

Self-Presentation Theory

Self-presentation is an influential theory in sociology, aiming to explain how individuals develop, shape, and maintain their impressions in society.

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Theory Factsheet

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Introduction

Self-presentation theory explains how individuals use verbal and non-verbal cues to project a particular image in society (Goffman, 1959). The theory draws on dramaturgy metaphors, such as backstage and frontstage, as a lens to explore human behaviour in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Using dramaturgy as an analytical tool dates back to Nicholas Evreinov's (1927) research on theatrical instincts, as well as Kenneth Burke's (1969) work evaluating and scrutinising dramatic action (Shulman, 2016). Continuing this discourse, Erving Goffman (1959) offered a rich vein of theoretical concepts in sociology by drawing on theatre metaphors. While sociology research at that time focused on broader societal forces and structures, self-presentation theory emphasised individual behaviours and offered a lens to evaluate how performers interact with others to achieve personal goals (Goffman, 1959). Key to self-presentation theory is the notion of impression management and the routines that individuals play to manage an audience's perception. As a result, self-presentation is crucial in developing one's social identity. Thus, the theory paved the way for a better understanding of identity development through the performance acts of individuals in society.

Theory

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theorisation, self-presentation is defined as individuals' actions to control, shape, and modify the impressions other people have of them in a particular setting. In other words, individuals' "*performance is socialised, moulded, and modified to fit into the*

understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman, 1959:p44). Hence, self-presentation holds a strategic value to individuals as impressions influence how others assess, treat, and reward them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). For instance, in a workplace setting, impressions may shape personal success and career progression (Gardner & Martinko, 1988).

Self-presentation theory draws on the traditions of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986). Goffman suggests six key principles of the theory (Goffman, 1959; Shulman, 2016). First, individuals are performers who express their self to society. In practice, individuals highlight a persona and project a particular image to others. Such a projection is a means to show their identity and who they are to the society. Second, individuals want to put forward a credible image. They do so by being truthful and authentic in the way they present themselves. They showcase their expertise in a particular domain. Third, individuals take special care to avoid presenting themselves "*out of character*". They strive to ensure that their performance or communication aligns with their role and identity in society. Fourth, if a performance is inadequate and not up to the mark, individuals address or repair it by engaging in restorative actions. Such actions ensure that their desired image is not tarnished. Fifth, self-presentation occurs in social places, known as regions of performance. Such regions in everyday life include the workplace, social gatherings, and social media. As such, they are "*platforms*" for self-presentation. Sixth, individuals work in teams and manage the impression of the collective to achieve common goals. In other words, a performance may not always occur alone, but can take place in concert with other individuals.

Individuals enact self-presentation because they are motivated to maximise rewards and minimise punishment (Leary & Kowalski, 1990;Schlenker, 1980). More specifically, motivations include the desire to (i) enhance self-esteem, (ii) develop a self-identity, and (iii) generate social and material benefits (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In practice, people may strive to project an image that will result in praise and compliments, positively shaping one's self-esteem (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In contrast, individuals may avoid presenting an image that draws criticism and a lack of self-worth (Cohen, 1959). More specifically, a central motivation for self-presentation is to build an identity in society to foster a unique perception in the minds of others (Schlenker, 1980). Further, self-presentation is an adequate mechanism to foster rewards that can be social, including, trust, affection, and friendship. It can generate material benefits, such as financial gain (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Goffman (1959) uses the dramaturgical metaphor to explain the self-presentation theory and states that "*the theatre metaphor is the 'structure of the social encounter' that occurs in all social life*" (Adams & Sydie, 2002:p170). Drawing on dramaturgical metaphors, self-presentation comprises backstage and frontstage strategies akin to a theatre performance (Cho et al., 2018). These strategies are summarised in Table 1. Backstage relates to reflecting, practising, and taking adequate measures to prepare oneself (Goffman, 1959). Such practices occur in private and offer individuals a more comfortable atmosphere in which to prepare without the pressure from society, such as norms and expectations to behave in a certain way (Jeacle, 2014). The theory suggests the significance of rehearsal, which focuses on preparation work for the frontstage (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles, 2023). For instance, individuals can practise and adjust their presentation at home before a formal client meeting.

