the technical and social possibilities offered by a platform's design that enable or restrict user behavior. Identity performance refers to the ways individuals enact and manage their self-presentation for imagined audiences online.

The Emergence of Online Identity

The digital age has fundamentally reshaped how individuals construct and present their identities. With the rise of the internet, and especially social networking

platforms like Facebook, the concept of identity has shifted from something stable and singular to something fluid, performative, and often curated. Online identity is no longer merely an extension of offline selfhood: it is a space where individuals experiment, negotiate, and perform multiple versions of themselves for different audiences (Boyd, 2007).

The emergence of online identity can be traced back to the early days of Internet Communication, including forums, chat rooms, and early social media platforms. These platforms allowed users to construct personas using pseudonyms, avatars, and customizable profiles. As Boyd and Ellison (2007) noted in their work on social network sites, the profile has become the digital body, the primary interface through which identity is perceived and interpreted by others online.

More than just a passive medium, Facebook actively shapes how users craft their online selves through design choices that promote certain behaviors and discourage others. Features like profile picture updates, birthday reminders, and the visibility of engagement metrics nudge users toward strategic self-presentation. At the same time, the platform's algorithms prioritize content that is emotionally engaging, popular, or controversial, creating a feedback loop that often amplifies performative aspects of identity. Users are not just managing how they appear to friends, but also how they're interpreted by a system that values attention and interaction over nuance.

With the advent of Facebook in 2004, online identity began to take on a new level of realism and persistence. Unlike earlier platforms, Facebook encouraged the use of real names, real-life networks, and connections to offline identity markers like school, work, and hometown. This shift marked the beginning of what Turkle (2011) describes as a new form of network self, as one that is always connected, always visible, and constantly updated. Facebook blurred the lines between the public and the private, the personal and the professional, forcing users to navigate complex social dynamics in curating their digital selves.

Furthermore, online identity is deeply shaped by platform affordances. The structure of Facebook, for example, emphasizes a linear narrative of one's life through features like the Timeline, creating a sense of coherence and continuity that may not always reflect reality. These affordances push users to present a stable, consistent version of themselves, despite the natural complexities and contradictions of identity (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). What emerges is a strategic self-presentation that is both authentic and performative, yet tailored for digital consumption.

Importantly, the rise of online identity has also raised concerns about surveillance, data ownership, and algorithmic influence. As users build their

identities through interactions, likes, and shares, platforms like Facebook collect and analyze this data to create detailed digital profiles, often used for targeted advertising and content curation. This commodification of identity challenges traditional notions of selfhood and autonomy (Zuboff, 2019).

Thus, the emergence of online identity is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by technological affordances, social expectations, and platform architectures.

The following chapter examines how Facebook, as a dominant force in the digital landscape, has shaped online identity into a personal, public, and continuously evolving phenomenon

From Profile to Persona: Identity-Making on Facebook

Today, Facebook is considered to be a most influential platform, and it plays a central role in constructing individual online identities. Its profile features – being fundamental in constructing digital identity – offer users to disclose such personal information as name(s), gender, education, occupation, location, relationships, interests and more. In addition to personal information, users share photos, videos, news, life milestones, personal thoughts and opinions.

What makes Facebook particularly interesting is the balance it strikes between control and spontaneity in self-presentation. Unlike platforms that focus solely on real-time content or short-form updates, Facebook encourages a more layered and enduring identity archive. Users can choose what to highlight, what to omit, and what parts of their lives to frame for others. At the same time, the interactive nature of the platform – through comments, tags, and reactions – means that others also participate in shaping one's online identity. This interplay between self-curation and social feedback creates a complex, collaborative process of identity-making that is both deeply personal and inherently public.

To explore how Facebook contributes to the construction of online identity, we will case study public figures' Facebook profiles. Public figures provide a unique yet highly illustrative lens for our analysis for the following reasons: (1) their profiles represent a heightened form of identity construction, where the tension between authenticity and performance is especially pronounced; (2) their profiles are publicly accessible and intended for wide public consumption, and present a suitable and ethically acceptable source of data; (3) with higher levels of interaction (likes, shares, comments, and media attention) celebrity profiles amplify the feedback dynamics that shape self-presentation; (4) the strategies used (selective self-disclosure, image management, audience engagement) reflect tactics used by everyday users, though at a larger scale; (5) celebrities often use Facebook's full suite of features (from professional bios to curated photo albums,

public posts, and interactions in comments) which allows for a comprehensive analysis of how platform design affects identity expression. Additionally, the analysis of Facebook profiles of public figures underscores the dynamic and contingent nature of digital identity. Unlike relatively static online presences, these profiles are continually reconfigured in response to external events, career transitions, shifts in public perception, and processes of personal development. A public figure may reconstruct their image following a scandal, rebrand in alignment with new professional endeavours, or recalibrate their discourse to resonate with prevailing social movements. Such patterns demonstrate that online identity is not a stable construct but rather a negotiated, fluid, and contextually responsive phenomenon shaped by interactions within and beyond digital environments.

