

Self-Presentation on Social Media: Sociological Research of Young People in the City of Split (Croatia)

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Abstract

Youth self-presentation represents the creative expression of personality, interests, and attitudes through the formation of an online identity on social media, which is an indispensable component of young people's lives nowadays. Just as Goffman's actor presents himself on stage in everyday life, people on social media have unique modes of expression that include filtering, editing, and selective sharing of content in order to present themselves in the best light and impress their target online audience. This sociological research aims to gain an insight into how young people present themselves to their online audience by examining why and how often they use and post on social media, as well as how they create and edit content on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok as the most popular social media. An online survey was used in 2023 to gather data from a sample of 283 young people in Split (Croatia), who were between the ages of 20 and 34. The study's findings indicate that young people follow posts and stories of others every day and that women spend more time both following and posting content on social media than men. In comparison with Facebook and TikTok, they prefer to use Instagram. Compared to men who use social media because of its popularity or in order to make new acquaintances, women use it for entertainment (Facebook) and to follow and create content (Instagram). At the same time, women are more inclined to use various options and tools when creating and editing content on social media.

Keywords: youth self-presentation, Goffman's dramaturgical approach, online identity, social media, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok

1. Introduction Young People and Social Media

1.1 Young People and Social Media

Young people, as bearers of innovative ideas and perspectives, represent a vital asset of society. Youth includes individuals from the age of 15, when they enter the period of adolescence, until early adulthood, with the upper age limit being thirty, depending on the culture and context of a certain society. Young people have different experiences and specific patterns of behavior that contribute to the development of group identity and a different social position compared to older generations. During the transition to adulthood, and through the processes of social and psychological development, they face a series of challenges related to accepting various social roles and forming a personal identity (Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017; Ilišin, 2017). Adequate social integration requires hard work and plenty of time. Therefore, the dimension of free time appears as an important aspect of youth life. In their free time, leaving aside life's obligations and the obstacles brought by growing up, young people practice sports, go out to cafes, and socialize with friends and acquaintances, thereby satisfying their desires and needs as well as building interpersonal relationships (Ilišin, 2017; Rattinger, 2017; Šuljug Vučica et al., 2020).

The development of information and communication technology has contributed to the exponential development of social media as new forms of media that, due to their specific virtual features, change the dynamics of interactions and assert themselves as tools offered within the free time of young people (Aydin and Arslan, 2016; Rattinger, 2017; Albash and Ma, 2017). Young people access social media by using mobile phones or personal computers, which is a consequence of increasing mobility (Levak and Barić Šelmić, 2018). By using mobile phones and personal computers, they communicate and interact with others (Lončar et al., 2023; Rattinger, 2017; Albash and Ma, 2017; Aydin and Arslan, 2016; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014), document their lives and share information

about themselves (Lončar et al., 2023; Albash and Ma, 2017; Aydin and Arslan, 2016), follow/share content (Rattinger, 2017; Aydin and Arslan, 2016), or have fun (Lončar et al., 2023; Albash and Ma, 2017; Rattinger, 2017). The loss of significance of physical closeness leads to the emergence of "distanced" virtuality, which is focused exclusively on the effect of visuality as a dominant way of expression and communication (Šmakić, 2016; Li and Xie, 2020). The dominance of visuality is largely presented on Instagram, which allows its users to document fleeting life events (McCune, 2011), but also to use many editorial tools to experiment with their social presentation (Baker and Walsh, 2018).

The popularity of the Internet and the trends promoted by social media allow young people to build communication and social connections, and to think creatively and freely about the content they share within virtual spaces (Levak and Barić Šelmić, 2018; Šmakić, 2016). Creative individual presentation is linked to the process of self-presentation, which Baumeister defines as a set of practices and motivations aimed at meeting the audience's expectations, but also at remaining true to one's ideals when presenting to the desired audience (Baumeister, 1987: 71). Accordingly, young people express their creativity through profiles on social media by using various practices of displaying personal information and preferences to the online audience (Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015). On social media, feedback related to the quality of the content can be positive or negative, and is usually expressed through likes and comments. Likes and comments are considered symbols of popularity and social recognition because they influence how young people present themselves to others, which results from the fact that likes and comments reflect standards of value and affirmation (Skogen et al., 2021; Baker and Walsh, 2018; Šmakić, 2016).