Table 1: Self-presentation strategies

Self-presentation strategies	Key activities
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Rehearsal	Preparing for self-presentation
Idealisation	Performing an ideal accredited impression
Mystification	Holding the observers in a state of awe
Self-promotion	Demonstrating credibility and expertise
Exemplification	Expressing righteousness and ethicality
Supplication	Showing vulnerability and helplessness
Ingratiation	Fostering likability and attractiveness
Identification	Linking to a particular community
Basking in reflected glory	Associating with a particular person
Downward comparison	Projecting a superior image at the cost of others
Upward comparison	Act of comparing oneself with someone better
Remaining silent	Not forming specific views
Apology	The practice of showing remorse due to a wrong action and promising morally righteous conduct in the future
Corrective action	Suggesting action plans to avoid the recurrence of wrongdoing

In contrast, frontstage comprises the "*setting*", which includes the layout and objects in a particular room that set the scene for expression and action (Goffman, 1959). The setting is a place that is usually stable and unmovable, but at times can be relocated such as a circus (Goffman, 1959). Another key aspect of the frontstage is the "*personal front*", which relates to personal characteristics such as sex, age, and facial expressions (Goffman, 1959). These characteristics are signals that are either fixed or vary over time (Goffman, 1959). Fixed characteristics are, for instance, one's ethnic background, whereas characteristics that change include gestures based on one's mood. The theory suggests that the personal front can be better understood through the lens of appearance and manner. The former relates to one's temporal state such as work or leisure. The latter expresses the interaction role that one is likely to pursue in a given situation, like being professional and sincere (Goffman, 1959). Usually, there exists a coherence between the appearance and manner, although, at times, they may be misaligned (Goffman, 1959). For instance, a person of high status may behave in a way considered down to earth (Goffman, 1959).

Individuals can enact certain routines as part of their self-expression on the frontstage. At times, these routines can become institutionalised when an individual takes on specific roles in society (Goffman, 1959). The theory highlights the following routines: idealisation, mystification, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, ingratiation, identification, basking in reflected glory, downward comparison, upward comparison, remaining silent, apology, and corrective action (Schütz, 1998).

Idealisation relates to individuals performing an ideal accredited impression in society (Goffman, 1959). Idealisation is common in social stratification research: individuals strive to go higher up the ladder in the social strata and adjust their self-presentations to reflect that ideal state and value system. In practice, individuals gain insight into the sign equipment required to showcase idealisation, and subsequently use it to project the accredited social class. Mystification is pursued by reducing contact and increasing social distance with the audience to create a sense of awe (Goffman, 1959). It is a means of limiting familiarity with others. For instance, mystification was used by Kings and Queens to foster an impression of power. The audience responded in a way that respected their mystic and sacred identity.

Self-promotion is pursued to create a credible image of oneself in the minds of others (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1986; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Such a form of persuasion is relevant in various circumstances, such as job interviews, influencer marketing, and presidential speeches. For instance, a candidate applying for a digital marketing role may share reflections on their expertise in search engine optimisation. An influencer focusing on health and fitness may share online videos of their exercise regimes. A presidential candidate may talk about their vast political experience to project their leadership qualities. Therefore, self-promotion focuses on projecting oneself as an expert and capable person in a particular domain (Bande et al., 2019). However, the theory suggests the issue of misrepresentation: behaviours that represent a false front (Goffman, 1959). Individuals may use credible vehicle signs for the wrong reasons, such as deception and fraud (Goffman, 1959).

Exemplification strategy focuses on creating an impression of oneself as virtuous and honourable (Bonner, Greenbaum & Quade, 2017; Gardner, 2003; Schütz, 1997). In other words, exemplification relates to creating an identity that rests on the notion of morality and ethics. For instance, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) may publish posts on social media supporting charities, which projects a righteous image. Further, individuals regularly take a stand against harmful organisational behaviours, such as those engaging in child labour. While sharing their views on social media, those individuals exemplify a high moral ground and justify why organisations engaging in transgressions need to be held accountable. However, an exemplification strategy has its potential dangers. The society may question the motive behind such actions and consider it a means to cover up previous unethical deeds (Stone et al., 1997).

Supplication is based on showing oneself as vulnerable and frail to draw adequate support and help from others (Christopher et al., 2005; Korzynski, Haenlein & Rautiainen, 2021). The ingratiation strategy relates to creating a likable and attractive impression in a particular place offline, such as one's workplace, and online on social media (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016; Gross et al., 2021). For instance, an individual can project themselves to be professional and collegial in the workplace to foster goodwill and social approval.

