# The Practice of Social Media in Relation to Identity and Online Self-Curation

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## Abstract

This paper delves into the construction of online identity through the lens of blogging, drawing upon the author's experiences within an Internet Cultures module. It explores the notion of online self-curation, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between one's daily life identity and their online persona. The paper elucidates how individuals present themselves on social media platforms, highlighting the role of blogging as a form of self-expression and identity building. It introduces the concept of 'context collapse,' shedding light on the challenges of communicating with an amorphous online audience. Through a discussion of identity as a 'narration project,' the author underscores the significance of narrative in constructing and maintaining online identities. The paper underscores the need for media education to incorporate the concept of online self-curation as a vital component of digital media literacy. It concludes by recognizing the value of blogging in fostering a deeper understanding of identity construction in the digital age.

**Keywords:** online self-curation, identity construction, context collapse

## 1. Introduction

Within the filed of digital media education, the central concern revolves around the development and application of theories and concepts learned, with a critical focus on connecting digital phenomena to media education. Scholars like Buckingham (2008) have long debated the fundamental paradox of identity, whether it hinges on how one distinguishes themselves from others or if it involves similarities. The decision to focus on Chinese dance as a blog topic emerged from a desire to share personal experiences and engage readers. Drawing from a background as a professional dancer in China, the choice was made to showcase traditional and classical Chinese dance forms. To ensure accessibility to a broader audience less familiar with Chinese culture and dance, an informal and approachable writing style was adopted. According to Giddens (1991), modern individuals are characterized by constant self-reflection, emphasizing the fluidity rather than fixity of identity. The act of shaping one's identity, both in daily life and on social media, is regarded as a process of constructing an online persona. This commentary aims to delve into the concept of online self-curation, exploring how it relates to personal identity. Drawing from experiences in the Internet Cultures module, this discussion will illuminate the intricate interplay between daily life identities and online

representations. Ultimately, the essay will contemplate the integration of these practices, grounded in theoretical foundations, into the realm of media literacy within the sphere of education.

## 2. Blogging: From Performers to Curators

Goffman (1959) stated that people try to guide and create a certain image of themselves when they interact with others. According to Goffman's 'dramaturgical' theory, people put on performances in their daily life and work to keep up impression management. This metaphor of life could be interpreted as a kind of Shakespearean performative stage. In real life, there are a lot of ways to manage ourselves on this stage. Our facial expressions and words are cues that are all part of our self-presentation and performance. Goffman's dramaturgical theory also helps to research about people's online behaviors. When I started my blog, my first piece was about me and why I chose dance as my blog's main topic (Figure 1).
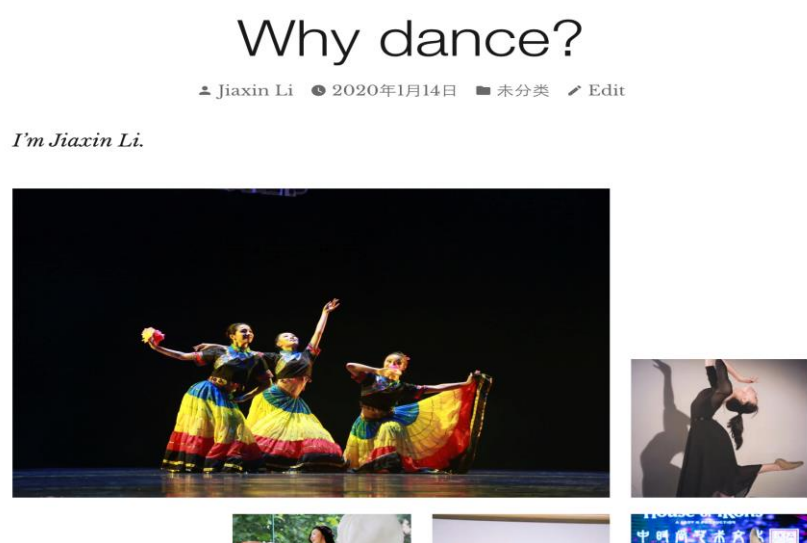


**Figure 1.**

Every picture I used and every experience I talked about came after self-introspection and management and will be part of my online identity. The process of people choosing, managing and using their personal digital texts to decorate their portfolio online, is one we can call curation (Williams et al., 2009). It is similar to professional curators who work in museums and libraries, but it is a process to reconstruct every personal detail in a certain online space. People put on performances in their daily lives and curate these on social media. Thus, we are performers in our daily lives, but curators on social media.

