Balancing Digital Selves

Mediated Self-Presentation of Migrant Women in Germany on LinkedIn

MAYA HEMANT KRISHNA

ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary study is an exploration of how skilled migrant women located in Germany utilize LinkedIn, the online professional networking site, for the purposes of self-presentation. By specifically focussing on the type of content posted, the fundamental question examined is how migrant women showcase their professional identities along with their personal and intersectional identities. Literature on LinkedIn usage has focussed almost exclusively on user profiles, platform architecture or perceptions by recruiters/organizations. LinkedIn as a platform has drastically changed since 2020 and there is not as much scholarship available on the choices that users take to construct their digital self through LinkedIn posts. How do migrant women use the platform to establish their professional presence and expertise? Do the themes of migration, gender and challenges in the labour marketplace find space in their narratives? By conducting ten semi-structured interviews, this study aims to make a contribution to this space. This qualitative method was chosen to make an enquiry into the negotiations and positioning of multiple identities of the individuals and how they situate their lived experiences on a medium like LinkedIn. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, resulting in the emergence of three global themes related to: a) How platform architecture influences self-presentation, b) The construction of the digital self and negotiations made, c) The reflexive self that attempts to de-centre and address structural challenges. These findings illustrate the numerous struggles involved in self-presentation on LinkedIn, but also indicate how the platform is increasingly being co-opted by users to blur the boundaries between their professional and personal selves in order to take control of their narratives, be visible and vocal.

INTRODUCTION

As of April 2023, LinkedIn is one of the largest professional networking sites, reporting a user base of approximately 922 million users, with women accounting for 43.2% of this statistic (Kemp, 2023). LinkedIn has however differed from other social media platforms because its focus has been on the centring of the professional identity. This distinction, in turn, drew more rigid boundaries on the presentation of personal facets of the self. Twenty years after it began, LinkedIn is in the process of transforming itself beyond being a site for just business and networking. The addition of new features like Creator Mode, LinkedIn Live, LinkedIn Newsletter, LinkedIn Audio Events (Bhatti, 2023) and the organizational direction taken to identify and support creators (Adgully Bureau, 2022) illustrate where the platform is guiding its audience towards. The last few years have also indicated a shift in content on LinkedIn. Stories of the struggles involved in being a working parent, the loss of a job, problems posed by mental health, discrimination at the workplace, etc., are increasingly finding a space on LinkedIn feeds – thus blurring the boundaries between the professional and the personal self. Placed within this context, studying self-presentation on LinkedIn allows a glimpse into the processes that go into expressing complex, fragmented identities and lived experiences that work in tandem with a person's professional identity.

Understanding the state of migration with respect to Germany is also important to set the stage for this study. In the year 2022, it was reported that 351,000 people moved to Germany for the purposes of employment, indicating a sharp 19% increase from the previous year and a 244% increase over the past ten years (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), 2023). Germany has held a strong economic position in Europe since around 2009, but its ageing population and dwindling birth rate is creating workforce shortages, consequently generating an environment conducive for migration (Odendahl & Springford, 2017). From a policy perspective, the Immigration Act for Skilled Workers (Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz) passed in 2020 attempts to make the migration pathways for labour migrants easier, with a focus on appealing to qualified/highly-skilled workers (BAMF - Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023). However, over the years, have German workplaces enabled an easy integration for these foreign workers? And placed in this new environment, how do migrant workers manage their professional identities?

Hegde (2016: 21) succinctly captures the meeting point of the two contexts provided above by stating that 'new technologies enable both the disciplining and self-expression of migrant communities worldwide … to reinvent and redefine identity'. Globalization as well as social media platforms demand that the "self" is in constant circulation (Appadurai, 1996), requiring the adoption of promotional practices at the personal level (Wernick, 1991).

It is against this backdrop that the topic of enquiry for this study presented itself - the construction of migrant women's personal, intersectional and professional identities on LinkedIn. As previous research on LinkedIn has mostly centred around user profiles, platform architecture and audience perception, this study aims to make a contribution by investigating the relatively newer phenomenon of migrant users utilizing the post function frequently to strategically position themselves. The aim is to understand the motivations behind the type of content shared through LinkedIn posts, the cues that users intentionally include or exclude in their impression management strategies, the influences that impact it and the positioning that users aspire to achieve. This interdisciplinary study employs semi-structured interviews for data collection and the data is further analysed using thematic analysis to provide valuable insights that lie at the intersection of promotional culture practices (like personal branding) and identity construction of migrant women in Germany on LinkedIn.

This dissertation is structured into 7 sections. Chapter 2 introduces the relevant literature and concepts that ground the topic of study. Chapter 3 outlines the conceptual framework, while Chapter 4 presents the research objectives of the study. A detailed account of the research design and methodology is presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 elaborates on the results and interpretations related to the three themes that emerged. The last chapter summarizes the key findings and suggests relevant areas of further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores research related to self-presentation and situates it within the context of promotional cultures, especially relating to the field of personal branding. After briefly examining the literature available on LinkedIn, it looks at the intersection of migrant and gender identities. The sections ends with highlighting some of the important concepts linked to personal branding. This paper operationalizes the concept of the self as an organizational strand throughout this literature

review as it is strongly associated with the majority of the concepts mentioned below. Throughout this paper, the terms "identity" and "self" are also used interchangeably.

Self-presentation and Impression Management

Humans are multi-layered beings and in the presence of different people, situations and environments, the way we act and present ourselves varies. As these behavioural patterns exist not just in the physical environment, but also in the online spaces we inhabit, self-presentation in digital spheres is a topic of interest to scholars across disciplines like media and communication studies, sociology and psychology. Though this study focusses on online self-presentation, it is crucial to understand self-presentation in the pre-social media era as many of those elements are connected to the digital age.

Self-Presentation in an Offline World

Erving Goffman's (1956) seminal book, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" provides a good starting point for this discussion. He posits that by engaging in a "performance" of self-presentation, an individual attempts to control how others behave - hoping to influence their behaviour and the circumstances to accomplish the desired results. Individuals employ a range of strategic practices (Leary, 2019) to gain the approval as well as evade disapproval of others (Arkin, 1981; Goffman, 1956). Self-presentation involves the reciprocal exchange of packaged information between individuals and audiences in order to gain responses that help in the attainment of goals (Schlenker, 2012). Brewer and Gardener's (1996) framework on self-representation includes 3 types of definition of the self: personal, relational (in relation to others) and collective (in relation to a group). They emphasize that the important feature of the "collective self" is that it can function in the absence of personal relationships and relates to social identities. Through Foucault's (1988: 18) concept of "technologies of the self", it is seen that individuals attempt to transform themselves by actively participating in activities on their own or through the support extended by others 'in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'. According to him, the "technologies of the self" intersect with various other technologies, such as those linked to production (how things are created), power (how people behave and are subjected to domination/objectification) and sign systems (the process of meaning making through signs and symbols).