The identification strategy puts emphasis on associating oneself with a particular community to create a specific image in society (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For instance, some consumers may link themselves to the Harley-Davidson community to create a rebellious and adventurous image (Schembri, 2009). Tattoos, leather jackets, and riding on Harley motorcycles in packs reinforce their identification (Schembri, 2009). A strategy that slightly overlaps with identification work is "*basking in reflected glory*" (Cialdini et al., 1976). In this case, an individual associates themselves with another person who has a positive impression in society and thus leverages those associations (Schütz, 1998).

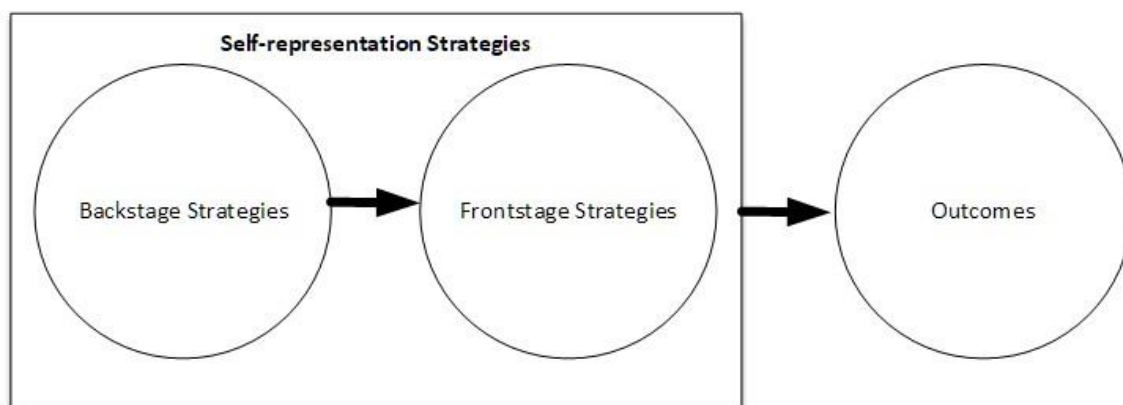
Downward comparison focuses on projecting oneself as superior and in a positive light to the detriment of others (Wills, 1981). One may witness downward comparison in politics as one presidential candidate expresses how their vision and proposed policies are superior compared to

another candidate. Upward comparison, however, is the practice of comparing oneself with someone better to improve one's self-evaluations and perceptions (Collins, 1996).

Remaining silent may be a particular practice for individuals to be neutral and not face any criticism or backlash (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Finally, particularly when one is responsible for an adverse event or has engaged in a wrong action, they may share an apology, defined as "*repenting and promising moral behaviour in the future*" (Hart, Tortoriello & Richardson, 2020:p2). They may suggest putting corrective measures in place so that it does not happen again in the future (Schütz, 1998).

Figure 1 offers a generic framework of self-presentation theory, comprising frontstage and backstage strategies that help attain specific outcomes (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The backstage and frontstage are inter-related. Backstage strategies often involve preparation, desk research, and due diligence to gain insight into a particular performance (Jacobs, 1992). As such, backstage is an unofficial channel for individuals to gain the necessary skills, attributes, and contextual understanding to perform certain routines (Tiilikainen et al., 2024). Subsequently, individuals enact frontstage strategies involving those practised routines and impressions in a social context (Schütz, 1997).

Figure 1: Framework for self-presentation strategies



To ensure adequate self-presentation, the theory suggests various means by which impression management can be pursued in the right way and includes defensive and protective practices (Goffman, 1959) as well as maintaining the definition of the situation (Tiilikainen et al., 2024). Defensive practices pursued by performers are a means for individuals and teams to safeguard their own performance. It requires discipline, whereby individuals have "*presence of mind*". Disciplined individuals are resilient to unexpected circumstances and are sufficiently agile to ensure the performance attains its goal. In addition, individuals can enact circumspection by adequately preparing to offer a high-quality performance (Goffman, 1959). This involves taking time to design the performance and enacting foresight and prudence. Individuals may even show loyalty and devotion to other team members to ensure the overall impression does not fail (Goffman, 1959). When individuals reveal secrets or problems to outsiders, it damages the image of the team.