Finally, it should be noted that the next chapter examines public figures' Facebook profiles to demonstrate how the platform functions not merely as a social network but as a dynamic arena for identity performance and reinvention. The intricate link between self-expression and audience reception, permanence and revision, visibility and control illustrates the layered nature of digital identity construction in contemporary culture. In the case studies that follow, we will aim to unfold how Facebook's unique affordances, cultural reach, and participatory mechanisms contribute to the shaping of personas that are both meticulously curated and socially co-authored, revealing not just who people are, but who they wish to be seen in the digital public sphere.

Building Digital Identity: Case Studying Facebook Profiles

Since our research explores how Facebook shapes online identity through authenticity and performance, the ideal candidate would be someone who actively uses the platform, curates a public persona (blending personal and professional content), receives substantial engagement (likes, comments, shares), and provides insight into the dynamics of online self-presentation without being a notorious figure. In other words, to gain meaningful insight into this dynamic, we are seeking a case study subject who actively engages with Facebook not just as a passive user, but as a deliberate curator of an online persona. Their content should naturally touch on or reflect themes of identity, authenticity, and how one responds to social or public expectations.

Importantly, as already mentioned, we are not looking to analyze individuals already widely recognized for controversy or notoriety, as that can distort the lens through which identity performance is understood. Instead, we aim to explore how people, especially those with a semi-public presence, navigate the fine line between sincerity and strategy. For instance, public figures often masterfully construct

personas that appear authentic while also serving brand or political objectives. Consider Kim Kardashian, who uses her Facebook profile (m.facebook.com) to project a curated version of herself that merges lifestyle, branding, and personal moments into a polished public identity. Similarly, Barack Obama (m.facebook.com) maintains a tone that feels personal and approachable, even while carefully aligning with the expectations of political leadership and legacy. Both examples illustrate how identity online is often a negotiation between being real and being resonant, and it is this balance we are interested in exploring through our case study.

Thus, this case study will examine how Facebook functions as a platform which enables famous individuals to construct and perform digital identities, highlighting the tension between authenticity and self-presentation. The two public figures crafting public identity through balancing realness with performative branding (Kim Kardashian – m.facebook.com) or maintaining a balance between personal tone and political branding in high-stake contexts will be respectively Kim Kardashian and Barack Obama.

Facebook Profile: Kim Kardashian

Profile Type: Verified Public Figure.

Follower Count: 30M+.

Profile Bio: Business mogul. Beauty founder. Advocate. Mom.

Cover Image: Glamorous, professionally shot fashion image.

Profile Image: Brand-consistent headshot.

Post Examples (Representative/Fictionalized)

- Photo Album: *A day in Milan* #FashionWeek #SKIMS (240K likes, 6K shares).
- Video: *My morning skincare routine – featuring SKKN by Kim* (sponsored content, product tags, 180K likes).
- Life Event: *North's 10th Birthday – I can't believe how fast time flies* (Family-oriented post, highly engaged).

Strategic Use of Features: Kim uses Facebook Stories for brand drops. She promotes through Marketplace links, Facebook Shops, and tagged products. She highlights press coverage, interviews (brand + self-narrative control) as well.

Identity Construction

- Self-Disclosure: Shares selectively personal moments (e.g. children's birthdays, behind-the-scenes glimpses), always curated with visual polish.
- Performance vs. Authenticity: High emphasis on performance. Posts are aesthetic-driven, often aligned with brand campaigns, suggesting a carefully managed image. Occasional real moments are still curated to support a larger narrative of accessibility-meets-luxury.
- Themes: Luxury, femininity, motherhood, empowerment, branding.
- Audience Engagement: This is primarily visual, comments often praise appearance, brand, or family. Engagement is high, but mostly one-directional. She rarely engages directly in comments.

Based on the case study and feature analysis of Kim Kardashian's Facebook profile and the broader framework outlined for exploring how Facebook contributes to digital identity construction, we can assume:

Kardashian's Facebook profile demonstrates how the platform functions as a curated stage for identity performance. The tension between authenticity and branding is evident: while her posts include family moments, they are visually curated to align with commercial partnerships. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, where public figures manage impressions much like actors performing on a stage. The high engagement metrics indicate that audience responses help shape Kardashian's digital persona, reinforcing aspects of her identity that attract attention. Her use of Facebook's features, including Stories, Marketplace, and Shops, reflects how platform affordances shape and control identity expression. Overall, Kardashian's presence illustrates broader trends in digital self-presentation, combining selective self-disclosure, visual curation, and feedback loops that define contemporary online identity-making.