Therefore, the construction of the self doesn't just rest in the hands of the individual but is impacted by other occurrences too. For Giddens (1991: 2), the self must not be seen solely as a passive subject, but as a reflexive one where through 'forging their self-identities … individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications'. What Goffman's dramaturgical approach lacks is that it doesn't engage with the notion of power in an elaborate way and it doesn't focus on reflexivity, either in relation to the author himself or with the conditions of the social worlds that the book mentions (Giddens, 2009). Another weakness levelled against Goffman's theory is that it is rooted around the "situation" and disregards alterations in roles and social structures (Meyrowitz, 1986).

Similar to Hall's (1992) opinion about the multiplication of transient, temporary and perplexing identities, Brubaker (2020) asserts that the age of digital hyperconnectivity offers users an unending repository of "possible selves" - an event that can be rewarding as well as destabilizing. The next section discusses self-presentation in the digital age and how technological affordances impact the process of identity construction.

Social Network Sites and Self-Presentation in the Digital Age

Initially, the Internet was seen as a storehouse of information, but the introduction of social network sites (hereafter SNS) added the layer which allowed for the building of interpersonal relationships and social networks (Weaver & Morrison, 2008), infusing 'expectations of sociability, … conviviality, perhaps even empathy and support' (Parks, 2011: 106). Apart from being a vehicle for community building and self-expression, user-generated content on SNS can offer a path to self-actualization and realization (Hemetsberger, 2005; Shao, 2009). Hence, SNS became an important site for the production of the digital self (Bargh et al., 2002; Khamis et al., 2017; Papacharissi, 2018; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Turkle, 1996).

Building on an earlier definition which focussed on SNS in relation to profiles and user connections (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Gross & Acquisti, 2005), a newer definition of SNS centres around user-generated content and how it can be consumed, produced and interacted with (Ellison & boyd, 2013). For Castells (2013), this form of "mass self-communication" includes the possibility of reaching a mass audience, wherein the content is produced by the self, the message retrieval method is directed by the self and how the content is obtained and repurposed from cyberspace is also self-selected. The

oil that runs many SNS is the labour put in by their users through the sharing of life stories or self-branding (Khamis et al., 2017; Terranova, 2000).

However, this form of content is impacted by SNS architectures (van Dijck, 2009). Interestingly, Hogan (2010) contests Goffman's terminology of "performance" in relation to self-presentation and offers an alternative term for the self that is displayed online – an "exhibition". In his view, an online exhibition of the self includes data (artifacts) that can be replicated, stored in databases (storehouses) and managed by site-specific algorithms (curators) who distribute the above-mentioned artifacts to an audience. This audience can also evolve into virtual communities 'when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold, 1993: 6). In contrast, Papacharissi (2018) places immense importance on the influence of SNS architectures that offer the suggestion of "community" through the technological affordances in place.

The rapid rate at which platforms alter themselves by adding new features or algorithms requires individuals to constantly navigate these platform architectures to optimize their self-presentation strategies. Users face the additional challenge of "context collapse" wherein multiple audiences or contexts are merged into one (Marwick & boyd, 2011) which causes a shift 'by changing the "situation geography" of social life' (Meyrowitz, 1986: 6). Adding to the discussion on context collapse, "context collusions" and "context collisions" are seen as two aspects of the phenomenon (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). They posit that the former is an intentional blurring of contexts that can have advantages, while the latter can occur without the person's involvement and can result in unwanted consequences. Online affordances create "imagined audiences" (Marwick & boyd, 2011) as well as "conflicting social spheres" which can 'lead to tension and to destabilized social networks' (Binder et al., 2009: 965). Though people often use strategies to gain the approval of others through "acquisitive self-presentation", in order to deal with the above-mentioned phenomenon, they may indulge in adopting a form of "protective self-presentation" (Arkin, 1981). Individuals may also utilize the "lowest common denominator approach" wherein the content is produced with a hope that it appeals to all or a majority of the audiences that may encounter it (Hogan, 2010).

SNS like LinkedIn can be viewed as spaces that allow for the display of the "professional self-presentation" or the "public self" which vary from the depictions shared online with close friends and familial connections (van Dijck, 2013). She adds that the year 2008 marked the change where

community-oriented platforms became more interested in making connectivity profitable, thus turning these platforms into vehicles of self-presentation and storytelling. Recognizing that these platforms are not neutral in nature, Hogan (2010) stresses that SNS take on the role of the middle-man by exerting control on access and distribution. Marwick (2005) critiqued the development of platforms as a processes driven purely by commercial goals instead of the needs of their users. She adds that stripped of context, SNS are disconnected from the broader social structures and 'encourages framing oneself as a consumer and commodifying complicated relationships as social capital' (p. 3). Similarly, Papacharissi (2018) agrees on how external hierarchies are reflected and reproduced, but adds that the act of authoring oneself online can occasionally also reinvent these hierarchies. Digital environments should not be mistaken as unbiased, silent, and democratizing in nature as they hold power and identity development on such platforms is infused with belief systems, hierarchical order and politics (Leurs, 2015).

Just like digital self-presentation cannot be separated from the topic of SNS architectures, the next section examines the connection between the societal factors linked to globalization which contribute to the need for strategic promotional practices at an individual level.

Globalization and Promotional Cultures

Scholars like Giddens (1990) and Bauman (2000) have emphasized that precarity is a condition that arises from late modernity. The process of globalization additionally locates individuals within new societal structures and has a 'pluralizing impact on identities' (Hall, 1992: 309), leading to the rise in adoption of promotional practices. Technological transformations along with globalization offer new mediums for creating the "imagined self", but this labour of imagination is a site of tensions where people and groups attempt to incorporate the global into their modern practices (Appadurai, 1996).

Despite the increase of volatility and insecurity, the liquid aspect of the digital and global age offers workers more flexibility and independence (Bauman, 2000). This shift holds people responsible for their own careers, requiring them to be self-reliant, autonomous and entrepreneurial in nature (Lane, 2011), and is accompanied with the hunt for meaning, influence and personal achievement (du Gay, 1996). Mobility in this day and age dictates the construction of identities not once, but multiple times in new settings (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012), transforming them into a 'moveable feast' (Hall, 1992: 277).

With organizations and recruiters turning to online platforms to find candidates, proactively building one's personal brand online can increase access to opportunities. More than two decades ago, well-known management guru, Tom Peters, made the concept of personal branding popular through his article "The Brand Called You", urging his readers to become the "CEO of Me Inc." by strategically standing out, carving out a distinctive niche and establishing credibility (Peters, 1997). A personal brand should offer a unique value proposition, be memorable, build reputation and expertise for advancement at work, while communicating one's personality (Harold, 2013). Reflexivity plays a vital role in personal brand strategies as individuals need to critically evaluate the selves they want to present in order to make an impression (Wee & Brooks, 2010). Though all of the above relate to individual actions taken, the perception of the personal brand is what is perceived by the recipient of this messaging (McNally & Speak, 2002), accordingly obliging individuals to attempt to offer a valuable and rewarding encounter with their audience (Wee & Brooks, 2010).