Protective practices, however, are pursued by audience members to help the performers manage their impressions (Goffman, 1959). They do so by not intruding on the back or frontstage. In practice, etiquette is maintained by not involving oneself in others' personal matters. Permission and

consent are exercised to gain access. For instance, salespersons usually introduce themselves first and ask permission to discuss a product or service. However, the audience can exercise extra understanding and empathy when performance is not up to the mark for a person learning their trade (Goffman, 1959).

Finally, by maintaining a definition of the situation, individuals can develop an *"agreed upon, subjective understanding of what will happen in a given situation or setting, and who will play which roles in the action"* (Crossman, 2019). As a result, the concept defines the social order and gives symbolic meaning to human interactions that occur in everyday life (Tiilikainen et al., 2024). When the definition of the situation is not maintained or broken, the performance becomes ineffective and may even collapse (Tiilikainen et al., 2024).

Institutions shape how performers present themselves in everyday life. Goffman (1983:p1) used the terminology - interaction order – to explain the *"loose coupling between interaction practices and social structure"* and how *"the workings of the interaction order can easily be viewed as the consequence of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of ground rules for a game, the provisions of a traffic code or the rules of syntax of a language"*. As such, the interaction order offers rules and norms that shape one's behaviour in society. At an extreme level, institutions can have high levels of dominance and control, which Goffman (1961) defines as total institutions, which are often applied in prisons, military organisations, and even hospitals. Total institutions exert control over individuals' daily routines, movements, and even identities (Goffman, 1961). The theoretical properties of total institutions include role dispossession i.e., *"the process through which new recruits are prevented from being who they were in the world they inhabited prior to entry"* (Shulman, 2016:p103). This involves trimming or programming, which relates to individuals being *"shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations"* (Goffman, 1986:p16). Individuals in a total institution are forced to give up their identity kit i.e., personal belongings that give meaning to who they are in society (Shulman, 2016).

Theoretical developments

Since Goffman's original work, scholars have advanced the theoretical properties of self-presentation. Specifically, in sharp contrast to total institutions, Scott (2011:p3) suggested the notion of reinventive institutions, defined as *"a material, discursive or symbolic structure in which voluntary members actively seek to cultivate a new social identity, role or status. This is interpreted positively as a process of reinvention, self-improvement or transformation. It is achieved not only through formal instruction in an institutional rhetoric, but also through the mechanisms of performative regulation in the interaction context of an inmate culture"*. Reinventive institutions are much more relevant in modern life, whereby individuals want to go through a transformation of their self and create a new identity (Scott, 2011). In other words, they want to let go of their previous self in pursuit of a reinvigorated new persona. Illustrative cases of reinventive institutions include spiritual communities and lifestyle groups (Shulman, 2016). Individuals are not forced to enter these communities; rather, they do so entirely voluntarily (Scott, 2010). These institutions are self-organising, i.e., the community members keep a check on each other to maintain the collective norms (Huber et al., 2020).

In contrast to Goffman's original theorisation of self-presentation in face-to-face, offline interactions, research work has extended the theory to evaluate online impression management (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran & Shahar, 2016; Ranzini & Hoek, 2017; Rui & Stefanone, 2013). In practice, individuals use technology features such as text, images or videos to signal and manage their online image. This contrasts with non-verbal signals, such as body language, which are often common in offline interactions. Online impression management can be managed more conveniently as

individuals can develop, change, or edit informational cues in a way that suits their purpose (Sun, Fang & Zhang, 2021). However, individuals' digital footprint may remain over time online, and it can be viewed and accessed by others anytime (Hogan, 2010). This relates to the problem of "stage breach", where data about individuals' private lives are retrievable on search engines and social media platforms (Shulman, 2016). As such, the internet has caused the blurring of boundaries between back and frontstage, a phenomenon dubbed as "collapsed contexts" (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), defined as "a flattening of the spatial, temporal, and social boundaries that otherwise separate audiences on social networking sites" (Duguay, 2016:p892). In response, individuals may use privacy filters or even delete content posted in the past that may negatively influence their image in society (DeAndrea, Tong & Lim, 2018).