Personal and professional identities are blurred in Kardashian's profile. Kim's bio – *Business mogul. Beauty founder. Advocate. Mom* – reflects a hybrid digital identity as she blends entrepreneurial roles (brand owner, advocate), celebrity persona (glamorous images, interviews) and personal identity (motherhood, family posts). The blurring reflects how Facebook facilitates multi-dimensional identity construction, making it a tool for storytelling.

Kim's feedback loops shape identity performance. The high engagement metrics (240K likes, 6K shares) indicate that audience response is integral to shaping Kim's digital persona. The feedback dynamics reinforces which aspects of identity are rewarded by followers and amplifies the successful content. This is a proof that identity is co-constructed with audiences on the Facebook interactive platform.

The full utilization of platform features enhances control of her profile. Kardashian uses the platform's full suite (Stories and Marketplace for real-time and commercial interaction, Facebook Shops for direct product promotion, Life Events, press highlights, and curated albums for personal-professional narrative continuity). These features enable identity management, showing how the platform affordances shape expression.

Broader trends are illustrated in her everyday digital identity. Kim's use of Facebook reflects her strategies: selective self-disclosure (what is shared or withheld), visual curation (images that represent aspirational versions of herself), engagement with followers (likes, comments).

Thus, Kim Kardashian's profile serves as an exaggerated version of how ordinary users also can craft their online personas. Her Facebook presence exemplifies the platform's role in constructing a curated (yet authentic), hybrid, performative, and feedback-driven digital identity. By combining personal authenticity with strategic branding, and leveraging Facebook's technical affordances, she illustrates how public figures (and by extension, all users) negotiate identity in a mediated, attention-driven environment. The case study supports the conclusion that Facebook reflects and shapes how identity is built, maintained, and consumed in the digital age.

Facebook Profile: Barack Obama

Profile Type: Verified Politician/Public Figure.

Follower Count: 60M+.

Profile Bio: Dad, husband, former President, citizen.

Cover Image: A group of diverse young people at a campaign-style event.

Profile Image: Warm portrait, smile, professional but friendly.

Post Examples (Representative/Fictionalized)

- Status Update: *Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there – especially to the ones doing the hard work with love and patience. #FathersDay* (540K likes, 60K comments).
- Shared Article: *Proud to support new leaders committed to voting rights and community organizing. Here's how to help.* (Political call-to-action).
- Throwback Photo: Barack and Michelle in their early years (nostalgia + relatability).

Strategic Use of Features: Obama uses Facebook Live for key political events or campaigns. He frequently tags other pages (e.g., Obama Foundation to reinforce civic engagement), and utilizes Notes or longer-form text posts for reflections.

Identity Construction

- Self-Disclosure: His persona is calm, thoughtful, fatherly, and posts mix civic commentary with glimpses of personal life (Michelle, daughters, dog Bo)..
- Performance vs. Authenticity: Leans toward authenticity, maintains a “genuine leader” tone, uses simple language, humility.
- Themes: Democracy, family, justice, hope, unity.
- Audience Engagement: Engagement is high across political and non-political posts. Comments often reflect admiration or discourse. Obama does not typically respond, but posts are crafted to prompt reflection or action.

Based on the case study and feature analysis of Barack Obama’s Facebook profile, along with the broader framework for understanding how Facebook contributes to digital identity construction, we can assume the following: Obama’s profile operates as a carefully curated yet seemingly authentic extension of his public persona. Every post, image, and interaction reflects an intentional balance between the personal and the political. His online presence reinforces his core values – empathy, inclusivity, and civic engagement – while his conversational tone and approachable style invite followers to feel personally connected to him.

Through this strategic yet relatable use of Facebook, Obama demonstrates how digital identity can serve as both a personal narrative and a platform for public leadership. He leverages the affordances of social media to sustain visibility, shape collective memory, and engage audiences beyond traditional political channels. In doing so, Obama exemplifies how contemporary figures can use digital spaces not only to communicate ideas but also to cultivate trust, inspire participation, and ultimately influence the tone and direction of public discourse in the social media era.

The above two Facebook profiles contribute to constructing online identities through the following (yet different) characteristics:

Features	Kim Kardashian	Barack Obama
Primary Identity	Celebrity, Brand	Political Leader, Citizen
Tone	Aspirational, Polished	Reflective Inclusive
Engagement Type	Visual Admiration, Passive	Ideological Discussion, Active
Self-Disclosure	Selective (family, beauty)	Balanced (family, civic values)
Performance	Highly imaged	Moderately messaged
Authenticity	Controlled Authenticity	Earnest, Value Driven Authenticity

Platform Utilization	Brand and Lifestyle Promotion	Social and Public Messaging
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Thus, Facebook functions as a stage for identity performance, but with differing emphasis for the two public figures. Kim Kardashian represents the commodified, performative self (luxury visuals and emotional glimpses) where **identity is mostly aesthetic, aligned with color and product branding**. Barack Obama, by contrast, represents the public, civic and social self (strategic messages and few personal moments), where **identity is mostly leadership, values, and community**.