In sum, modernity demands the commodification of the self due to the insecurities it introduces into the market (Bauman, 2007; Fuchs, 2013; Lair et al., 2005). The mix of capitalism and promotion-rich environments lead to the incorporation of branding techniques at an individual level (Davis, 2013), wherein people are not only creating their own narratives but also end up becoming "promotional products", available for consumption by the public (Wernick, 1991). While Banet-Weiser (2012) critiques the previous assumption by stating that a person's active participation and labour is what distinguishes it from commodification, Fuchs (2013: 39) argues that this labour occurs as a result of the corporatization of social media which is 'a realm of Internet prosumer commodification and exploitation'.

However, it also cannot be ignored these actions taken in the digital world have the potential to allow people to have actual offline gains based on the social value generated online (van Dijck, 2013). The shift to modernity has resulted in a "value gap" being created, which in the context of work is now fulfilled by 'mobilizing the self as a relevant, potent value base' (Baumeister, 1997: 201). The precarity caused by unstable work conditions has played an important role in the adoption of personal branding strategies as they provide a malleable, adaptable and portable asset that can travel along with an individual throughout their career (Lair et al., 2005). At this point, the discussion moves to the platform LinkedIn – where these malleable identities are articulated online.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn functions as a mediated marketplace of labour within whose boundaries professionals have to decipher how the pieces of their career and personal life fit together (Sharone, 2017). Though LinkedIn has altered itself in the last few years, it largely aligns with the viewpoint that 'profiles function as inscriptions of normative professional behaviour… shapes an idealized portrait of one's professional identity' (van Dijck, 2013: 208). As a platform, LinkedIn enables the concept of "profilicity" – wherein identity is a construction that happens by sharing a public account of the self through one's profile (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2021).

A majority of existing literature pertaining to LinkedIn focusses on the user profiles (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Damnjanovic et al., 2012; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018), LinkedIn/job assessment (DeKay, 2009; Roulin & Levashina, 2019) or the reception of these profiles by recruiters (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Marin & Nilă, 2021; Zide et al., 2014).

Impression management in a work-setting is closely linked to outcomes such as being hired, having good workplace relationships, financial gains, promotions or even avoiding getting fired (DuBrin, 2010). LinkedIn can be viewed as an extension of the workplace as the architecture of the platform simulates some of the aspects mentioned above – thus, needing people to perform in a certain way on this professional networking site. LinkedIn has been positioning itself as a space to exhibit thought leadership, but the uptake of it by people who aren't necessarily the CEOs or top management has increased over the last few years, especially after the Covid-19 outbreak. The platform has seen a rise in posts on the personal struggles people face (Orgad & Gill, 2022) and 'vulnerability is having a moment on LinkedIn' (Ghaffary & Molla, 2023, para. 7). Trang et al. (2023) on Gen Z's LinkedIn usage also indicates the experimentation with "supplication" – understood here as the expression of weakness which can align with exercises of building trust, being authentic and relatable.

Due to the limited research specifically related to self-presentation that occurs through posts (and not profiles), this study attempts to make a contribution in this space.

Intersectionality

Having created the term "intersectionality" more than three decades ago, Kimberlé Crenshaw's updated definition of the term is as 'a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of

inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other' (Steinmetz, 2020, para. 2). Due to the chosen demographic for this study, this section briefly discusses the intersectional identities in relation to technology, migration and gender.

User agency in the world of social media complex and cannot be viewed from just one dimension as multiple factors like the social, technological, cultural, etc., come together in the production of content (van Dijck, 2009). Older discourses hailed the internet as being disconnected from nationalities, gender and race, but that was a thought situated in neoliberal ideology that platforms the values of freedom and individualism (Nakamura, 2010). Papacharissi (2009) questions the validity of the Internet as a leveller when individuals need to carry their offline personas onto these networks, bringing along their gender, class and racial identities, while Hegde (2016) stresses that technology can discipline as well as foster self-expression within migrant communities while enabling the recasting of identity. Relating to migration, Leurs (2015) posits that the activation of digital identities have the likelihood of containing power within a micro-political perspective.

 The disadvantage that migrant women face is twofold – that of being a woman and a migrant (OECD, 2020). Additionally, the OECD report states that gender gaps and unemployment rates among migrant women are higher as compared to their local peers. Transnationalism is omnipresent in the local identity of an immigrant making migration a journey that is not static but which extends across and impacts people, countries, economies, etc (Hegde, 2016). In the same context, Hall (1992) puts forward the suggestion of identities in "translation". For him, difference inserted into their lives creates "cultures of hybridity" where they cannot have a unified identity due to the union of the histories of their past and the existence of a new culture – thus, "translating" them permanently.

This study does not consider whether the content respondents create emerge from postfeminist values, but a mention of the postfeminist environment is found to be relevant in this context. Postfeminism's focus on values of empowerment and individualism, clubbed with the interactive aspect of technology platforms creates conditions conducive for personal-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Critiquing the intersection of postfeminism with neoliberalism, patriarchy and capitalism, Gill (2017) states that this intersection encourages the display of postfeminist sensibilities like independence, confidence, aspiration, etc. Interestingly, Orgad and Gill (2022) also argue that the rise in encouraging women to talk about confidence as well as vulnerability place the burden on women

to propose a solution vis-à-vis taking an in-depth look at the structural causes behind the inequalities faced by women.

In conclusion, Hall (1996) provides a useful approach of looking at intersectional identities as a "point of suture" – the coming together of the discourses and measures that position the subjects in specific discussions and the procedures that form subjectivities, allowing for the subject to be engaged with as an individual.

Features of Personal Branding

In a crowded and competitive labour market, employing personal branding practices is no longer an option, but a requirement. The following sub-sections examine a few key features of personal branding.

Authenticity

A concept closely linked to personal branding is that of authenticity. Unlike earlier times where people's identities were judged based on their social roles (tribal identity, class, occupation, etc) and how they committed to these roles through the process of identification (sincerity), modernity offers individuals more alternatives to break away from "sincerity" and move towards "authenticity" (Trilling, 1972). Wee and Brooks (2010) point out that the moral dimension involved in the process of discovering the self in order to present it makes the concept of authenticity inherent.

Authenticity and transparency are the hallmarks of successful personal brands as they build trust, reputation and respect (Schawbel, 2015). In contrast, boyd (2011) argues that authenticity becomes a complex subject in the SNS space because the replicability of content makes it easy to alter and judging its legitimacy becomes harder. The boundaries between the "authentic self" and "commodified self" have become hazy in today's world, but this is an anticipated and permissible result, which has created a shift from '"authentic culture" to the branding of authenticity' (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 5). Additionally, Moeller and D'Ambrosio (2021: 16) put forward an argument in favour for "profilicity", stating that the digital age has propelled us to move a step beyond authenticity as individuals now view themselves as profiles or personal brands that are up for observation where 'others can see how we like to be seen as being seen'.