Due to the advent of social media, Hogan (2010) extended Goffman's theorisation by differentiating between "performances" and "exhibitions" that occur online. Performances, similar to Goffman's dramaturgy metaphor, occur in real-time, such as in chat rooms, online meetings, and live streams. In this case, the situation is synchronous, and performances are time-bound (Hogan, 2010). However, exhibitions do not occur in real time, and individuals use technology artifacts afforded by social media to curate content (Hogan, 2010). These include posting a status update, uploading a photo album, or sharing a pre-recorded, edited video. As a result, exhibitions occur in asynchronous situations.

Overall, self-presentation theory provides a dramaturgy analytical lens for researchers to evaluate human behaviour in face-to-face and online interactions that involve synchronous and/or asynchronous situations. It offers a range of back and frontstage strategies that individuals and teams enact to manage their impressions in society, also suggesting that the broader institutional environment shapes how they behave in everyday life. Table 2 summarises the key conceptual definitions of self-presentation theory.

Table 2: Key concepts and definitions

Concepts	Definitions
Performance	Actions or behaviours pursued by individuals that are in line with the definition of the situation
Performers	Actors, individuals, or collaborators who play a role in the performance
Frontstage	A metaphorical official stage or a social situation where individuals can present their self through strategies such as self-promotion and supplication
Backstage	A metaphorical unofficial stage where individuals can prepare, gain insight into the contextual situation and reflect on how to manage their self-image
Setting	The layout and objects in a particular social context that set the scene for a performance
Personal front	Personal attributes that showcase one's signals, which are either fixed or vary over time

Appearance	The temporal state of a performer, such as work or leisure
Manner	The interaction role that a performer is likely to enact in a particular social context
Defensive practices	Performers pursuing specific actions to safeguard their performance
Protective practices	Audience members pursuing certain actions to support the performers in their impression management pursuits
Definition of situation	Developing a common understanding of or consensus about particular situations in terms of the role individuals will play and the behavioural expectations in that social context
Interaction order	<i>"Loose coupling between interaction practices and social structure"</i> (Goffman, 1983:p1)
Total institutions	<i>A "place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life"</i> (Goffman, 1968:p11)
Trimming or programming	<i>Individuals being "shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations"</i> (Goffman, 1986:p16)
Identity kit	Personal belongings and artifacts that give meaning to one's identity
Reinventive institutions	<i>"A material, discursive or symbolic structure in which voluntary members actively seek to cultivate a new social identity, role or status"</i> (Scott, 2011:p3)
Collapsed contexts	<i>"A flattening of the spatial, temporal, and social boundaries that otherwise separate audiences on social networking sites"</i> (Duguay, 2016:p892)
Exhibitions	<i>"A site (typically online) where people submit reproducible artifacts"</i> (Hogan, 2010:p381)

Applications

Self-presentation theory is primarily anchored in sociology. However, other disciplines, such as management, marketing, and information systems, have extended the application of the theory in their respective contexts, such as work, social media, and branding. As such, the sociology discipline sheds light on the theoretical aspects of self-presentation, including its strategies, motivations, and application of the theory in everyday life (Goffman, 1959; Lewis & Neighbors, 2005; Schütz, 1998; Vohs, Baumeister & Ciarocco, 2005). Based on the theory, management scholars have investigated the application of self-presentation at work at two levels: individual and organisational (Bolino et al.,

2008; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Cook et al., 2024; Windscheid et al., 2018). At an individual level, self-presentation theory has been extensively applied to evaluate job interviews and performance appraisals (Kim et al., 2023; Moon et al., 2024). The theory is highly appropriate when determining individuals' success or failure in securing work in organisations, as well as their job performance and career success (Gioaba & Krings, 2017; Bolino et al., 2008). For instance, leaders and managers who engage in appropriate self-presentation are more likely to generate "buy-in" and support from colleagues about their suggestions and action plans (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). Research has even investigated how employees manage their impressions when interacting with colleagues on social media (Sun, Fang & Zhang, 2021; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg, 2013). This is crucial yet challenging because employees simultaneously have to manage their work and personal identities on social media (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg, 2013). In addition, research looked into how entrepreneurs managed their impression after the failure of their business (Kibler et al., 2021; Shepherd & Haynie, 2011). They do so to retain their credibility for future entrepreneurial ventures (Kibler et al., 2021).