While public figures like the ones discussed above operate at a larger scale, the general dynamics of online identity construction are shared with all the users. Both famous and common people engage in self-presentation balancing authenticity and performance with audience expectations. However, public figures amplify this process through branding and greater visibility, while common users are more related to social and ethnic belonging and privacy. Thus, the tools are the same but the stakes are different.

Conclusion

Today Facebook has transformed the way we construct, perform, and perceive identity in the digital age. What began as a social networking platform soon became a powerful tool through which authenticity meets performance, and identity is built. By promoting real-name policies and encouraging connections rooted in offline life, Facebook helps shift online identity from anonymity to anchored authenticity. Yet, this authenticity is rarely pure – it is filtered through likes, shaped by algorithms, and calibrated to audience expectations.

Through the analysis of Facebook's features and case studies of public figures like Kim Kardashian and Barack Obama, it has been demonstrated that Facebook users – whether public figures or everyday individuals – use the platform not just to reflect who they are, but to craft who they want to be seen as. The tension between personal truth (authenticity) and social performance is constant. Facebook's structure, with its emphasis on visibility, feedback, and memory, pushes users to present coherent, appealing narratives. Looking ahead, the future of online identity may hinge on how platforms evolve and how users respond to increasing pressures of curation and surveillance. As social media continues to blur the boundaries between public and private, professional and personal selves, we may see a growing desire for digital spaces that allow more nuanced, fluid, and less performative expressions of the self. Alternatively, new platforms might deepen the

commodification of identity, turning every aspect of online presence into data and branding.

Ultimately, Facebook not just reflects our identities – it helps reshape them. Understanding this is key to navigating the digital self in a world where being online is no longer optional, and where who we are is, to a certain extent, who we construct ourselves to be.

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Գ. Մուրադյան – Ֆեյսբուքի դերը առցանց ինքնության կառուցման գործում.

– Հոդվածը դիտարկում է, թե ինչպես է Ֆեյսբուքը նպաստում մեր առցանց ինքնությունը ներկայացնելուն, ինչպես է հարթակը խրախուսում օգտատերերին լինել «իրական»՝ օգտագործելով իրենց անուններն ու կյանքը որպես թվային ներկայության մաս: Ֆեյսբուքյան պրոֆիլների, գրառումների և նորությունների ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ մարդիկ իրենք են վերահսկում, թե ինչպես են իրենք ներկայացնում իրենց՝ ներառյալ լայքերն ու մեկնաբանությունները: Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է թվային ինքնության կառուցումը իրավիճակային-փաստարկային և հարթակի առանձնահատկությունների վերլուծության մեթոդների կիրառությամբ՝ կարևորելով իրականության, ինքնաներկայացման, ներգրավվածության, հավասարակշռվածության, սոցիալական պատկանելության հասկացությունները: Հետազոտության արդյունքները ցույց են տալիս, որ թեև Ֆեյսբուքը նպաստում է իրական կյանքի հետ կապված առցանց ինքնության կառուցմանը, այն նաև ստեղծում է դժվարություններ այդ ինքնություննը կառավարելու գործում և ներկայացնում, թե ինչպես ենք մենք տեսնում մեզ թվային աշխարհում այսօր:

Բանալի բառեր. առցանց ինքնություն, թվային/ցանցային «ես», Ֆեյսբուք, պրոֆիլներ, իրական, ինքնաներկայացում

Г. Мурадян – Роль Фейсбук в формировании онлайн-идентичности. – В статье исследуется, как платформа Фейсбук влияет на наше мышление, восприятие собственной идентичности в сети и способы её представления. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как политика подлинности – использование настоящих имён и элементов реальной жизни – способствует формированию цифрового присутствия пользователей. Анализируются функции профиля, публикаций и новостной ленты, демонстрируя, что люди осознанно управляют своим образом в сети, реагируя на лайки, комментарии и алгоритмическую селекцию контента. Через тематическое исследование и анализ функционала платформы рассматриваются вопросы подлинности, само-представления, вовлечённости и стратегии балансирования между искренним само-выражением и соответствием социальным ожиданиям. На основе исследований в области медиа и социальных наук делается вывод, что, несмотря на то что Фейсбук способствует формированию онлайн-идентичности, тесно связанной с реальной жизнью, он одновременно создаёт новые формы давления, требующие тщательного управления этой идентичностью.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-идентичность, цифровое/сетевое «я», Фейсбук, профили, подлинность, самопредставление