Visibility and Representation

For the post-Marxist scholar Laclau (1990: 39), representation emerges from space of "dislocation" where identities 'depend on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time'.

Increased visibility offers the chance of gaining more opportunities in one's career trajectory, additionally widening the "spheres of influence" (Schawbel, 2015). Though SNS offer a possibility of immense visibility, they do not guarantee it and this becomes more complex by the presence of "imagined audiences" as the individual cannot be certain for whom the performance is staged (boyd, 2011). Promotional work can also advance a 'promotional regime of visibility … that may sustain or reconfigure power relations in public' (Jiménez-Martínez & Edwards, 2023: 15). Though the authors agree that visibility can be seen as a mode of resistance, their critique on visibility is that this regime can grant the illusion of social justice by encouraging individualism under the garb of empowerment, in turn concealing the collective or the invisible.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review has mapped out how identity connects with most of the concepts described in the literature review, thus illustrating the challenge in navigating the process of self-presentation. The specific objective of this interdisciplinary research is to explore how migrant women in Germany utilize promotional cultures towards the construction of their identities on LinkedIn.

Theoretically, my study will draw on Goffman's theory of self-presentation as one of the pillars of the conceptual framework. Though Goffman was writing in an era before the advent of social media, his work has continued to inform the work of scholars who theorize about how people use self-presentation strategies in the digital world. Self-presentation can be visualized as a performance where two types of stages exist – the front stage is where the self is performed for the outside world and the back stage, where some aspects are not revealed but which may also contain a form of the authentic self (Goffman, 1956). During the performance of the self, a 'front' is selected (Goffman, 1956) which has the ability to "give impressions" intentionally or "give off impressions" unintentionally (Goffman, 1959). As pointed out in the literature review, Goffman's work has received critique on not focussing enough on the reflexive aspect involved in self-presentation. Since Giddens' work links itself to late modernity and then globalization, while taking "reflexivity" into consideration, this

study will also incorporate Giddens' important contributions on the subject of self-presentation. For Giddens (1991), modernity 'produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation' (p. 6), but the human experience can be articulated as 'we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (p. 75).

Connecting the sociological perspectives of self-presentation with perspectives from media and communications, scholars argue that globalization and technological advances have accelerated the need for promotional practices like personal branding. This shift facilitates the formation of narratives around the self, introducing a dynamic quality to user behaviour online. The individual is affected by the commodification of the self as they must constantly self-produce, connect with their audience and self-stage in order to remain competitively relevant (Wernick, 1991). Equating Davis' (2013) perspective on celebrity culture and power to promotional practices, the benefits accompanying symbolic capital include economic capital and symbolic power. He argues that these benefits can also manifest as power in political, social and economic realms. Another important perspective discussed in media and communications scholarship relates to the complex relationships that are born when promotional practices are performed in digital environments as a person ventures to 'type oneself into being' (Sundén, 2003: 3) - making them sites that are rife with promises and tensions (Papacharissi, 2018). Drawing on the varied concepts discussed in the literature review, the second pillar that supports this study is that of promotional cultures and the technological affordances that impact it.

Due to the demographic profile of the participants, an intersectional lens in relation to the display of professional and personal identities is also adopted.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study explores the complexity inherent in the practice of promotional practices like personal branding on LinkedIn. LinkedIn was chosen as a site for this study as previous research has mostly focussed on user profiles and the perception of them by recruiters or organizations. With the recent rise in users utilizing posts to communicate various aspects of their personal lives on LinkedIn, the topic provided a new angle to study the construction of the digital self.

The discussed literature has aided the formulation of the research objectives which focus on exploring the strategies, nuances and implications involved in the promotional practices employed. By delving into the motivations and choices behind the content posted, the influence that the platform exerts on

users, and the articulation of the lived realities of migrant women, this research seeks to unravel the intricate balance that the users need to maintain.

The key research question that guides this study is: *How do migrant women in Germany use aspects of promotional cultures to showcase their professional as well as personal and intersectional identities on LinkedIn*?

Using the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews, the research attempts to provide valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges that underpin promotional practices, thus offering a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between identity, social media, gender and migration. This interdisciplinary study aims to make an original contribution to media and communications scholarship in two ways: firstly, through the study of how LinkedIn posts are used as tools of self-presentation; and secondly, through the unique and intersectional perspectives of migrant women in Germany.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methodological Rationale

Identities can find themselves in a state of flux due to the major life changes that accompany the act of migration. The performance of identity on LinkedIn is further complicated by it being a professional networking site. Keeping these two threads in mind, the semi-structured qualitative interview method was adopted to answer the research question. A previously conducted pilot study also determined that this method is suitable for this study.

Terming the method an "inter-view", Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) highlight that knowledge construction occurs through the sharing of the subject's experiences and the exchange of views between the interviewee and interviewer. The semi-structured interview provides deeper insight into the life-worlds of participants while attempting to draw out the nuanced descriptions that they provide (Kvale, 2007) and are also useful to understand personal, social and political issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The constructivist approach of the method provides the space for participants and researchers to highlight multiple perspectives (gender, race, social roles, etc) that 'dance together for the moment but also extend outward in social space and backward and forward in time' (Warren, 2001: 98).

As the individual constructions of identities was the motive of this study, the semi-structured interview method proved to have advantages over other qualitative methods. Though focus groups would provide valuable data on interaction between participants (Kitzinger, 1995), interviews were a better choice to understand participant motivations. Compared to focus groups, interviews are more conducive for building a confidential environment (Brinkmann, 2013) that can hold space for personal, emotional and sensitive topics. Group dynamics and participant interaction are vital aspects of focus groups (Barbour, 2018), but the geographical locations of the participants deterred the selection of this method. Online focus groups were not seen as a viable option due to the challenges involved with multiple participants and the limited time that would be available for participants to share their stories. The survey method was also not selected as it does not allow for detailed and unique answers like interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

A main benefit of semi-structured interviews is 'its attention to lived experience while also addressing theoretically driven variables of interest' (Galletta, 2013: 24). It also provides a lot of flexibility as interviewers can deviate from the existing topic guide, ask additional questions or seek clarifications (Brennen, 2017). As the interviewer is also an instrument in the meaning-making process (Seidman, 2006), the quality of the interview is highly dependent on the interviewer's skills relating to conversation, topic knowledge, etc., and the ability to direct the flow of the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Similarly, interviewees may change their mind about certain topics during the interview which can have an impact on the construction of meaning (Kvale, 2007).