At an organisational level, empirical work has examined organisational impression management (Benthaus, Risius & Beck, 2016; Carter, 2006; Schniederjans, Cao & Schniederjans, 2013). This is defined as "*any action that is intentionally designed and carried out to influence an audience's perceptions of the organisation*" (Bolino et al., 2008:p1095). Studies have explored how organizational impression management strategies focus on assertive strategies to create a positive public image, such as sharing recent achievements (Mohamed, Gardner & Paolillo, 1999). In contrast, reactive strategies are used to manage crisis situations that tarnish the reputation of an organisation (Jin, Li & Hoskisson, 2022; Rim & Ferguson, 2020). Studies have also investigated how impression management of particular individuals (such as CEOs) shapes organisational image and performance (Cowen & Montgomery, 2020; Im, Kim & Miao, 2021). In contrast, research examined how organisational factors (e.g., culture) shape employee conduct in the workplace in a way that aligns with the values and norms expected in the organisation (Ashford et al., 1998).

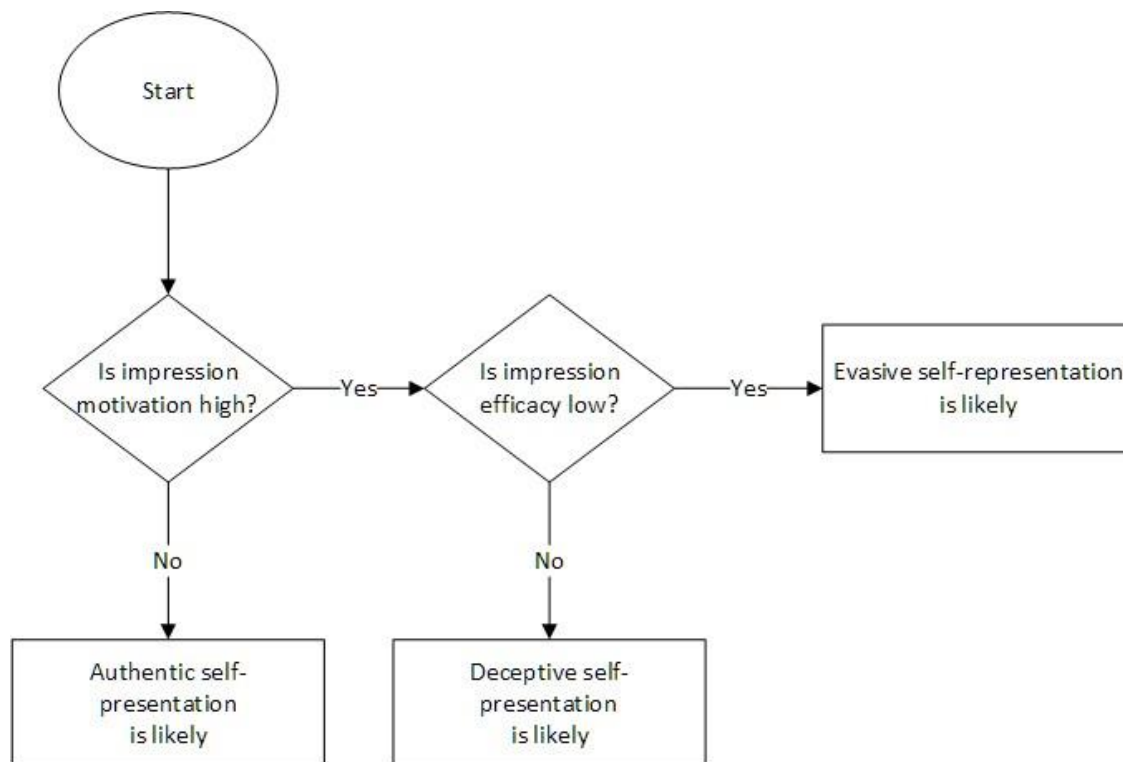
In contemporary marketing, the metaphor of dramaturgy, which is central to impression management, has been used in retail and service research to investigate how to enhance customer experience (Bitner, 1992). In practice, the front and backstage have been effectively used to offer guidelines and implications to improve retail and service environments (Grove, Fisk & John, 2000). The marketing field even provides insight into how brands play a role in self-presentation (Ferraro, Kirmani & Matherly, 2013; Lee, Ko & Megehee, 2015). In particular, consumers often use and purchase brands that relate to a specific self-concept they strive to build and maintain (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2022; Clark, Slama & Wolfe, 1999). In other words, brands offer consumers identity artifacts or props to express themselves. For instance, research by Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022) finds that consumers find cool brands (original, iconic, and popular brands) valuable to construct their cool identity. This phenomenon is pertinent to luxury brands, which enable consumers to project a classy, high-status image in society (Kim & Oh, 2022). However, such consumer practices may backfire. Other people (or observers) may have negative perceptions of consumers using brands in a conspicuous or attention-seeking way (Ferraro, Kirmani & Matherly, 2013) and perceive them as having dark personalities, including narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Rasmus, Czarna & Fortuna, 2023). Observers even perceive consumers who use luxury brands to have lower levels of warmth (Cannon & Rucker, 2019). Managing impressions in marketing applies to buyer-seller relationships (Fisk & Grove, 1996). For example, sales professionals are often required to project an expert image. Impression management is also core to business-to-business marketing management, for instance, to remain resilient in crises (Alo et al., 2023; Lan & Sheng, 2023).

