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Analysing Impression Management through Mediated Communication: A Linguistic and Thematic Study of Select Social Blogs

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Abstract

As human communication operates within the ambit of social dynamics, impression management becomes indispensable in constructing and managing identity. Every individual, consciously or unconsciously, is engaged in controlling how others perceive them. This article explores strategies for identity construction and perception management in mediated space in the digital age. The study focuses on select social blogs authored by writers for social causes or social organisations, and analyses them linguistically and thematically. It comprehensively examines the persuasive strategies these blogs employ to construct and represent desired identities. The findings reveal that communication through mediated space enables social awareness and amplifies marginalised voices through a thoughtful, succinct use of language.

Keywords: Mediated communication, Impression management, social blogs, feminism.

Introduction

Besides being a tool for communication, language also serves as a medium through which individuals construct and negotiate identity. First conceptualized by Goffman in 1959, *Impression Management* is a broad term that refers to the effective use of communication strategies to influence how individuals perceive one another. It is both a conscious and a subconscious process that attempts to regulate

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or shape the communicators' perceptions. It is an interplay between identity and reality. In a world marked by the digital turn, mediated communication is widely used in various forms for social interaction. It helps one influence others' thoughts through powerful word choice, themes, and a compelling call to action by providing enough space to curate and revise the content before publication. The increasing accessibility of social platforms and the desire to explore new realms have paved the way for the widespread use of social blogs to sensitize people to social concerns and to disseminate their ideas and beliefs. Therefore, impression management through mediated communication is of great importance, not only helping an author, writer, philanthropist, and scholar articulate their social beliefs or standpoints, but also serving as a powerful medium for developing the desired consciousness of skewed representations and marginalized/silenced social issues. In light of the above discussion, the present study focuses on select social blogs authored by writers for a social cause or a social organisation and analyses them linguistically and thematically. It comprehensively examines the persuasive strategies these blogs employ to construct and represent desired identities.

Impression management and mediated communication

Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC), as defined by Higgins (1991) and Metz (1994), refers to interaction facilitated through digital platforms. Unlike face-to-face interactions, mediated communication allows for revision, curation, and control, making it an ideal medium for strategic self-presentation. Blogs, as mediated communication, serve as reflective spaces where personal and political identities intersect. The major functions a blog performs are listed below:

a) *Blogs as an education tool*: They enable potential learners to acquire knowledge and gain information about various aspects of learning. Blogs are not confined to one topic or subject matter; they can be published on any topic that is of interest to the author. Deng and Yuen (2010) have proposed an empirically grounded framework for educational blogging that highlights self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction, and reflective dialogue.

b) *Blogs as cognitive and collaborative learning tool*: Blogs are a potent tool that empowers the prospective learners to become proficient, develop thinking and cognitive skills, and be rational decision makers. A blog offers extended interactivity, increasing students' involvement and motivation (Eteokleous-Grigoriou and Nisiforou, 2013).

c) *Blogs as a platform for discussion*: It permeates space to exchange ideas and opinions on a wide scale. It offers a dynamic space for open communication.

Since the blogs are educational, collaborative, and dynamic, the platform serves as a significant mediated communication tool for impression management. It helps to share thoughts and experiences, which is less likely to happen in spontaneous communication.

Mediated communication triggers a response through thoughtful, succinct language. With the surge in technological advancements and their widespread accessibility worldwide, mediated communication has become the most instrumental tool for educating prospective audiences and shaping their understanding of an issue. As is well known, written communication is permanent and reliable, and publishing a blog, article, or journal is always one of the most tactful ways to convey one's message and elicit a response. Mediated communication in writing triggers a response from the audience better than face-to-face communication does, as it is not spontaneous, and the author can deliberately use powerful words that might create an emotional dilemma in readers' minds.