Though rich and extensive data is generated through the interview process, the disadvantage of this method is that analysis can be heavily influenced by the researcher's biases (Patton, 2002). The researcher must thus strive to be more objective during the analysis phase. A power symmetry is inherent in the methodology employed as the interviewer generally has more control on how the interview is conducted and interpreted (Kvale, 2007). Flexibility is a feature of the method, but it also opens up the interview process to deviations from the topic guide which can offer up new meanings of interpretation, but also render the guide irrelevant (Warren, 2001).

Sampling and Sampling Strategy

In a pilot study conducted previously, all the participants recruited had a south-Asian background. For this dissertation, the conscious choice to include more diversity in the sample to get a range of

experiences was made (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and a purposive sampling strategy was adopted. Compared to convenience sampling, this sampling method focusses on the intentional selection of participants based on the requirements they meet, resulting in richer insights (Etikan et al., 2016; Flick, 2018).

Robinson's (2014) four-point approach to sampling guided the sample definition and selection of this study. The inclusion criteria applied to this study were people who: are migrants based in Germany, identify as women, use LinkedIn in an active/semi-active manner. The last criteria was interpreted as people who have been posting content on their profiles in a consistent manner (1 to few times every month) over the span of 6-12 months. Migrant women who did not post actively fell into the exclusion criteria. Germany was selected as an inclusion criterion for this study due to the researcher's own lived experience of being a migrant in Germany.

Considering the research focus, time, logistical concerns and the scope of the study, the sample size decided was between 8- 10 interviews in order to achieve data saturation (Bekele & Ago, 2022). After identifying 30 probable interviewees, 15 were contacted via LinkedIn with a short message detailing the study. One of the ten interviews included in this study is from the pilot study because of the rich insights gathered in that specific interview.

In the sample selected, 9 out of the 10 participants identified as female and 1 participant identified as non-binary. The LinkedIn account of the non-binary participant indicated that they were active in women-related employee resource groups within their organization and after being notified about the nature of the study, they agreed to participate in it. The limitation of studies like this one could result in the exclusion of identities that identify outside the binary gender spectrum, and this is why the decision to include their interview was taken as their view is important to this study.

Research Tools

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews allow the incorporation of open-ended and theory-related questions, but these questions must be intentionally created to connect to theoretical concepts and thoughtfully ordered and connected to unearth the research goals (Galletta, 2013; Silverman, 2020). The constructivist approach of interviewing sees the interviewee as someone who co-collaborates to create

meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).Therefore, the interview-guide can provide a rough outline for the interview, but it should also allow flexibility in response to the interviewee's responses (Kallio et al., 2016).

The interview guide (Appendix A) is structured into three sections. It begins with an outline of the research and explanation about the interview process. The second part contains questions connected to the research question (Rowlands & Johnson, 2012) and are divided into the following themes: warm-up questions and prompts, LinkedIn usage, self-presentation, migration and promotional cultures, closing questions. The last section contains cooling down statements or questions that allow interviewees to ask questions or add clarifications. Simple, open-ended and non-leading questions that could draw out elaborate responses (Knott et al., 2022) were created for the guide.

Conducting Interviews

Zoom was chosen as the tool to conduct interviews online to overcome time and geographical constraints. Its advantages include cost effectiveness, replication of face-to-face interviews in terms of rapport building and its security and data storage features (Archibald et al., 2019). Mediated interviews also offer flexibility and a sense of informality that aids rapport building (Weller, 2017).

All interviews were conducted in English and recorded in audio and video formats. The interviews were transcribed using the transcription feature on Microsoft Word and then manually checked and corrected.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the method of analysis to sift through the data collected as it allows for the discovery of commonalities, variation and connections between varied themes (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The flexibility of thematic analysis is that the importance of themes is not necessarily seen through the number of times they occur, but instead on whether it identifies vital information related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the interviews were transcribed, the data was coded using an inductive approach to avoid fitting the data to pre-conceived theoretical assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theory-driven deductive approach was then followed in the next iteration of the coding process (Gibbs, 2007). The coding framework (Appendix B) was generated using NVivo software. Following Braun and Clarke's

(2006) procedure of thematic analysis, the codes were organized into 10 sub-themes which were then further collapsed into 3 global themes.

Though thematic analysis is sometimes critiqued for decontextualizing and generalizing the data, themes also enable 'creating new readings and renderings of that data' (Gibson & Brown, 2009: 129).

Ethics and Reflexivity

After gaining approval of the LSE ethics board for the research, a combined information and consent sheet was shared with all participants before the interviews. They contained information about the study, data anonymization, data security and withdrawal from study. These points were also reiterated during the interview. Participant names were pseudonymised and any data that could make them easily identifiable (company name, job roles, cities, etc) was anonymized.

Cognizant of the fact that rapport building in interviews depends on visual cues (Boland et al., 2022), participants were made aware that notes were being taken and that I may not be looking at the screen occasionally. As interviews may elicit emotional and very personal responses, I stressed that interviewees were free to answer in as much length as they wanted and could also avoid answering any questions that made them uncomfortable.

Due to a comment made by a participant during the pilot study on the terminology of "migrant" and "immigrant" having probable conflicting connotations, the term "expatriate" was used in the initial contact messages and the information/consent sheet. However, I noticed that the participants and I used the three terms interchangeably during the interviews. According to the International Organization for Migration (n.d., para. 2), 'at the international level, no universally accepted definition for "migrant" exists' and it can cover a wide range of descriptions.

As a researcher, the common ground that I shared with the participants was that of being a migrant woman based in Germany. A few of the interviewees shared the same ethnic background as mine and some of the interviewees also inhabited the same work sphere as mine (even if I didn't know them personally). These shared commonalities could position me as someone with insider status, adding a level of comfort to the interview process, facilitating rapport building, building trust and privileging me with more access to the private lifeworlds of the participants (Ellis & Berger, 2001). Ganga and Scott (2006) caution that this proximity may bring the researcher close to the participant,

but it can also highlights the social cracks that separate them. Thus, it was important to keep these factors in mind and try to objectively separate my own experiences from that of the interviewees during the interview and analysis phase (Patton, 2002). Disclosing my background as a migrant woman at the beginning of the interview may have reduced the power asymmetry between the participants and me. Since I established contact over LinkedIn, my own profile would have offered some cues which could have reduced the distance between us.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section presents the results and interpretations that emerged from the ten interviews that were further analysed using thematic analysis. The aim is to paint a comprehensive picture of the specific themes that are connected to the research question of how migrant women in Germany use aspects of promotional cultures to showcase their professional as well as personal and intersectional identities on LinkedIn. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis can be broadly defined as themes pertaining to the platform, the self and a dialogue between the self and society.

LinkedIn as a Stage

To understand how respondents carry out the process of showcasing their selves on LinkedIn, it is crucial to examine how the stage upon which this performance takes place influences the act.