Information systems researchers have effectively investigated how technology can be used in the self-presentation process (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012; Ma & Agarwal, 2007; Shi, Lai & Chen, 2023). The theoretical integration of self-presentation and technology is particularly relevant due to

the advent of the internet, social media, metaverse, and artificial intelligence. For instance, Ma and Agarwal (2007) examined how technology artifacts afforded by virtual communities, such as avatars, nicknames, digital photographs and personal pages, enable users to enact self-presentation to create their identity. They find that when people have perceived verified identities, defined as "*perceived confirmation from other community members of a focal person's belief about (their) identities*" (p. 46), it encourages the person to share knowledge with others in the virtual community. It even increases their satisfaction level with the community. Another study found that the desire for online self-presentation, defined as the "*extent to which an individual wants to present his or her preferred image in a virtual community of interest,*" encourages individuals to purchase digital items, such as avatars and image files (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012:p1235). These digital items are artifacts for self-expression and communication (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012). The authors argue that the desire for online self-presentation in virtual communities is influenced by three factors: self-efficacy, norms, and involvement. They suggest that individuals who believe in their own capability to adequately develop a desired perception of themselves in the virtual community are more likely to engage in self-presentation work. Also, if the virtual community norms (rules and expectations) are conducive to self-presentation, the desire for self-presentation is stimulated. Further, if individuals are involved with the virtual community, i.e., they can relate to the community members, feel a strong affinity with them, and invest time and resources in the community, then it increases one's desire for self-presentation. Chen and Chen (2020) suggest that the perceived value of those digital items encourages users to make a purchase. Yet in another study, Oh, Goh and Phan (2023) offer interesting insights and show that social media users are more inclined to share positive news to their network as part of their image-building process, as opposed to negative or controversial news. The reason is that sharing positive news reinforces one's positive self-identity. In fact, such sharing behaviours are particularly relevant for users with a broader social network as they have a higher disposition to maintain a positive self-image (Oh, Goh & Phan, 2023).

Self-presentation theory has been applied to effectively explore human deception (DeAndrea et al., 2012; Toma, Hancock & Ellison, 2008). Individuals may apply impression management strategies to falsely show themselves favourably to achieve their desired goals (Petrescu, Ajjan & Harrison, 2023). Research shows that individuals whose motivation to produce a positive impression in a group is low are likely to present themselves in an authentic way (Wooten & Reed, 2000). Similarly, if individuals are highly motivated to create a favourable image, they are not likely to use deception in a group unless they possess the self-efficacy to engage in deceptive work (Wooten & Reed, 2000). Meanwhile, those with low self-efficacy will probably pursue evasive self-presentation practices, such as stalling or repressing information (Wooten & Reed, 2000). Self-efficacy in the context of impression management means the extent to which an individual can control and manage their impression. It is subject to the requirements or demands of self-presentation in a particular social context, and the capabilities one possesses to achieve those demands (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Figure 2 offers a framework that highlights deceptive self-presentation work in groups.

Figure 2: Behavioural consequences of self-presentational concerns among focus group participants. Source Wooten & Reed (2000)



Importantly, with the advancements in digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and deepfakes, individuals can develop content that may look real even though it is not (Mustak et al., 2023; Vasist & Krishnan, 2023). As a result, it has become extremely challenging to differentiate between authentic and fabricated content. This is further exacerbated as individuals can use digital tools, such as video filters, to project a misleading identity (Herring et al., 2024).