Impression Management

Impression Management is one of the most central concepts discussed by Goffman (1959), a Canadian-born sociologist renowned for his contributions to social theory. He unfurled the idea of "Self-Representation" in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He conceptualizes impression management as a process of regulating or influencing others' opinions of oneself through the use of multiple stratagems. He explicitly identifies it as a theatrical performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. (Goffman 8) As discussed by Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday* Life (1959) and by Adler and Rodman in *Understanding*

Human Communication (2006), an integral part of impression management is the "Concept of Self". It explores the dual-faceted concept of self: Private and Public. People tend to exhibit more than one personality while interacting with others. The self that people do not wish to expose to others and rather keep mainly to themselves is called the "Private Self", and the other self that they exhibit whilst interacting with unfamiliar people is called the "Public Self".

It is later defined (Schlenker, cited in Leary and Kowalski) as the "attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions." (34) Impression management does not entail the concept of malingering or feigning one's identity in order to gain a desirable impression only, but also subsumes achieving a befitting and appreciative response. It postulates that every person has some definite control over how others perceive them. Goffman's conceptualization of impression management is restricted to the role of self-presentation in producing social reality. He excludes the significance of "inner psychological factors in social interactions." (Leary and Kowalski 35) The scholars further emphasize that impression management is an umbrella term that encompasses "all behavioral attempts to create impressions in others' minds. People attempt to create impressions not only of their personal attributes, but also of their attitudes, moods, roles, status, physical states, interests, beliefs, and so on." (39) Thus, they establish an understanding of impression management as a concept that implies impression motivation and impression construction.

In a broader sense, impression management primarily focuses on self-ingratiation, self-disclosure, and self-promotion. As discussed in UK Essays (2018), seven major impression management techniques are used to influence how others perceive an individual. These are as follows:

1. *Conformity*: Conformity means to conform one's behaviour to a distinct set of rules to seem favourable and desired.
2. *Excuses*: It refers to giving explanations of a problematic situation in order to moderate or dwindle the intensity of the punishment that might result as a consequence of it.
3. *Acclaim:* It refers to addressing the audience with honour and indulging in self-recognition of the remarkable excellence

achieved for some tasks. It acts as an accolade for an individual who pushes them to be more efficient and result-driven.

4. *Flattery*: Flattery means to express admiration only to appear mellow and gracious. People often blandish others to influence their perception of themselves.
5. *Apologies:* This means to admit and be accountable for an action or a gesture. It aims to seek pardon from someone while, at the same time, appearing wanted and admirable.
6. *Favours:* Favours means to commit an action for someone to seek approval. They are not intended with a genuine desire to help someone, but rather to yearn for recognition and approbation. People do favours when they wish to gain something from someone in the future.
7. *Association:* Association refers to associating or fraternizing with someone in order to boost growth and glorification. Some people frequently align themselves with stronger or more recognised personalities to become popular and sought after.

These strategies of self-promotion, ingratiation, and self-disclosure work mticulously for impression motivation and impression construction.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study specified in the Introduction section, the following research questions are proposed:

1. How is impression management performed by bloggers when presenting stigmatized identities in mediated communication?
2. What rhetorical and linguistic strategies are used in blogs to challenge stereotypes and reshape audience perceptions?
3. How does self-disclosure in blogs contribute to digital activism and awareness-building about marginalized identities?

Methodology

The present work is qualitative in nature. It analyses the themes and language employed in the parent blog titled "10 Thought-Provoking Social Justice Blogs Everyone Should Read", published on the Human Rights Careers platform. The main blog includes ten hyperlinks to feminist sub-blogs authored by individuals and collectives, such as:

- Janet Mock (Redefining Realness)
- Mia McKenzie (Black Girl Dangerous)
- Hollaback!
- Crunk Feminist Collective
- UC Social Justice
- Campus Pride
- Real Coloured Girls
- Peace and Justice Centre

The analysis is dissected into seven broad, critical parameters: blog aim and purpose, central theme (s), recurrent and underlying themes, target audience, level of intellect, language use, and word choice and diction. Sub-categorically, it delves deep into aspects like treatment of women, sexual orientation, gender disparity, and social stance.