## 3. The Process of Self-Curation Online

In relation to what I learned during my blogging experience, I found people carefully select details which they find to be a part of their self-identity and display them on social media. Perkel (2008) states that online profiles allow people to use media texts to express themselves and share what they like to anyone. This represents another form of social engagement with others. In this digital age, curating an online presence becomes something which many feel like they must take part in.

Blogging is a type of social media where people post information that is represented through a copious number of symbols, such as text, images, sound, etc. People use digital tokens, such as, pictures, avatars, fonts and music, to depict themselves in their blogs. Marwick (2013, p. 6) notes that "these items become symbolic markers of personal identity." Since my blog is about dance, I used several pictures of professional dancers and also dance related mantras (Figure 2) that have inspired me personally. This was in order to attract my readers to become more interested about Chinese dance. These symbols help me construct my identity and image in relation to my interests.

# Flashback Dance

*You do not stop dancing from growing old*
*You grow old from stop dancing*



**Figure 2.**

Through the blogging exercise in this module, I noticed that people can comfortably write sincerely on blogging platforms because of the sense of spatial security which filters out potential hypocrisy and artificiality. Although people self-curate and manage themselves before they post their blogs, the process does reveal a large part of their true identity.

When I was writing my first post (a self-introduction), I was not anxious or afraid about my privacy. I chose to use real personal experiences to show why I blog about dance. Cultural differences between the West and Asia made me want to explain more about what Chinese dance actually is in my later posts. So far, these are the materials I have chosen and curated from my cultural identity and self-identity (Figure 3).

After I started to learn Chinese dancing for 20 years I realized that art is really important in our daily life and also gives us energy, creativity and aesthetic ability. Basically, I have rarely seen that people knowing a lot about Chinese dance in western countries and the culture and convention behind it. So this is the main reason why I am going to introduce some master pieces here.

So in my blog I will introduce more gorgeous, culture representational and imaginative dance clips for my readers.

*Shall we start?*

*Let's dance!*

**Figure 3.**

Interpersonal interactions within social media spaces are pronounced. The responses that users receive on online social media platforms, such as blogs, are a reflection of the type of person we are, as well as the group of people we identify with. Lowrey (2009, p. 113) argues that those

who trade off their online privacy, do so because of the return, which is gaining a greater sense of 'belonging to a group of people who not only see who we are, but who care about us as well.'

Ohh! So this is why you wanted to write a blog about dance. I can see that through your experiences you have a close connection with Chinese dance and it is an important part of who you are.

★ Like

Reply

**Figure 4.** This is a comment I received from someone about my introduction post

In my case, I post pictures, videos and information about myself associated with Chinese dance and culture. I later received a comment in my first post (Figure 4). This comment gave me a sense of how we expect people will respond to seeing our self-presentation and highlighted the importance of blogging as a way to construct and curate one's identity online.

Potter (2012) argues that it is necessary to study and research on how to build up self-curatorship in this digital era where curatorship is a key skill and disposition in new media. From my experiences of online curatorship, it is a process where people choose specific personal characteristics to perform on social media platforms. While I wrote my blog, I wondered what factors compel people to curate in the way they do. Among my posts, I wrote about two types of dance, which were choreographed and originated from traditional Chinese stories (Figure 5).

# Farewell My Concubine

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*She was dressed in a shade of red*
*The flame of life*

**Figure 5.** 'Farewell My Concubine' and Meet Destiny

'Farewell My concubine' is a tragic love story about a king and his wife in the West Chu dynasty. The story is fairly well-known in Western countries, because it was filmed by the famous Chinese director, Kaige Chen. The film won 'Best Film not in the English Language' at the British Academy Film Awards in 1994. The other dance was choreographed by a poet who was inspired by the Chinese philosopher, Zhuang Zi. It is a representation of the ancient Chinese philosophy of Daoism.

I would like to discuss the reasons behind my choices to write the blog posts in Figure 5. I had other choices of classical Chinese dances I could have chosen, but I chose these two as they both contain contemporary dance movements. In my

dancing, I often combine both classical Chinese and contemporary dance. Thus, writing about these is a way for me to build up my personal identity online. Another reason I wrote about these two dances was because there is a profound Chinese culture behind them. I felt it would be valuable to introduce them in English, to people who might not know a lot about Chinese culture and dance.

When I started organizing my blog, I already knew it would be different from sharing information about Chinese culture with Chinese people. I needed to take into consideration the fact that my readers might be not familiar with Chinese culture and arts. Therefore, I made selections taking into account what is more familiar and popular in Western countries. As I said before, these two types of dance have contemporary elements of dance elements as well as represent Chinese history and culture, making them more accessible for the audiences who I imagined would read my blog. The process of choosing what to write about is a reflection of both my cultural and personal identity.