Limitations

Sociologists suggest that self-presentation theory, rooted in symbolic interactionism, focuses on micro-level interpretations of signs and meanings but offers a limited understanding of the broader societal factors and powers that influence individuals' lives (Shulman, 2016). Moreover, management studies criticise the analytical ability of a theatre metaphor to explore impression management within organisations (Shulman, 2016). While self-presentation theory may be a useful framework, the extent to which a theatre's characteristics relate to an organisation has been questioned (Shulman, 2016). This limitation is acknowledged by Goffman, who states in his book that "*the perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones ... In using this model I will attempt not to make light of its obvious inadequacies. The stage presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real.*" (Goffman, 1959). Ongoing management research is attending to this limitation by investigating how employees manage their impression towards their co-workers and supervisors in organisations (Huang, Paterson & Wang, 2024).

Along the same lines, scholars have questioned the validity of a "performance" in self-presentation and whether such rituals are relevant in today's society (Williams, 1986). The theory focuses on face-to-face interactions to manage impressions (Williams, 1986). Blumer (1972) suggests that the theory "*stems from the narrowly constructed area of human group lifelimited the area of face-to-face association with a corresponding exclusion of the vast sum of human activity falling outside such*

association." However, ongoing scholarly work is addressing this limitation by evaluating self-presentation in online environments, such as social media (Klostermann et al., 2023; Seidman, 2013). Self-presentation theory focuses heavily on the individual, and its applications to teams have received comparatively limited attention and extension (Blumer, 1972). As a result, recent research has looked into impression management on teamwork and team satisfaction (Schiller et al., 2024).

Scholars suggest that although Goffman's conceptualisation of the interaction order offers a unique yet descriptive theoretical property, it provides limited knowledge of how the interaction order evolves over time and the explanatory variables that could suggest how and why the change occurred (Colomy & Brown, 1996). Importantly, Goffman's conceptualisation of total institutions has received criticism in terms of its theoretical scope and generalisability, as not all organisations, such as mental hospitals, exert extreme control (Lemert, 1981). The total institution does not consider differences in "*organisational goal, professional ideology, staff personality*" (Weinstein, 1982:p269). Thus, research has looked into the application of impression management under different institutional environments, uncertainties in the business environment, and organisational motives (Ahmed, Elsayed & Xu, 2024; Busenbark, Lange & Certo, 2017).

Concepts

Rehearsal (Independent): The preparation work for the frontstage (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles, 2023)

Self-promotion (Independent): The creation of a credible image of oneself in the minds of others (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1986)

Exemplification (Independent): The creation of an impression of oneself as virtuous and honourable (Gardner, 2003)

Supplication (Independent): The action of showing oneself as vulnerable and frail to draw adequate support and help from others (Christopher et al., 2005)

Ingratiation (Independent): The practice of creating a likable and attractive impression in a particular place (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016)

Identification (Independent): The action of associating oneself with a particular community to create a specific image in society (Brewer & Gardner, 1996)

Basking In Reflected Glory (Independent): The action of associating oneself with another person who has a positive impression in society to leverage those associations (Schütz, 1998)

Downward Comparison (Independent): The action of projecting oneself as superior and in a positive light to the detriment of others (Wills, 1981)

Upward Comparison (Independent): The action of comparing oneself with someone superior (Collins, 1996)

Remaining Silent (Independent): The practice for individuals to be neutral and not face any criticism or backlash by not engaging in the conversation (Schütz, 1998)

Apology (Independent): The practice of showing remorse due to a wrong action and promising morally righteous conduct in the future. (Hart, Tortoriello & Richardson, 2020)

Self-esteem (Dependent): The belief of having self-worth (Leary & Kowalski, 1990)

Self-identity (Dependent): The practice of creating a unique perception of oneself in public (Leary & Kowalski, 1990)

Social And Material Benefits (Dependent): Social rewards relate to non-financial aspects of life such as trust, affection, and friendship. Material rewards include financial gains. (Leary & Kowalski, 1990)

Backstage Strategy (Independent): The practice of reflecting, practising, and taking adequate measures to prepare oneself (Goffman, 1959)

Frontstage Strategy (Independent): The presentation of self in public or in society (Goffman, 1959)

Idealisation (Independent): Performing an ideal accredited impression (Goffman, 1959)

Mystification (Independent): Holding the observers in a state of awe (Goffman, 1959)

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