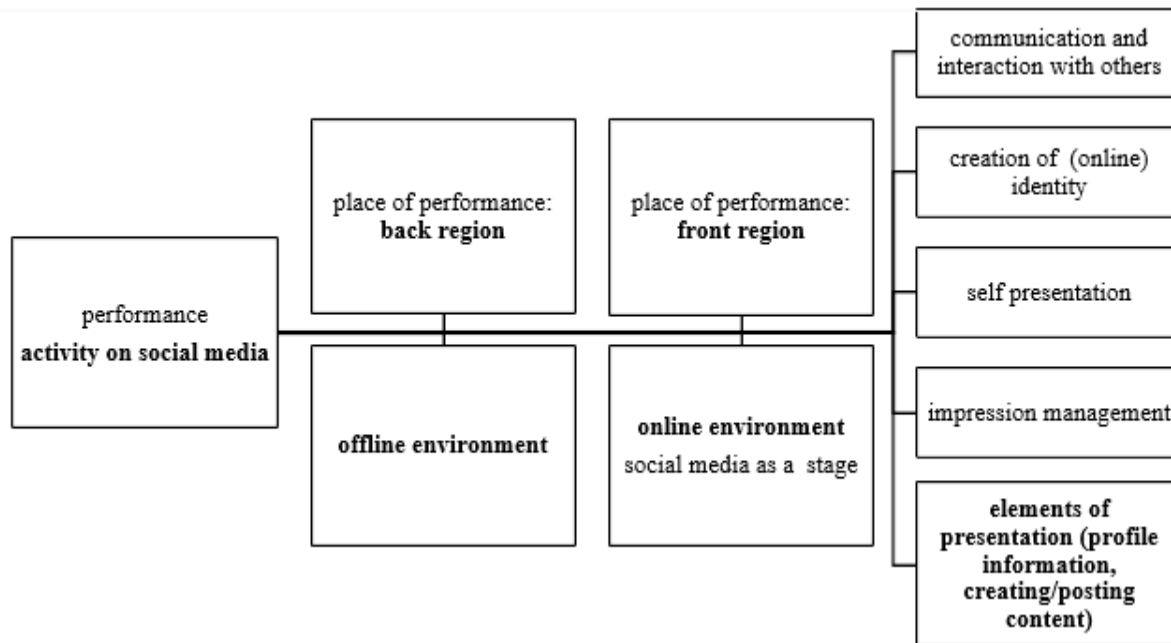
Social media provide young people with unlimited imagination when expressing various virtual identities through different social profiles (Hernandez-Serrano et al., 2022), but also with the possibility of controlling what, where (on which social media), how, and when they present themselves to others (Skogen et al., 2021). Through the process of selective self-presentation, young people do not show all aspects of their life, but carefully choose the best and most prominent social content (Wiederhold, 2018) that they post to create a certain image of themselves and the content they share (Putro and Palupi, 2022), but also to achieve a certain ideal, or to leave a favorable impression on others (Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015). Social media emphasize the physical attractiveness of users by encouraging unrealistic standards of beauty and perfection. For this reason, young people are "forced" to use various tools to improve their content to the level of perfection so that their content is in line with the set social norms. However, burdened by investing in a "perfect" portrayal, young people often face a series of pitfalls and risks (Jerončić Tomić et al., 2020; Chua and Chang, 2016; Guo, 2020). Looking perfect on social media puts pressure on young people, during which, in the desire to be better than others, they distort their personality (Herring and Kapidzic, 2015) and compare themselves to others whom they consider better (Hjetland et al., 2022), which leads to impairment of the quality of life as well as the development of low self-esteem (Chua and Chang, 2016) and anxiety and depressive disorders (Skogen et al., 2021).

1.2 Online Context of Dramaturgical Approach

Goffman's dramaturgical approach starts from everyday social situations in which the presence of other people (the audience) directs activities (performances) through which an individual wants to "convey an impression" that is in his interest. The performance takes place in the front region. The front region represents the stage where the performance takes place and includes different settings of the space and expressive equipment (physical characteristics, gestures, etc.) that is associated with the performer. On the other hand, the back region represents a place where impressions are built, which is closed to the audience, and where the performer can step out of his role (Goffman, 1956). Goffman's dramaturgical approach provides an insight into the complexity of social interactions and manner in which individuals adjust their behavior and self-presentation in different contexts. The process of self-presentation on social media, just as in Goffman's theory, takes place within regions where the front region indicates selected content that is presented to the audience, while the back region indicates private moments and thoughts that are not shared publicly. Therefore, the authors (Miller, 1995; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Tashmin, 2016; Merunkova and Šlerka, 2019) rely on Goffman's fundamental theses when approaching self-presentation in an online environment (See Scheme 1).

Tashmin views self-presentation on Facebook as a performance that requires a suitable environment, foreground credibility, and interaction with the audience. Social networking enables social media users to create desirable identities or those worthy of attention (Tashmin, 2016: 98). Impression management means successfully presenting to an audience (Facebook friends list), and several aspects of Facebook allow the user (social actor) to manage impressions. This primarily refers to a certain number of friends with whom one communicates and for whom content is created. At the same time, information (regarding education, relationship status, etc.) or photos (profile and cover photos, for example) are added in order to present oneself to others and to leave a good impression (Tashmin, 2016: 99-100). Hogan seeks to clarify the ontological difference between the performer (the one who performs the performance in real-time) and the artifact (the result of a past performance that can be experienced at another time). Goffman's dramaturgical approach,

Hogan states, explains that the individual does not present an authentic but an idealized version of himself. Performances on a stage enable a person to select what is presented to the audience for the purposes of impression management. In the era of social media, a performance space can be defined as a place that is mostly online and where performance artifacts can be seen (Hogan, 2010: 377-379).



Scheme 1. Conceptual scheme of "online impression management" created for this paper, which shows the application of the dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1956) on social media (Miller, 1995; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Tashmin, 2016; Merunkova and Šlerka, 2019).

Online environment presents the area for performing and presenting different types of online identities. The separation of a performer and audience makes the concealing of certain aspects of (offline) self-presentation and embellishing (online) self-presentation to others (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013: 101) easier. The online environment can be seen as a stage (front region) with offline life (back region), where actors (online users) invest in their performance to elicit the desired reaction from others. Hiding personality traits is an example of Goffman's impression management because online users (actors) try to control the aspects of themselves that they want other users (audience) in the online environment to perceive (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013: 104). Online identities are created through the presentation of one's interests, and photos of oneself and one's loved ones. However, in the case of online communication, the individual still manages this data, and limited interaction with others is established without the awareness of rejection and without the risk of (further) unwanted involvement, which is more than present in every day (offline) interactions (Miller, 1995: 3).