Affordances and Constraints

In their responses, interviewees touched upon the affordances that LinkedIn as a platform provides as well as the constraints they face. All respondents described LinkedIn in positive terms, ranging from:

> … LinkedIn became my touchpoint to educate myself in a quick and effective way, what companies are there, what job situation is, which people are working where, and so, it gave me a good overview. (Hina)

> I do believe that it's one of those digital platforms that is really creating and building up towards equity in the digital economy that we are seeing today. (Tamara)

Though agreeing with the majoritarian view about the benefits of the platform, the interviewees also seemed to recognize the control exerted by the platform or the loss of control as a user, by the function of LinkedIn being an SNS platform.

> I do come across posts where it says, okay, LinkedIn likes photos, LinkedIn likes videos, or, you know, it's better not to tag so many people, etc. So, I do pay attention to it. (Tisha)

> But, the disadvantage is also that sometimes, you have nothing to say, and if you stop posting regularly, even for a week, because you go on vacation, then it just fully drops cause you stopped. So, you really have to commit to, like, posting and, maybe, schedule posts. (Isabella)

Most of the participants tried to address this control through different techniques but 20% of the sample stated that they did not let the algorithm impact their posting behaviour.

> I look what the people are talking about in this week, in which way it goes, and I identify with the subjects and then, when … I want to say something about this topic, then I post something …without thinking about, oh, how much followers I will get, how much likes (Amelia)

In contrast, Vittoria acknowledges and recognizes the dopamine rush that comes from interaction on her posts:

> … you get addicted to the likes … How performant was this post? And I don't like this behaviour, to see on myself, because I really want to post it, because I want to say it, and not to get a lot of reach…So, I feel kind of addicted to this attention sometimes. (Vittoria)

The positive sentiment of the respondents are in line with the literature on how platforms 'support self-expression, connection, and communities, they do so within spaces prescribed and defined by algorithms' (Papacharissi, 2018: 4; Shao, 2009). The technological affordances not only connect users to each other, but end up transforming them through the introduction of new techniques which open up numerous opportunities (boyd, 2011).

Despite the efforts that participants put into their self-presentation, algorithms play the role of the curator by filtering and ordering the data it receives (Hogan, 2010). As seen in the examples, a capital-intensive dimension is added to user-agency (van Dijck, 2013) by exerting pressure to optimize their self-presentation through multiple techniques that feed the algorithm. The branded self and "profilic identity" of the interviewees is in constant motion of being updated (Khamis et al., 2017; Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2021) and is caught up in a tug of war between them and LinkedIn (van Dijck, 2013).

Additionally, it isn't just the algorithm that demands consistency, but a strong personal brand also demands consistent and repeated actions to build that brand relationship with the audience (McNally & Speak, 2002). This point provides the foundation for the next theme (see 6.2), which examines the actions involved in the assembly of the digital self on LinkedIn.

Context Collapse

All interviewees reported some form of blurring of boundaries that occurred or that they tried to avoid on their LinkedIn posts. Referring to her usage of a blogging platform, stating that it didn't fit the theme of LinkedIn, Debbie shares her apprehension of sharing certain content from there on her LinkedIn feed:

> Yeah, it is more about like loving yourself or something like this, it is a personal development topic. It is also, you have to share a bit of your vulnerability at some point, and as the team leader, like leadership position, you kind of should not. Or, if you are just new to a company, it's not the first thing you think of to show your exactly self, right? (Debbie)

Recalling how her LinkedIn usage became a subject of her performance review at work, Vittoria shares :

> …they were judging my performance based on my LinkedIn posts. And, so, the (title of another employee) … she was, like, copy pasting sentences of my LinkedIn posts into my performance review. And then saying, she's not doing it for the company, she's doing it for herself, to build a personal branding, she is super egoistic, and showing off herself. (Vittoria)

The literature review outlines how one of the major tensions of presenting the digital self is that of "context collapse" (boyd & Ellison, 2007). As illustrated above, sharing content on SNS can lead to the decontextualization of the content (Hogan, 2010). All respondents reported trying to avoid context collisions due to the instability created by the mixing of multiple audiences (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). As it is the professional identity that is connected to LinkedIn, some aspects of the "lowest common denominator" approach (Hogan, 2010) can be seen as compared to other platforms that are discussed in the following section. These actions (as well as reactions from imagined audiences) suggest that these factors influence the choices that participants make and inform their decisions on what self-presentation strategies they follow.

Comparison to Other Platforms

Adding to the discussion on "context collapse" above, one of the techniques that the interviewees incorporate to address this tension is to use different platforms. About 90% of the interviewees reported that the boundaries they drew around their LinkedIn identities were more rigid and showcased a more serious side of them. The reasons they chose other platforms to showcase certain content varied across respondents.

> Well, I have Facebook still, and Instagram, but those are … very private… is for my family to see what my kids are doing. But I'm very selective, like, who I connect with. (Isabella)

> So, Sofia on LinkedIn … is me from (company name) and the work I do there. Then, on Instagram, it's very much about the sport I'm doing … And then, if you go on TikTok, I do (topic name) content…So, it's definitely different everywhere. (Sofia)

Sharing that certain parts of her identity (artwork, work on mental health, etc.) are reserved for other platforms, Hina elaborates:

> I kind of self-censor that on LinkedIn, only because everybody keeps giving feedback, when you put in too many different things, then they're like, okay, she does everything… what is she really focused on? (Hina)

The term "setting" referring to 'furniture, décor, physical layout … which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it' (Goffman, 1956: 13) captures the "setting" that SNS platforms create in a virtual world. In the absence of teammates like in Goffman's offline world, these virtual settings can exert the "dramaturgical discipline" on a user by focussing on 'the management of one's face and voice' (Goffman, 1956: 138). By using other platforms for alternative self-presentations, participants are seemingly drawing boundaries around the LinkedIn "setting" (Papacharissi, 2009) as their "promotional texts" can carry varied interpretations that may be deciphered by their audience in different ways (Davis, 2013).

Personal Branding

But how do participants take control of their own narratives to pursue their professional goals? Applying Goffman's (1956) concepts of the front stage and back stage to this analysis, the front stage is considered as the actual post shared on LinkedIn and the back stage can be the selves that remain

hidden from the audience as well as the decisions that the subject undertakes to manage their impressions.