Discussion

To begin with, the title, *10 Thought-Provoking Social Justice Blogs Everyone Should Read*, makes it clear that the blog is rooted in the ideologies promulgated by various organizations that blatantly support and endorse feminist views. The entire blog is deeply woven with ideas about the dynamics of social issues. As is well known, social concerns are ubiquitous and manifest in diverse forms; likewise, the selected blog offers ten hyperlinks that allow the reader to explore various dimensions of feminism. From feminist organizations to transgender and LGBTQ rights, these dimensions embody interwoven societal phenomena. Some key aspects of the analysis are:

1. *Aim and Purpose*: Beginning with the most zoomed out perspective, the blog is published on the 'Human Rights

Career portal', which in itself means how expansive the reach of the blog is, indicating alongside the gravity of its significance and exigence. The 'Human Rights Career' site aims to inform and train aspiring individuals with the help of online courses, internships, scholarships, career-related activities, etc. Additionally, it serves as a medium for raising awareness of acute incidents of discrimination and barbarity. The purpose of the blog, along with raising awareness, is to invite prospective individuals who are defenders of human rights and sometimes the victims of discrimination. Their hankering to share their experiences becomes evident and crucial for the world and for any individual who might be a victim of it. Essentially, it offers a professional training and coaching platform, headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

The parent blog, published on a professional human rights platform, is educational and advocacy-oriented. It highlights feminist organizations and their contributions to gender and social justice movements, encouraging both awareness and engagement. Sub-blogs vary in scope, ranging from memoir-style storytelling to structured educational content, which serve as a means of feminist resistance and identity assertion.

2. *Placement of Themes*: The title of the blog is well-curated and evocatively suggests the theme that is precisely the focal attention of it. The blog focuses on apprising the audience, particularly about ten feminist organizations that are instrumental worldwide in raising awareness and magnifying the dimensions of organizational transformations in feminist groups. The paramount theme of all ten blogs is to promote the rights of women across dynamic avenues, including feminism, colour bias, gender, race, LGBTIQ, etc. The blog advocates overcoming the stigma that has long pervaded our society. It targets the damaging beliefs about queer people, instigating anger and mental insanity. This blog provides individual information about 10 influential organizations, authors, and sub-blogs that raise awareness of the prevalent predicament, to tackle the longstanding infamy and disgrace levied upon them in unimaginable ways. In *UC Social Justice*, a blog authored by Elizabeth Gatten explores the themes of

breaking the shackles of debauchery and of Freedom. By beginning to narrate her own experience, "I came out as bisexual in 2018 after many years of confusion, frustration, and self-hate," she heroically talks about her delayed existence due to the rife stereotypes that surrounded her. Her playlist, featuring 15 singers, helped her find freedom from being someone else. Another prominent web platform, *Hollaback!* primarily caters to the theme of acute intimidation, violence, and brutality. With its very title, one can discern that its main aim is to empower women by controlling street harassment. In one of their blogs, "STAND UP AGAINST STREET HARASSMENT," they openly offer training to handle street abuse and harassment. In *Crunk Feminist Collective*, the major theme that unfolds is colour bias. The author ferociously advocates the rights of Black people by exploring themes of longing ("Black women demand health, peace, and the right to live free"), abduction ("Black children are missing and murdered"), violence ("restricted and controlled through violence by police"), and detonation ("Black churches are bombed and defaced"). *The Peace and Justice Centre*, one of the non-profit organizations, explores the theme of harmony and well-being by attempting to eradicate injustice and exploitation. It is established to guide the audience toward racial, economic, political, and social justice. Along with these, other themes include racial justice, raising awareness through educational programs, strict adherence to nonviolence, and togetherness.

3. *Recurrent themes*: The underlying and pressing themes are as follows:

    a) *Treatment of women*: The focal point of the entire blog, as the title suggests, is the treatment meted out towards women. As we witness in *Hollaback!* the severity of public harassment is depicted through personal incidents of manhandling. *Real Coloured Girls* reveals the trauma that dark-skinned women have to go through almost every time. *Black Girls Dangerous*, as the name suggests, gives voice to the queer and the tangled identity of the

marginalized girls. All these blogs clamour for peace and wish to eliminate the longstanding stigma.

b) *Social dynamics:* Society is plagued with rampant inequality about class, gender, race, etc. The blog by 'Human Rights Careers' deliberately emphasises the influx of pervasive social concerns. This explicitly shows that grave and despicable issues plague society. The ideas strongly adhere to the far-flung intermingled societal concerns like disparity based on colour, race, gender, etc.