In their analysis of self-presentation on Facebook, Merunkova and Šlerka state that the front region consists of the content that the user posts, while the back region refers to the content that is private and available only to the user. The user profile serves partly as a stage and partly as a facade, and the users create their own identity on it by using a profile photo, a text part of the profile where they present information about themselves and their preferences and a list of friends who make up their audience. These elements are more presentational than interactive, and apart from them, the users create an identity by posting and/or sharing textual, visual, or audiovisual content. Facebook friends also participate in these activities by reacting to the content with likes and comments (Merunkova and Šlerka, 2019: 253-254). The analysis shows that the posted content can be classified into several topics - information and photos related to the user (personal experiences, opinions, and feelings), entertainment content (witty stories, comics, memes), popular cultural content (music videos, concerts ...), business content and educational content. Although the presentation generally consists of several categories, the most common way of performing identity is manifested through posts about yourself (experiences, thoughts, achievements, photos of yourself, etc.) on the user's profile page. However, this is done thoughtfully and the content is created in a way that the primary goal of posting the content is not to attract the attention of the audience (as it would be posting content on daily bases), but to show the value of the content in a way that the content stands out for its humorousness, interestingness and importance for the audience (Merunkova and Šlerka, 2019: 260-264).

Social media more popular among young people are certainly Facebook (Alhabash and Ma, 2017; Rattinger, 2017), Instagram (Alhabash and Ma, 2017; Lončar et al., 2023), and TikTok as a relatively recently used media (Putro and Palupi, 2022). According to the previous research, the reasons for using social media are creating social relationships (Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015); communication, following/sharing content, meeting partners, purchasing items and self-promotion (Aydin and Arslan, 2016); making contacts with friends, viewing photos/videos, playing games and using applications (Rattinger, 2017); self-documentation, social interaction, entertainment, passing time, sharing information and self-expression (Albash and Ma, 2017); distraction, connecting with others and showing one's own life (Lončar et al., 2023). Research also shows certain gender differences in the use of social media. Mazman and Kocak Usluel point out that women use social media (e.g., Facebook) for academic purposes (joining groups to find people with similar interest or sharing/posting project, research and homework tasks), maintaining existing relationships (such as finding their old friends and keeping in touch with the existing ones) and following agenda (different daily activities such as following changes/innovations or having fun) while men use it to make new friends and relationships (Mazman and Kocak Usluel, 2011). Lončar, Šuljug Vučica and Hržić indicate that young women are more active in using social media (e.g., Instagram) and they post and react to posts more often, while young men are more passive and therefore, browse content more often than posting it or reacting to it. Also, women are more active in liking and commenting the content, as well as preparing and editing more frequently before posting the content (Lončar et al., 2023). Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan state that men tend to portray themselves as strong while women tend to portray themselves as attractive. Women more often put efforts into impressing others in terms of physical beauty and into balancing pressure to present a desirable (sexual) image while avoiding being labeled as promiscuous (Manago et al., 2008). Apart from the mentioned, according to Kapidzic and Herring, teenage girls generally choose photos at a short distance from the camera (in which only their face or upper torso is shown), emphasizing seductive behavior, while teenage boys prefer photos where they are further away, avoiding close contact with the camera. Teenage girls and boys also differ in dressing, where (most) boys post photos of themselves fully clothed while (almost half of the) girls post photos of themselves in revealing clothing (Kapidzic and Herring, 2014).

Once a photo is liked or commented on, the photo becomes a mediator of social interaction and social relations (McCune, 2011). User engagement on social media can include liking or commenting to appreciate/approve the content and sharing posts (McCune, 2011; Li and Xie, 2020). Sharing is more socially visible and undirected because shared content is sent to all followers without addressing anyone in particular. In contrast, liking is more private and focused, as it provides direct confirmation of posted content (Li and Xie, 2020). McCune (2011) points out that liking is an engagement which is more superficial than commenting. Nevertheless, achieving a significant number of likes indicates that the post is interesting and popular, which further increases the post's ability to attract more likes (Moran et al., 2020), making the like become a kind of networking among users as well as a gesture of support (McCune, 2011). Likes and comments reveal the social confirmation, influence, and status of users as a type of "ritual recognition" through which users of a particular community confirm each other's identities (Baker and Walsh, 2018). Putro and Palupi (2022) as well as Hjetland et al. (2022) point out that individuals need to get as many likes as possible for their content in order to be popular. On the other hand, in accordance with the study implemented by Scissors et al. (2016), apart from the number of likes, the person liking the content is also important to consider (for example, whether this person has a close relationship with the person posting the content).

2. Methodological Aspects of the Research

The method used in conducting the research was an online survey with a questionnaire as a measuring instrument. The online survey was chosen as it makes the access to young people on the Internet and the possibility of posting the survey on social media easier. For the purpose of this research, a convenient research sample of young people aged 20 to 34 in the city of Split was used. The total number of young people aged 20 to 34 in the city of Split is 27,831 people, while the planned sample included about 1% of the target population of young people in the city of Split (N=283).

The questionnaire consisted of 14 closed questions divided into three sets. The first set of questions examined the structural characteristics of young people (gender, age, level of education, place of residence and work status), the second set of questions examined the frequency and ways of spending free time (with the answers offered: never, once a month or less often, several times a month, several times weekly and every day), while the third set of questions examined the reasons for the use (with the offered answers no/yes) as well as the characteristics of creating and posting content on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok (with the offered answers no/yes, but not often/yes, often). With the last question in the survey questionnaire (with the offered answers never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always), another aspect of the presentation was analyzed, and that is whom young people mostly appear on posted content with.