Front Stage

Offering multiple views on the choices of which "fronts" they choose to present, participants express:

> I've been very active on really talking about the topics … like diversity, equity and inclusion, company culture. I also talk a lot about being a working mom or being an expat in Germany. (Isabella)

> I showcase myself as part of the organization. I think a big part of my brand is being Sofia from (company name) who focuses on people topics, right? So, that's, I think, the company has given me the ability to really tap into so many of my passions in one place, in one company. I can address being black and I can address females and how they're treated, I can address LGBTQ. (Sofia)

Amelia's content strategy involves talking about her work, new trends in the sector and her illness. Talking about her illness is important because:

> … it belongs to my life, it belongs to me. I have a bit difficulties … and inclusion, it's very, very difficult point in Germany and be open for inclusion. (Amelia)

The front stage performance includes a large part of acquisitive self-presentation strategies (Arkin, 1981). By sharing their vulnerabilities, the posts of the participants carry with it expected benefits (perceived authenticity, building trust and rapport) but can also involve risks to professional reputation (Trang et al., 2023). Brubaker (2020) claims that digital hyperconnectivity is a 'technology of individualization' (p. 787) which pressurizes users to be distinctive enough to express traits of individuality and authenticity, which also aligns with the personal branding literature (Harold, 2013; McNally & Speak, 2002; Peters, 1997). Through these accounts, we get a glimpse into how reflexivity (Giddens, 1991; Wee & Brooks, 2010) seemingly plays out in the authoring of the digital self.

Back Stage

For the participants, understanding the back stage also aids in the selection of the 'front'.

> Fear is such a huge part of the migrant psychology, that it holds you back because you don't know what people are going to say about you and use it against you. So, being a minority, you have to always be

on guard, versus Instagram for me, where I don't have too many guards, like I will just show anything. (Hina)

… there are certain things that come, being a woman…as in, if you're a leader, you are called aggressive, or if you're confident, you are called abrasive … these things, maybe, I would like to talk about, but then I do hold myself back. (Tisha)

Though Amelia actively talks about her illness, having experienced uncomfortable reactions to self-disclosure of her nationality in real life, she avoids discussing that often on LinkedIn:

I'm a bit afraid. I have a bit respect to go out and tell everybody, oh, I'm (nationality), I'm from (country name) … because of the experience the last 30 years. (Amelia)

Thus, some of the interviewees utilize protective self-presentation measures to control their impressions on others (Arkin, 1981; Goffman, 1956). For Goffman (1956), hiding certain aspects of the self was connected to obscuring aspects that conflicted with the ideal version of the self. However, in these examples we see that protective self-presentation measures help participants avoid negative consequences connected to current and future work structures (Trang et al., 2023). Many of the back stage choices that participants elaborated on are directly linked to structural challenges that are a reflection of the 'crisis-prone nature of late modernity… which may sometimes threaten the very core of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991: 184–185). To deal with these challenges, users adopt different techniques for the staging of the self.

Strategic Decisions

The respondents' answers highlight a range of strategic decisions related to how they post, how personal branding is understood and how they seek to position themselves. 30% of the participants mentioned that they already have or are considering hiring someone to work on their profile:

… she interviewed me in her podcast and I asked her, hey, like, why don't you, like, work with me, because you have this sweet and personal, empathic way of writing. And, she writes my text, she is my voice. (Samantha)

I would have loved to know somebody who would have managed my feed for me, and if it's affordable enough, and if that person is … knowledgeable enough to understand my thoughts and express on my behalf (Tisha)

Four out of the five employees in the sample also shared organization-related content occasionally on their LinkedIn posts. However, Tisha articulates why she wants to focus on herself vis-à-vis her organization:

> I started realising, you know, you're not your organisation, you are an entity in yourself, and, after I have had that trust or understanding … now, I am posting as myself. I feel like I can say things that I feel about, I care about, etc. (Tisha)

Contrastingly, Kiara was one of the two participants who strongly stated that they did not consider their activities personal branding.

> I think for me the visibility of the thing that I'm saying, the issues that I'm talking about, the content that I'm thinking about, that matters, not my own visibility … I don't want to put about myself because I don't think I'm like a sellable quantity anyway. (Kiara)

The overwhelming majority of participants expressed that their content positioned themselves as leaders.

> … because it puts me at a leadership position, and I think that helps me showcase that young people can be great leaders. (Sofia)

> I also try to build a voice not only about the issue or the topics of where I'm working, but also around empathetic leadership or feminist leadership. (Kiara)

Like corporate brands, the personal brand that is created for consumption by others needs to be 'a self which continually produces itself for competitive circulation' (Wernick, 1991: 193). The small section of respondents who have (or want to) outsource the work of personal branding highlights the labour that is involved for the person itself. Brand logics of product development, packaging and promotion (Lair et al., 2005) are also inherent in their promotional practices. By positioning and connecting themselves with certain value propositions (Harold, 2013), participants add cues to bring attention to facets of their professional identities which may not be visible to others (Goffman, 1956). Through the posts they share and the narrativization of the self, participants draw a route from their past to the future they seek (Giddens, 1991). In some way or the other, all participants indicated that their branding efforts are also steps in order to position themselves as leaders or as individuals who possess transferable expertise (Baumeister, 1997; Lair et al., 2005). These strategies and positioning

also align with the primary and normative view that LinkedIn also stands for as a platform (van Dijck, 2013)

The new finding emanating from the present analysis is that one-third of the respondents reported that an unexpected outcome of their self-presentation was when people reached out to them for certain things, thus casting them into the role of mentors.

> … because this is something that is inherent to me, as a person, I saw direct results, where people were reaching out to me … So, this was maybe a non-job related result, but it meant a lot to me. (Hina)

> I try responding or even if there are a lot of people who wrote to say that can we talk to you like this for mentoring and career guidance and stuff like that. So, I try finding that time. (Kiara)

These instances can be seen as ones that tap into the realm of self-realization and a communal version of the self (Hemetsberger, 2005) while showcasing the power that is generated 'when a personal brand builds similar linkages to the heart as well as the head' (McNally & Speak, 2002: 8).

Motivations

Being a voice for something as well as being visible featured as a recurrent theme in the data as respondents were either trying to make themselves visible in the labour marketplace or attempting to shed a spotlight on topics that were dear to them.

> I'm in a country where I can openly be who I am, I can openly speak up, and it's not the same in many countries … I'm in a really position of advantage and I'm in a space where I can use my voice to speak up for those who can't use their voice, and it's maybe even dangerous for their life to use their voice. (Sofia)

> So, it's not about self-promotion, but mostly about being a powerful voice… I mean, voice for others, voice that is going to change something. (Kiara)

Speaking about how visibility became more apparent after one of her initial posts went viral, Tamara notes:

> I didn't understand how powerful the platform is, I just did not understand the power of visibility. And it showed me with the one post, you get a lot of eyeballs on you and a lot of opportunities come, you connect with people. (Tamara)

These attempts for visibility or being a voice seems to also be connected to the need for being a part of the community. Interestingly, when posed questions about their initial LinkedIn usage, the word "networking" was mostly used. However, while talking about their own strategic practices, the word "community" was used more frequently.

> I was looking for other women of colour, other African women in leadership roles, so that, you know, to kind of build that community, and kind of pour into each other and, you know, leverage the collective. (Tamara)

> You know, 1600 people is, maybe … not so much, but for me, are the right people. Because I know these persons are in my community because they like what I share, they are on my side in good and in bad. (Amelia)

The "community-centric" activities that respondents mention undertaking highlight how self-presentation need not be just an activity conducted in the pursuit of selfish goals, but can be socially beneficial by boosting others' identities and engaging in activities that align with audience inclinations (Schlenker, 2012).