Thus, themes like gender-based discrimination marked by harassment, colourism, and invisibility of marginalised women are recurring motifs in blogs like *Hollaback!* and *Real Coloured Girls*. The subject of queer and trans Identity is mediated through blogs such as *Redefining Realness* and *Campus Pride*. It foregrounds LGBTQ+ struggles, intersectionality, and acceptance. Another theme of race is propagated through *Crunk Feminist Collective* and *Black Girl Dangerous* that confront racism, white supremacy, and historical trauma. The blogs by *the Peace and Justice Centre* emphasise nonviolence, community activism, and systemic reform to combat discriminatory stances.

4. *Target Audience:* Since the blog centres on real social issues, it is significantly targeted at people worldwide. There is hardly any specific demographic target; rather, its reach and scope are global. The blog's audience spans a diverse range, especially those aged 15-40. *The Crunk Feminist Collective* blog and *Real Coloured Girls* by Christa Bell & Mako Fitts Ward, focused on the White racist people who sabotage and subdue the rights of the Black people. The target audience in *Hollaback!* is mainly blooming adolescent girls because the stories shared by various women show public harassment mainly in schools, subways, school gates, stations, etc. The target audience of the *Peace and Justice Centre* blog is mainly institutions, organizations, activists, groups, reformists, and the general public, all of whom aim to attain peace and create a conflict-free, civilized world. By tailoring language and

tone, authors address diverse audience needs—from intellectual engagement to emotional resonance.

5. *Level of intellect:* The targeted level of intellect in the *Real Coloured Girls* by Christa Bell & Mako Fitts Ward is thoughtful and scholarly. With the use of words such as "fervent ubiquity", "cusp of an archetypal transformation", and "misogynist patriarchies", the author aims to address the intellectual mass of people. With facilitative newsletters, educational programs, and courses, they can support the queer and make the campus free of LGBTQ bias.

6. *Word Choice & Diction*: The language throughout the blog is a blend of abstract and concrete nouns. Abstract words such as 'Race', 'Gender', Justice', 'Culture', 'Equality', 'feminism' are interconnected with concrete words such as 'Cincinnati', 'Janet Mock', 'Transwoman', 'book', 'New York', 'Activist', "Christina Bell", 'Feminist', "Mia McKenzie". This blend renders the blog assertive and evocative, highlighting the prevailing concerns and providing relevant measures to address the most acute issues. The word choice in *Redefining Realness* by Janet Mock and UC Social Justice is idiosyncratic, relying on personal experiences and exposure.

   Thus, the language in these blogs interweaves abstract nouns pertaining to justice, feminism, equality, and intersectionality with concrete referents of names, places, organizations, and personal incidents. Such a juxtaposition situates theoretical ideas in real-world contexts, thereby facilitating relatability and urgency. As remarked by Polkinghorne (2005)

   > To capture the richness of experience in language often requires the use of figurative expressions such as metaphors and narratives. These expressions expand the meanings contained in literal language to those that more closely indicate experienced meanings. (139).

   The word choice throughout is cogent and persuasive, with lived experience serving as a channel for broader social critique.