Before the field phase, a pilot study was conducted (10 % of the planned sample) in order to determine potential difficulties and shortcomings of the questionnaire. The internal consistency test (Cronbach's Alpha) was used for the scale dealing with the activities before creating (0.831) and posting the content (0.721) on social media. The field part

of the research was conducted during June and July 2023. The online questionnaire was created in Google Forms and posted on several social media. On Facebook, the questionnaire was posted in the groups STudenti, Split Students, Students of the Republic of Croatia, Survey - Share your survey, and Seminar, final, and graduate theses 2023/2024 due to the significant presence and engagement of young people in the groups mentioned above. On Instagram and TikTok the questionnaire was placed in the form of a story on the personal profile of one of the authors of this paper due to the large number of followers who belong to young population. Also, the questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp and e-mail due to the convenience of sending the questionnaire to friends and acquaintances. The collected data were entered and processed in the statistical program SPSS and statistical tests Chi-square test and Mann-Whitney U test were used.

As there are many social media, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok were selected for this research as those social media that are currently the most popular according to Statistics and reports on social media in 2022 by DataReportal. While choosing social media, the authors were guided by the fact that these social media have common features: creating and posting content (photos or videos in the form of posts and stories) and forms of social engagement (liking and commenting). Although YouTube, Whatsapp, and WeChat are more popular social media than Instagram and TikTok according to the number of users, they were not considered in the research because the Youtube platform is focused on posting videos, and Whatsapp and WeChat are platforms intended for exchanging text or voice messages.

Therefore, the general aim of the research was to examine the self-presentation of young people on the social media Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Special research goals were to examine the ways in which young people spent their free time on social media, the frequency and the reasons for using social media, the ways of creating and editing content before posting it on social media, and the reasons for posting content on social media.

Modern society imposes norms and standards referring to the ideal physical appearance and appropriate social behaviors, and these social expectations are not set in equal ways for women and men. According to Webb and Temple (2016), social media provide a space where gender norms can be accepted and performed as well as rejected, although women are more likely to reproduce gender norms in self-presentation on social media. Since papers and research dealing with social media indicate certain differences in the practices of using social media among women and men (e.g., Mazman and Kocak Usuel, 2011; Manago et al., 2008; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015; Lončar et al., 2023), the set research hypotheses focus on gender differences. Accordingly, the research hypotheses were as follows:

[H1] ways of spending free time among young people on social media will differ depending on gender,

[H2] the frequency and reasons for using social media will differ depending on gender,

[H3] ways of creating and editing content before posting on social media will differ by gender,

[H4] the reasons for posting content on social media will differ depending on gender.

As for the data, 65,7 % of women and 34,3 % of men participated in the research. The greatest number of participants was aged 20-24 (47,3 %), followed by the age group 25-29 (25,4 %) and 30-34 (27,2 %). The greatest share of participants has completed high school (45,2 %) or undergraduate/professional study programs (33,9 %), while a smaller share of them have completed graduate/specialist study programs (16,3 %). During the research, 40 % of young people lived with their parents and 41 % were studying. Some of the young people were working (22,3 %), and some of them were temporary employed (35,3 %) or employed for an indefinite period (12 %).

3. Research Results

3.1 Use of Social Media (Instagram, Facebook and TikTok)

According to the results of the conducted research, young people spend their free time on social media every day, following content such as photos and videos (posts/stories) of other users (70 %). In comparison, they post their content once a month or less often (48,4 %).

The first research hypothesis [H1] assumes that there is a difference in the way young people spend their free time on social media depending on their gender. The results of the Mann-Whitney U-test show a statistically significant difference, with women spending more time following and posting content on social media than men (see Table 1).

Table 1. Differences in the way of spending free time on social media between women and men (N=283)

	Gender (N)	Mean Rank	U	Z	P
Following content on social media	Men (97)	120,29	6915,500	-3,983	<0,001
	Women (186)	153,32			
Posting content on social media	Men (97)	118,62	6753,000	-3,731	<0,001
	Women (186)	154,19			

Instagram is the social media where young people spend their free time most often (60,4 %). Less often they spend their free time on Facebook (26,1 %) or TikTok (25,4 %). The participants selected fun (90,5 %), spending free time (86,2 %), following the content of other users (83,4 %), and communicating with friends and/or acquaintances (79,5 %) as the reasons for using Instagram. About half of them use it to search for information (62,5 %) and to create and post their content (photos, videos - post/story) (58,7 %). Reasons, such as education (33,2 %), the popularity of Instagram (31,8 %), communicating and/or meeting strangers (25,4 %), work (19,4 %), and getting likes and comments (13,8 %) were stated by the participants in smaller distributions. Similar reasons were given for two other social media, Facebook and TikTok, with the exception of creating and posting content on TikTok. Namely, most of the research participants do not use TikTok to create and post content.

The second research hypothesis [H2] assumes that there is a difference in the frequency of using social media depending on gender. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test show no statistically significant differences in the use of Instagram (U=7936,500; Z=-1,923; p=0,054), Facebook (U=8670,500; Z=-0,589; p=0,556) and TikTok (U=8226,000; Z=-1,312; p=0,190) between women and men.

The Chi-square test was used to test whether there are differences in the reasons for using social media (Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok) depending on gender. The results of the Chi-square test indicate a statistically significant difference with Instagram. In other words, women use Instagram to follow the content of other users and to create and post their content, while men use it to communicate with strangers, due to its popularity, and to receive likes and comments (see Table 2.1.).

