

# Social Media Changed Notions of the Self and Privacy

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**Abstract.** This article investigates how the individual's concept of self has altered in two ways in light of the fast changing circumstances of social media. To begin with, social media has abstracted and branded the concept "self." Second, social media divides the concept of self into two categories: "ideal self" and "actual self." The distinction between the two selves has both good and negative implications. Furthermore, social media confuses the idea of privacy, and consumers have difficulty determining whether data will be utilized unlawfully and openly in Big Data.

**Keywords:** social media; self; privacy.

## 1. Introduction

The development of social media builds a solid base for the abstract world in our everyday life. According to Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message." (McLuhan, 1966) The innovation of social media tools is more critical than the essential meaning of information. Each technologically advanced medium, created by intense demands, contributes greatly to the development of society. In addition, each new medium enriches human culture and civilization and changes the way we live. Social media stills at a very early stage. For instance, oral media enables people to communicate face-to-face. Later, printed media such as paper books and letters were invented to transcend the limitations of time and place in the literature age. In today's world, the invention of the Internet has launched online applications such as Facebook and WeChat, which enables information to spread in seconds. The birth of each new media technology has changed the efficiency of information dissemination and changed people's way of life.

When faced with the tremendous and persistent demands of social media, we are forced to focus on the smallest individual component, the self. Self also relates to the idea of privacy. In light of the rapidly evolving circumstances of social media, this essay examines how the individual's sense of self has changed in two ways. Firstly, social media have made the term "self" more abstract and labeled. Second, social media separates the notion of self into the "ideal self" and the "real self." The difference between those two selves has both positive and negative effects. Besides, social media blurs the definition of privacy and there are some difficulties individuals face while defining which data would be used illegally and publicly in the Big Data.

This essay focuses more on how particular online social media impact self and privacy. In this essay, the self is a single element that makes up society. The concept of self is defined as how people perceive themselves and what makes them different from others. Moreover, the definition of privacy refers to information that relates to self and usually leads to information that the individual does not want to share with society.

## 2. Social Media Changed the Notion of Self

### 2.1 Social media online makes the term "self" abstract and labeled

The information posted on social media makes understanding the term "self" more abstract. When thinking of self, individuals usually have an image in mind of a person. That phenomenon shows that people basically use their audio and visual capabilities to receive information in today's Internet age. Marshall McLuhan(1966) states that " The media are extensions of our human senses." (McLuhan, 1966) For instance, radio is the extension of hearing ability, and TV is the extension of visualization. We have the mental image in our minds because of the frequent exposure to visual pictures and videos posted on the Internet. Based on that idea, people keep posting their ideas and thoughts on the Internet.

With the consistent exposure of textual articles and paragraphs, sometimes an individual's ideas connect or represent the self. Therefore, the self becomes more abstract and more labeled.

Tags with a high representation removed figurative details. This model is an excellent way to remember people's characteristics in the case of massive data. At the same time, it has changed the way people cognize the "self." Instead of recognizing individuals in detailed ways, people usually introduce "self" with their most famous songs, beautiful body traits, and ideas. This approach allows individuals to remember quickly but has the disadvantage of providing partial information.

## 2.2 Social media separate the notion of self

Online media separates the notion of self into "the ideal self" and the "real self." Compared to the real world, Internet media provides a free environment with fewer restrictions and authority, allowing people to showcase a more popular or perfect version of themselves. George-Herbert Mead (1863) states that people see themselves from the perspective of others. (Mead, 2018) Compared to facing fear towards other individuals' thoughts and anxiety in the real world, the self could gain value by leveraging social media to manipulate and shape an ideal version of self. According to Bianco (2014), in his article *Pervasive Unreality: Reining in Photoshop*, Before releasing commercial pictures to the public, the advertising business uses programs like Photoshop to alter the actual appearance of persons and products. (Bianco, 2014) After receiving the difference between pictures and reality, individuals begin to imitate and use software like Photoshop to create an ideal version to get more popular online. As more people use software to change their appearance, the tendency to competition between selves appears on social media. This phenomenon indirectly creates the gap between the self on social media (the ideal self) and the self that exists in the real world.

Realizing the gap between the "ideal self" and the "real self" brings social benefits because proper imagination can enlarge people's creative space. The "ideal self" could change the "real self" in particular ways—for example, the creation of the Metaverse. According to Mystakidis (2022), the Metaverse is an everlasting and persistent multiuser environment that merges physical reality with digital virtuality. It is built on the convergence of technologies, such as virtual reality, that enable multimodal interactions with virtual worlds, digital items, and people (VR). (Mystakidis, 2022) Metaverses are created to add ideal elements to the real self.

However, the difference between "ideal self" and "real self" could negatively impact individuals. Comparing individuals' "real self" with others' "ideal self" would cause anxiety and depression. According to the survey made by Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017), researchers utilized a nationally representative sample of 563 emerging adults (18–22 years old; 50.2 percent female; 63.3 percent Non-Hispanic White). Participants self-reported how much time they spent on various social media sites and completed anxiety questionnaires on an average day. The results indicated that more time spent on social media was significantly associated with increased dispositional anxiety and depression symptoms. (Vannucci et al., 2017).

## 3. Social media blur the definition of privacy

In the modern world, people are increasingly relying on social media, which meets the definition of "deboundarying," the loss of the ability to separate public and private information. People spontaneously share information online without knowing how to protect their privacy, which is common among teenagers. According to the article "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy" (2013), youth provide more personal information online than in the past. They use Facebook's privacy settings but share with large groups of friends (Madden et al., 2013). The majority of teen social media users claim they are unconcerned about third-party data access. Young people tend to overshare because of their herd mentality and the need to be praised.

In addition, when Big data is combined with privacy data, individuals cannot control where their privacy is used publicly. As social media gives individuals equal rights to present themselves, everybody has the right to talk and post on the Internet. The amount of data recorded makes it difficult

to distinguish truth from deception. The article "Big Data privacy issues in public social media." (2012) illustrated that Big Data is a new name for a broad field of data-intensive informatics in which datasets are so large that working with them effectively could become problematic (Smith et al., 2012). A user is typically unaware of the personally relevant information publicly available on social media. A large amount of use of social media blocked individuals from managing their privacy information.

#### 4. Conclusion

Privacy and self are critical to our lives, and the development has pushed our world into a brand new stage. At the same time, we are moving on to the electronic age. The notion of self and the concept of privacy gradually changed through online social media.

Social media has abstracted the notion of self. By using tags and thinking of self in an easy-memorized way. Apart from making self less detailed, social media changed the concept of self by adding the ideal self into the real world. The distinction between the authentic and ideal selves has both good and negative implications. Furthermore, social media confuses the idea of privacy, and consumers have difficulty determining whether data will be utilized unlawfully and in huge amount of data called Big Data.

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