After this process, I gained a stronger sense about the 'freedom' in blogging. Although people often think that there is more freedom on social media than real life, Marwick (2013, p. 5) argues that 'identity expression is influenced by perception of audience and different social media platforms will affect how people present themselves.' People cannot do whatever they want when they express themselves online, because they must consider who their audiences are and what they want to know. This will directly influence the curators to continuously build up and maintain their identity.

According to Giddens (1991), modern individuals have to construct their socio-cultural identity in a 'self-reflexive' manner, a form of self-motoring in daily life. Blogging is also a self-reflexive process. During the composition of my blog, I was considering different ways of presenting it. Before this, I had never really done this kind of online profile of myself, so I had no idea how to start. In my first blog, I did not think about using GIFs, videos and other forms to present dancing. However, after I posted several blogs, I gradually realized that I needed to find a better way to present and provide a vivid display of images. I re-edited the posts using GIFs because the free version of WordPress does not allow one to upload videos.

Through repeated reflection and introspection, I continuously work on constructing my online identity as a self-curator through my selection of topics, using of forms and so on. The act of being self-reflexive is continuous and ubiquitous among everyone. At every moment, at least at regular intervals, individuals are required to question themselves based on what is happening, which is a process also involved in media literacy.

## 4. Identity: A Narration Project

Under each main title of my blog, I added a subheading that I associated with the dance. These were usually poetic or literary subheadings. I did this because throughout my life, every time I see a powerful and meaningful dance, it has always given me literary inspiration. So, when I started blogging, I wanted to express and define the dances I introduced in my blog, in my own way, the way I interpret them. I suppose this artistic and imaginative expression is a means for me to build up my identity. After readers go through my blog, they will start to identify me, not only as a dancer or as someone who is interested in dance, but also someone who has their own appreciation of arts. This form of narrating one's identity gives readers the space to interpret who they think I am, in their own way. Giddens (1991, p. 54) claims that once we start to see identity as a 'project' we will realize that we do not find our identity in our own behaviors or through other people's reactions (though these are significant), but rather 'in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.' In this sense, we are continually conscious of our identity and we work to maintain it. In my blog, I posted reflective and artistic text, pictures and fonts, which helped to construct a certain identity of me.

Looking into our identity as a 'project' is clearly to recognize which part of 'me', we want to display or conceal. In this regard, people's identities have more possibilities to grow online due to different narrative tools and methods. It is less important that this form of identity is the person's 'truest' or 'whole' identity, but rather that it seems accessible and distinguishable.

## 5. Context Collapse

Usually, one's online audience is unrecognizable, and users are left to imagine who their audience is. As I said before, I had to imagine the audience of my blog. People use different social

media to present a self, based on their imaginary audience, rather than on the absolute truth of their self. This is the difference between online and offline identity curation. When people perform in daily life, they can use different expressions depending on who they are talking to, in order to find the most accurate expression in a specific context. However, due to the blurring of audiences in online contexts, one is not sure who they are specifically talking to, so they might change what they would normally say in an everyday context. Marwick and Boyd (2011) discuss the theory that people on social media inaccurately grasp the context in which they are speaking. Some certain contexts collapse into a single context when social networks are unified, so that audiences or readers might misunderstand or get confused about the contents. Comparing blogs with other social media platforms, it gives people more context to discover who you are and why you talk about what you do.

## 6. Conclusion

Bouvier (2012, p. 37) posits that social network platforms are perceived to provide new avenues for deliberate self-presentation and management within online social networks and among circles of friends. Subsequent to the blogging experience, it becomes apparent that the cultivation of one's identity represents a facet of self-curation. Although the concept of individuals functioning as curators of their own personas is not yet widely recognized, it warrants integration into the realm of media education. Particularly, the proficient management of one's online presence assumes increasing significance within the domain of digital media literacy.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that, within an educational context, blogging may not consistently serve as the most efficacious means for social interaction, given its often confined nature, primarily involving interactions among peers. The comprehensive process ought to engage students with social media in a productive manner, encompassing written content, visual imagery, auditory elements, and interpersonal connections, as advocated by Potter and Banaji (2012). The blogging exercise within the Internet Cultures module has afforded an opportunity to engage in practical exploration of the foundational process involved in crafting an online identity and its interplay with overarching digital media theories.

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