Table 2.1. Reasons for using Instagram depending on gender

Responses		Number of responses (%)			Df	χ^2	P
		In total (n=283)	Men (n=97)	Women (n=186)			
Information search	No	106 (37,5)	38 (39,2)	68 (36,6)	1	0,186	0,666
	Yes	177 (62,5)	59 (60,8)	118 (63,4)			
Job	No	228 (80,6)	77 (79,4)	151 (81,2)	1	0,132	0,716
	Yes	55 (19,4)	20 (20,6)	35 (18,8)			
Education	No	189 (66,8)	71 (73,2)	118 (63,4)	1	2,735	0,098
	Yes	94 (33,2)	26 (26,8)	68 (36,6)			
Fun	No	27 (9,5)	11 (11,3)	16 (8,6)	1	0,554	0,457
	Yes	256 (90,5)	86 (88,7)	170 (91,4)			
Spending free time	No	39 (13,8)	16 (16,5)	23 (12,4)	1	0,915	0,339
	Yes	244 (86,2)	81 (83,5)	163 (87,6)			
Following the content of other users	No	47 (16,6)	23 (23,7)	24 (12,9)	1	5,377	0,020
	Yes	236 (83,4)	74 (76,3)	162 (87,1)			
Creating and posting your content	No	117 (41,3)	48 (49,5)	69 (37,1)	1	4,084	0,045
	Yes	166 (58,7)	49 (50,5)	117 (62,9)			
Communication with friends/acquaintances	No	58 (20,5)	22 (22,7)	36 (19,4)	1	0,433	0,511
	Yes	225 (79,5)	75 (77,3)	150 (80,6)			
Communication with strangers	No	211 (74,6)	56 (57,7)	155 (83,3)	1	22,028	0,001
	Yes	72 (25,4)	41 (42,3)	31 (16,7)			
Popularity/trend	No	193 (68,2)	52 (53,6)	141 (75,8)	1	14,485	0,001
	Yes	90 (31,8)	45 (46,4)	45 (24,2)			
Likes/comments	No	244 (86,2)	75 (77,3)	169 (90,9)	1	9,838	0,002
	Yes	39 (13,8)	22 (22,7)	17 (9,1)			

χ^2 – Chi-square test; Df – degrees of freedom. Statistically significant differences are in bold.

The results of the Chi-square test indicate a statistically significant difference in the reasons for using Facebook depending on gender, with women using it more for fun than men, and men using Facebook more for communicating with strangers, because of trends or its popularity, and for getting likes and comments (see Table 2.2.).

Table 2.2. Reasons for using Facebook regarding gender

	Responses	Number of responses (%)			Df	χ^2	P
		In total (n=283)	Men (n=97)	Women (n=186)			
Information search	No	88 (31,1)	34 (35,1)	54 (29,0)	1	1,078	0,299
	Yes	195 (68,9)	63 (64,9)	132 (71,0)			
Job	No	211 (74,6)	73 (75,3)	138 (74,2)	1	0,038	0,845
	Yes	72 (25,4)	24 (24,7)	48 (25,8)			
Education	No	202 (71,4)	70 (72,2)	132 (71,0)	1	0,045	0,833
	Yes	81 (28,6)	27 (27,8)	54 (29,0)			
Fun	No	92 (32,5)	40 (41,2)	52 (28,0)	1	5,125	0,024
	Yes	191 (67,5)	57 (58,8)	134 (72,0)			
Spending free time	No	95 (33,6)	35 (36,1)	60 (32,3)	1	0,418	0,518
	Yes	188 (66,4)	62 (63,9)	126 (67,7)			
Following the content of other users	No	104 (36,7)	35 (36,1)	69 (37,1)	1	0,028	0,867
	Yes	179 (63,3)	62 (63,9)	117 (62,9)			
Creating and posting your content	No	195 (68,9)	61 (62,9)	134 (72,0)	1	2,495	0,114
	Yes	88 (31,1)	36 (37,1)	52 (28,0)			
Communication with friends/acquaintances	No	111 (39,2)	40 (41,2)	71 (38,2)	1	0,251	0,616
	Yes	172 (60,8)	57 (58,8)	115 (61,8)			
Communication with strangers	No	232 (82,0)	60 (61,9)	172 (92,5)	1	40,453	0,001
	Yes	51 (18,0)	37 (38,1)	14 (7,5)			
Popularity/trend	No	228 (80,6)	64 (66,0)	164 (88,2)	1	20,054	0,001
	Yes	55 (19,4)	33 (34,0)	22 (11,8)			
Likes/comments	No	254 (89,8)	77 (79,4)	177 (95,2)	1	17,260	0,001
	Yes	29 (10,2)	20 (20,6)	9 (4,8)			

Finally, the results of the Chi-square test indicate a statistically significant difference in the reasons for using TikTok depending on gender, with men using TikTok more to communicate with strangers, trends, or popularity as well as getting likes and comments, compared to women (see Table 2.3.).