7. *Language Use:* The language of the blog is simple and concise. Its main focus is educating people about non-profit

organizations that raise awareness and advocate for women's rights, LGBTIQ issues, and indigenous and marginalized women. The word choice is coherent and transparent. It engages the audience. In the first blog, *UC Social Justice: They call us Monsters*, the language used is scholarly and intellectual. Words such as "delinquency jurisdiction", "desistance, recidivism, and rehabilitation," "presumed trajectory of brain development," etc., elucidate the visions of the author artistically. Janet Mock in 'Redefining Realness' expounds tremendously about the rights of trans and queer people, belonging to different colours, genders, and races. She uses subjective language to trigger emotions by blending in with individualistic experiences as a trans woman. In *the Campus Pride* sub-blog, the word choice is relatively more compelling and urgent. The author's language is crisp, and she endeavours to discuss oppression most intriguingly. Similarly, in *Crunk Feminist Collective*, the language used is clear and direct, yet is fierce and indignant at times. The author furiously uses phrases like "reveal this nation's bloody history" "nonsensical myth-making", "violent truths," etc. The language used in *Hollaback!* is utterly subjective, relying on individual experiences. Phrases such as "I was walking, "I experienced, "This occurred to me," etc., depict the instances that are privy to oneself and are written with a selective and personal sense.

The entire blog is based on factual and authentic data collected by diverse organizations. It frequently refers to observations and research to substantiate its stance. For instance, the UC Social Justice blog uses research-related phrases. The occurrence of phrases like "neuroimaging research by CLBB faculty clarifies, "A longitudinal study, "Pathways to Desistance," and "establishes the fact that their views are substantiated through authentic sources" indicates that the views are substantiated through authentic sources.

The blogs considered in this study strategically employ first-person narrative to build authenticity and emotional resonance. It also uses second-person appeals ("you", "your") to create direct engagement and employs rhetorical questions, metaphors, and repetition for emphasis. This use of personal pronouns and affective

language bridges private experience and public discourse. The use of personal pronouns augments credibility through experiential wisdom. The use of personal pronouns to depict an incident or event creates a compelling effect, adding value and sending a potentially powerful message to the audience. Broadly, *Redefining Realness* by Janet Mock and *UC Social Justice* extensively use personal pronouns, as their use depends on personal happenings and inspections. Words like 'I', 'my', and 'we' document the writers' history and past lives. Apart from them, *Black Girl Dangerous* by Mia McKenzie does not entirely present hard facts; rather, it sketches her life through personal observations and delves into the norms of gender, sexuality, and blackness. She also uses words like 'I', 'we', and 'us' to add realism through first-hand observation. With the help of the first sub-blog, *UC Social Justice*, Kennedy Womack uses a first-person narrative, "my time", "I did not realize", "I can attest", etc., to set forth his stance on Juvenile crimes. *Hollaback!* another influential organisation, uses its cover heading as "HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE ARE ON THE RISE WE'RE HERE TO END IT". It has also made extensive use of personal pronouns. Hence, the use of personal pronouns, second-person appeals, and other rhetorical devices helps strengthen the author's voice by adding a hint of experiential wisdom and a sound basis.

Conclusion

Blogs play a vital role in raising awareness and educating prospective audiences about various issues. With the surge in technology, mediated communication is advancing rapidly; people nowadays are becoming more conscious of the impact they might have when interacting across manifold social platforms. Well-written arguments, especially those concerning emotional and social issues, grip the audience. The blogs analysed in this study reflect the intersection of mediated communication, identity politics, and impression management. Through carefully curated narratives and methodical language, bloggers have sought to shape perceptions while advocating for systemic change. Mediated communication provides the space to disseminate personal truths, challenge dominant ideologies, and forge solidarity across diverse audiences. Thus, these blogs are not merely a medium of self-expression but a rhetorical practice of self-representation and resistance. The findings of this

study reflect the relevance of Goffman's theory in the age of digital activism. It addresses negative stereotypes through self-promotion that mostly displays stand-out strategies for managing/ regulating perception to mitigate discrimination and reframe stigma. Moreover, through strategies of self-disclosure, bloggers have shared their stigmatized identities to educate others and normalize their experiences. Impression management in these blogs, therefore, is layered and strategic, combining personal voice and emotive diction with social critique. Language in these blogs displays both a reflective and performative function, facilitating authenticity while persuading readers. Thus, the computer-mediated platforms enable bloggers to frame and reframe personal and collective realities, contributing to knowledge production and advocacy.

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