Table 2.3. Reasons for using TikTok depending on gender

	Responses	Number of responses (%)			Df	χ^2	P
		In total (n=283)	Men (n=97)	Women (n=186)			
Information search	No	185 (65,4)	61 (62,9)	124 (66,7)	1	0,402	0,526
	Yes	98 (34,6)	36 (37,1)	62 (33,3)			
Job	No	258 (91,2)	84 (86,6)	174 (93,5)	1	3,824	0,051
	Yes	25 (8,8)	13 (13,4)	12 (6,5)			
Education	No	219 (77,4)	80 (82,5)	139 (74,7)	1	2,184	0,139
	Yes	64 (22,6)	17 (17,5)	47 (25,3)			
Fun	No	133 (47,0)	46 (47,4)	87 (46,8)	1	0,011	0,917
	Yes	150 (53,0)	51 (52,6)	99 (53,2)			
Spending free time	No	147 (51,9)	52 (53,6)	95 (51,1)	1	0,164	0,686
	Yes	136 (48,1)	45 (46,4)	91 (48,9)			
Following the content of other users	No	155 (54,8)	50 (51,5)	105 (56,5)	1	0,619	0,431
	Yes	128 (45,2)	47 (48,5)	81 (43,5)			
Creating and posting your content	No	243 (85,9)	82 (84,5)	161 (86,6)	1	0,215	0,643
	Yes	40 (14,1)	15 (15,5)	25 (13,4)			
Communication with friends/acquaintances	No	220 (77,7)	70 (72,2)	150 (80,6)	1	2,649	0,104
	Yes	63 (22,3)	27 (27,8)	36 (19,4)			
Communication with strangers	No	253 (89,4)	79 (81,4)	174 (93,5)	1	9,857	0,002
	Yes	30 (10,6)	18 (18,6)	12 (6,5)			
Popularity/trend	No	213 (75,3)	64 (66,0)	149 (80,1)	1	6,835	0,009
	Yes	70 (24,7)	22 (24,0)	37 (19,9)			
Likes/comments	No	267 (94,3)	87 (89,7)	180 (96,8)	1	5,997	0,014
	Yes	16 (5,7)	10 (10,3)	6 (3,2)			

χ^2 – Chi-square test; Df – degrees of freedom. Statistically significant differences are in bold.

Overall, the communication with strangers, the popularity of social media, and likes and comments are the reasons why men use Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. On the other hand, women use Instagram to follow the content of other people and to post their own content, and they use Facebook (more) for fun.

3.2 Creating and Editing Content on Social Media

In a world where daily time is spent using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, the ability to capture attention and engage your target audience has become essential. Young people mostly point out that when creating social content, although not often, they dress up (46.3 %), find suitable backgrounds or locations for photography/recording (43,5 %), and express positive emotions such as smiling (43,5 %). Finding the perfect pose or angle (41,3 %) as well as hiring a person (50,2 %) to take photos/film are not frequent activities when creating content (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Activities before creating content on social media

		No (1)		Yes, but not often (2)		Yes, often (3)		In total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Beautification (make-up, nice clothes...)		99	35	131	46,3	53	18,7	283	100,0
Finding a suitable background/location for photography/filming		80	28,3	123	43,5	80	28,3	283	100,0
Hiring someone for photography/filming (friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, photographer...)		142	50,2	104	36,7	37	13,1	283	100,0
Finding a perfect pose/angle for photography/filming		117	41,3	92	32,5	74	26,1	283	100,0
Smiling/happy facial expression		61	21,6	122	43,1	100	35,3	283	100,0

The visual aspect thus plays an important role in editing content on social media, with the goal of highlighting and conveying a specific message. Quality photos and videos attract attention and enhance the overall experience, so different techniques and tools are used to edit them. The results of the research show that young people mostly do not use options to beautify the content such as filters, effects, or photoshop (65 %), and that they do not remove undesirable people or items that they do not want in their content (54,8 %). On the other hand, when editing the content, they still improve its quality (40,6 %) and often take care to carefully select a photo or a video where they look best (51,2 %) (see Table 2.).

Table 2. Activities before posting content on social media

	No (1)		Yes, but not often (2)		Yes, often (3)		In total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Quality improvement (brightness, sharpness...)	96	33,9	115	40,6	72	25,4	283	100,0
Removing unwanted parts of the content (unwanted objects/people in the background...)	155	54,8	81	28,6	47	16,6	283	100,0
Applying options to beautify the content (filters, photoshop, effects...)	184	65,0	69	24,4	30	10,6	283	100,0
Carefully selecting the photo or video in which you look best	51	18,0	87	30,7	145	51,2	283	100,0

The third research hypothesis [H3] assumes that there is a difference in the ways of creating and editing content on social media depending on gender. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test indicate a statistically significant difference, whereby women, when compared to men, dress up more often before creating the content itself, find suitable backgrounds as well as perfect poses for photography/filming, hire people for photography, and try to have a happy facial expression. Regarding the activity of editing content before posting it on social media, women also show higher values. In comparison to men, they improve the quality of content, apply beautification options, and choose the most beautiful photos or videos (see Tables 3.1. and 3.2.) more often.

Table 3.1. Differences in the ways of creating content on social media between women and men (N=283)

	Gender (N)	Mean Rank	U	Z	P
Beautification (make-up, nice clothes)	Men (97)	121,85	7066,000	-3,242	0,001
	Women (186)	152,51			
Finding a suitable backdrop/location for photography/filming	Men (97)	114,79	6382,000	-4,323	0,001
	Women (186)	156,19			
Hiring someone for photography/filming (friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, photographer...)	Men (97)	124,77	7350,000	-2,821	0,005
	Women (186)	150,98			
Finding the perfect pose/angle for photography/filming	Men (97)	119,02	6791,500	-3,643	0,001
	Women (186)	153,99			
Smiling/happy facial expression	Men (97)	118,09	6702,000	-3,814	0,001
	Women (196)	154,47			

Mann-Whitney U-test. Statistically significant differences are in bold.

Table 3.2. Differences in the ways of editing content on social media between women and men (N=283)

	Gender(N)	Mean Rank	U	Z	P
Quality improvement (brightness, sharpness...)	Men (97)	111,43	6056,000	-4,844	0,001
	Women (186)	157,94			
Removing unwanted parts of the content (items/people in the background...)	Men (97)	135,13	8355,000	-1,134	0,257
	Women (186)	145,58			
Applying options to beautify the content (filters, photoshop, effects...)	Men (97)	128,39	7701,000	-2,398	0,016
	Women (186)	149,10			
Carefully selecting the photo or video where they look best	Men (97)	117,20	6615,000	-4,040	0,001
	Women (186)	154,94			

Mann-Whitney U-test. Statistically significant differences are in bold.

3.3 Posting Content on Social Media

Young people on social media often show themselves alone (41,7 %) and with friends (41 %), sometimes with family (35,3 %) and colleagues from school/college (29,3 %), while rarely or never show up with a partner (45,2 %) and with business colleagues (52,7 %). Content on social media is mostly posted for the sake of preserving memories (81,6 %) and for entertainment or spending free time (80,2 %). About half of the young people states other reasons such as keeping their social profile active (62,2 %), showing their own life, their appearance or preferences (57,2 %), communicating with others, either to maintain contact or to meet new people (54,8 %) and showing creativity/inspiration (55,1 %). On the other hand, posting content on social media because it is in trend (74,2 %), collecting likes and comments (67,8 %), or doing this for work (81,6 %) seem not to be the reasons for posting content on social media for young people (see Table 3.).

Table 3. Reasons for posting content on social media

	No (1)		Yes (2)		In total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Keeping the social profile active	107	37,8	176	62,2	283	100,0
Because it's trendy	210	74,2	73	25,8	283	100,0
Showing your own life (appearance, preferences, hobbies...)	121	42,8	162	57,2	283	100,0
Communication with other individuals (contact with acquaintances, meeting new individuals)	128	45,2	155	54,8	283	100,0
Collecting positive feedback (likes and comments)	192	67,8	91	32,2	283	100,0
Job (job promotion, earning...)	231	81,6	52	18,4	283	100,0
Keeping memories	52	18,4	231	81,6	283	100,0
Showing creativity, inspiration and motivation	127	44,9	156	55,1	283	100,0
Fun/entertainment/spending free time	56	19,8	227	80,2	283	100,0

The fourth research hypothesis [H4] assumes that there is a difference in the reasons for posting content on social media depending on gender. The results of the Chi-square test indicate a statistically significant difference in the reasons for posting content on social media depending on gender, with women posting more content on social media for showing their own lives, keeping memories, showing creativity or inspiration, and having fun, entertaining or spending free time, while men publish more content on social media due to current trends (see Table 4.).

Table 4. Reasons for posting content on social media depending on gender

Responses			Number of responses			Df	χ^2	P
		In total (n=283)	Men (n=97)	Women (n=186)				
Maintaining profile activity	No	107 (7,8)	37 (38,1)	70 (37,6)	1	0,007	0,933	
	Yes	176 (62,2)	60 (61,9)	116 (62,4)				
Trend	No	210 (74,2)	65 (67,0)	145 (78,0)	1	3,991	0,046	
	Yes	73 (25,8)	32 (33,0)	41 (22,0)				
Showing own life	No	121 (42,8)	50 (51,5)	71 (38,2)	1	4,659	0,031	
	Yes	162 (57,2)	47 (48,5)	115 (61,8)				
Communication with other individuals	No	128 (45,2)	45 (46,4)	83 (44,6)	1	0,080	0,777	
	Yes	155 (54,8)	52 (53,6)	103 (55,4)				
Likes and comments	No	192 (67,8)	60 (61,9)	132 (71,0)	1	2,426	0,119	
	Yes	91 (32,2)	37 (38,1)	54 (29,0)				
Job	No	231 (81,6)	82 (84,5)	149 (80,1)	1	0,834	0,361	
	Yes	52 (18,4)	15 (15,5)	37 (19,9)				
Keeping memories	No	52 (18,4)	28 (28,9)	24 (12,9)	1	10,831	0,001	
	Yes	231 (81,6)	69 (71,1)	162 (87,1)				
Showing creativity/ inspiration/ Motivation	No	127 (44,9)	54 (55,7)	73 (39,2)	1	6,951	0,008	
	Yes	156 (55,1)	43 (44,3)	113 (60,8)				
Fun/entertainment/ spending free time	No	56 (19,8)	27 (27,8)	29 (15,6)	1	6,021	0,014	
	Yes	227 (80,2)	70 (72,2)	157 (84,4)				

χ^2 – Chi-square test; Df – degrees of freedom. Statistically significant differences are in bold.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Classical actors put a lot of effort and thought into the stage to portray the performance of their character and win over the desired audience. The classical stage in the age of digital media is being replaced by a virtual one where actors are social media users, and their performance is substituted by their activity on social media. Offline environment, as the back region, reflects all the private moments available exclusively to the social media user. Online environment, as the front region, is presented by social media as a stage of self-presentation where users interact with others and create desired (virtual) identities with the help of specific presentational elements such as user profile, network of followers and beforehand and carefully created posted content (Miller, 1995; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Tashmin, 2016; Merunkova and Šlerka, 2019). Therefore, the research aimed to examine how young people in Split create their online identity and present themselves on social media, and to gain an insight into how technology changes young people's presentation considering that self-presentation management takes place online as well (Guo, 2020). It has also been noted that there are gender differences in relation to online self-presentations among young people (Mazman and Kocak Usluel, 2011; Manago et al., 2008; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015).

In comparison to Facebook and TikTok, Instagram is more popular among young people who participated in this study, but there are no differences in the preferences for either Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok between women and men. The results of the conducted research show that young people, as representatives of digital culture, spend a great deal of their time on social media following the content of other users. On the other hand, they post their own content, such as photos and videos, averagely once a month. Women follow the content of others on social media more often than men, but they also post their own content more often. Women post content to keep memories, show their own lives, express creativity, or fill their free time, while men post content because it is trendy. Researches conducted by Aydin and Arslan (2016), Rattinger (2017), Albash and Ma (2017) and Lončar et al. (2023) point out that following and posting content are indispensable aspects of youth activities on social media. However, research by Lončar et al. (2023) indicates that women are still more active on Instagram in the way that they post more content in comparison to men who are more likely to just browse the content.

Young people who participated in this research use social media mainly for fun, to spend their free time, to communicate with friends and acquaintances, and to follow and post content which is in line with the findings of the previous studies (Lončar et al., 2023; Rattinger, 2017; Albash and Ma, 2017; Aydin and Arslan, 2016; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014). As for other reasons for posting on social media, it can be noticed that young people also tend to show their lives (that is appearance, preferences and so on). Some of the previously mentioned researches (e.g., Lončar et al., 2023; Albash and Ma, 2017; Aydin and Arslan, 2016) pointed this out as well. Differences were also observed in relation to the reasons for using social media, whereby women use social media for entertainment (e.g., Facebook) or following and creating content (e.g., Instagram) more often, while men use Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok equally because of their popularity, for communication with strangers, and to get likes and comments. The above can be explained by the fact that women are more likely to perceive posts on Instagram as a form of (indirect) communication (Lončar et al., 2023). Apart from the mentioned, studies have highlighted that women generally use social media to maintain existing relationships, and men to build new social relationships (Mazman and Kocak Usluel, 2011). When it comes to receiving likes and comments, most men and women stated that they do not use social media for these purposes, but participants who stated that they use social media to receive likes and comments are mostly men. Considering that the results indicate that men post content rarely, this might refer to getting comments and likes to their comments made on the content posted by others.

The visual effect seems to be the most important element on social media. Young people often reach for different tools to improve their content, whether because they wish to present themselves as more attractive (Manago et al., 2008; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015) or because of insecurity about their appearance (Chua and Chang, 2016). Although some authors (Manago et al., 2008; Kapidzic and Herring, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015; Chua and Chang, 2016, Guo, 2020) emphasize the tendency of young people to use various tools to beautify the content in order to give off better personal impression, the conducted research shows certain differences in the activities before creating and posting content on social media in comparison to the aforementioned research. When creating content on social media, young people emphasize that they improve their appearance by dressing up, finding suitable backgrounds or locations for photography/filming, and by trying to smile in their photos/videos although they do not do it often. Given the importance of the visual impression quality, young people edit the content before posting it by improving the quality and being careful to post their best photo/video. On the other hand, they do not use tools and options such as filters, photoshop, effects, etc. to a greater extent. The above indicates that young participants tend to show their best and highest quality content on social media but also still prefer to show an authentic self-image versus the beautified one. This can be interpreted in the context of emerging trends on social media, i.e. the trend of posting an idealized depiction along with the more natural one on Instagram – “Instagram vs reality movement” (Tiggeman and Anderberg,

2020). However, women pay more attention to their content by dressing up more often before creating content on social media, finding suitable backgrounds and posing for photography/filming, and showing smiling faces compared to men. Likewise, before posting content on social media, women improve the quality of the content, use various tools to beautify the content (filters, photoshop, effects...), and choose their best/most beautiful photos for publication more often than men. The results are consistent with the previous research (e.g., Lončar et al., 2023).

The limitation of this research refers to the impossibility of generalizing the obtained research results to the general population of young people in Split, given that the research used a convenient sample. Also, it is not possible to guarantee the accuracy of the participant's responses in terms of their gender, age, place of residence, occupation and so on, nor to confirm the accuracy of all given answers, which essentially represents the shortcomings of online questionnaires as a research method. Likewise, the use of a binary approach to gender (woman-man) should be cited as a limitation, given that different categories of gender identities were not included. With this in mind, the recommendation for future research is to focus on researching the fluidity of identity with emphasis placed on different types of gender identity (for example non-binary, transgender, genderfluid...) in order to better understand expression of gender identities and whether it makes any difference in the youth presentation on social media. However, it can be emphasized that the research results provide certain views on the manners in which social media are used for the self-presentation of young people and, as such, can contribute to the development of scientific knowledge in the fields of sociology of youth and the sociology of the body. On the other hand, the complexity of self-presentation becomes even more evident in an online environment, and this might be associated with the dynamics of social networks and various social trends changing the tendencies of presentation among young people, which requires further analysis. Accordingly, the obtained research results can serve as a starting point for further sociological analyses in which the key role of social media in the formation of virtual and real identities of young people will be investigated in a more complex and systematic way.

Notes

Note 1. The paper was created on the basis of a research conducted for the purpose of writing the final thesis "Sociological Aspects of Youth Self-presentation on Social Media" at the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Split in 2023. Not all of the results of the research are presented in this paper.

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Authors contributions

Author Daniela Gudić was responsible for study design. Authors Marija Lončar and Zorana Šuljug Vučica were responsible for revising the study design. Author Daniela Gudić was responsible for data collection, data analysis, and writing the first drafted manuscript. Authors Marija Lončar and Zorana Šuljug Vučica were responsible for final drafting, revising, and proofreading the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript as well as contributed equally to the study.

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