As the respondents create a niche through their personal brands and the distinctive topics they link themselves with, a perception and emotion can emerge that connects them to their audience, granting their relationship resilience and stability (McNally & Speak, 2002). When these examples are viewed through the modality of "visibility as recognition" as proposed by Jiménez-Martínez and Edwards (2023), we can see the benefits of visibility, but also the tension that resides in visibility when it is accompanied by the aspect of surveillance. This accordingly influences the back stage performance discussed previously. The data appears to favour the "visibility as empowerment" and "visibility as resistance" narrative more than the latter.

Values

Responding to the last question in the interview guide pertaining to values that participants wanted to highlight through their posts, 20% directly stated authenticity as a value they held dear. But the importance of this value kept coming up in response to other answers too.

> Authenticity… this is so close to my heart, and also to give other people authenticity, representation … it's still very important to me, because one thing I've come to understand is, you cannot be that what you don't see. (Tamara)

> … authenticity, I mean, that's something that I generally hold on very dearly … even in my general life like non-social media life as well (Kiara)

A thread of activism also ran through some of the responses received:

> …my brand is about speaking up for other people, being an activist and really promoting activism in everybody. (Sofia)

> I have something, very strong opinion about things, so, I'm seeing myself using LinkedIn in the future more, rebellious, and even more strongly on how Germany can do better. (Samantha)

These findings indicate the expression of postfeminist sensibilities (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2017) like empowerment, individualism, confidence, etc.

Interestingly, many participants posed doubts or questioned how authentic the posts of other LinkedIn users were, indicating that the "brand of authenticity" rests heavily on the perception it generates (Banet-Weiser, 2012) and an individual cannot entirely control how their actions are received by their audience.

> The people are not honest with social media … they are not honest with themselves … I mean, to share these not very good points of our lives brings us to tell something what the people want to hear. (Amelia)

> This is a algorithm defining this world … and we post things so that the machine will put our information better… at some point, we don't have our self-identity and our self-interest anymore. (Debbie)

Incoporating the Personal with the Professional

The script that dominated self-presentation on LinkedIn till a few years ago focussed strongly on the professional identity of the person. However, with the recent changes on the platform and user behaviour, a heavier presence of the "personal" can be detected.

Responses to Structural Causes

For Isabella, posting about the struggles of being a working mom and an expatriate is important as:

> …maybe people recruiting or people in these teams, they're not even aware of how hard it is for people to…or for women, and expat women to get an opportunity, even a fair opportunity, right? (Isabella)

Though some of the respondents haven't yet posted about certain topics on their accounts, they actively expressed feeling the need to blur the boundary between the back stage and front stage to address problems that have arisen from experiences of discrimination or structural causes:

> I want to now highlight is that my migrant background isn't a disadvantage, but an advantage because speaking fluent German, having had so many years of experience in Germany, and international experience, I'm the perfect person to be the in-between. (Hina)

> … to be able to talk to someone, or talk to an audience about what was really going on, or how hard it was psychologically also, for many people, because we don't talk about that, how bureaucracy and letters can mess you up psychologically … I'm sure that many things are, like, with purpose … that a society is made to keep people small and not to grow, and I'm convinced of that. (Samantha)

Though there were no specific questions about this, a new finding that emerged from the two African participants in the sample was, the want to tackle stereotypes about Africa and its people through their self-presentation. These were the only responses received where people addressed wanting to combat stereotypes at a national/continental level.

> When we think of just how the media, for example, presents Africa, it's always in the worst possible way and they don't show the true reality … So, I think it's important to try counteract those things and showcase talent with our platforms and showcase positivity, because it's…it's like our duty as people. (Sofia)

> How come we don't see this side of these countries and this side of these continents on mainstream media. So, and again, I love the way LinkedIn is levelling the playing field for a lot, a lot of countries. (Tamara)

However, Tamara adds (a sentiment also reflected in Sofia's answers):

> I don't want that to be the only story. Because it is very easy for that to be the single story that people check about you. (Tamara)

When viewed collectively with the last two themes, the data showcases how the "technologies of the self" is articulated through the writing of the self (front stage), but also indicates how the "technologies of production" (LinkedIn) and the "technologies of power" (structural challenges) exert pressure and dominate each other (Foucault, 1988).

Personal is Political

Stressing on why visibility and representation online and in the German workplace matters, participants share:

> I feel it will create an impact, and it's important for diversity, inclusion when people of ethnicity like me speak up instead of just letting white people telling other people how to be inclusive. (Debbie)

> … they're used to have this stage always, and they felt offended by me, you know, taking my own space and own stage, and this just showed me that we need to do it even more to challenge that status quo. (Vittoria)

Amelia chooses to disclose details about her illness on this professional network because:

> I want to share this part of being every day, how I work it, and I want to make hope, and I want to tell the people, hey, it's okay to be not okay. It's okay to fall down, to fail… (Amelia)

And by intentionally making choices that can have repercussions, Tamara states:

> But then, it was very easy for me to decide, then those are not the doors I want to walk through. Then those are not the engagements that I want to be a part of, this is not an organisation that I want to represent myself in. (Tamara)

Through their participation and strategies, the respondents 'are learning to work within the constraints and possibilities of mediated architecture, just as people have always learned to navigate structures as part of their daily lives' (boyd, 2011: 55). However, through these findings it can be noted that some participants willingly want to challenge the status quo. These findings echo Laclau's (1990) viewpoint on the dislocation of identity – wherein the space is a threat to identity articulation but also facilitates the emergence of new identities. His view of the growth of new chances wherein the 'world is less 'given' and must be increasingly constructed' (p. 40) through societal actors reflect how participants seek to make themselves visible, see themselves represented and address the structural challenges they face. Respondents answers are indicative of their agency (Khamis et al., 2017) and the need to exhibit their "collective self" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). By adopting practices of "context collusion" where contexts are intentionally collapsed in order to make normative borders of a platform porous (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014), the respondents' views seem to suggest that their actions are an act of resistance as well as an active mechanism to filter out people/organizations they do not want in their professional circles.

Collectively, the findings underscore how the thread of inclusion runs through the self-presentations of all participants. All of them reported encountering different struggles as professionals which are related to causes like gender, ethnicity, familial status, etc. And this is where the "point of suture" emerges in their self-presentations – that 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference' (Hall, 1996: 4).

CONCLUSION

Individuals need to stand out in a marketplace of attention as visibility can lead to actual opportunities in a globalized world. Using the semi-structured interview method and thematic analysis, this interdisciplinary study aims to provide insights into how migrant women in Germany utilize aspects of promotional cultures to showcase their professional, personal and intersectional identities on LinkedIn.

The findings suggest that the boundaries of market logic and technology pose challenges in relation to the expression of digital identities of LinkedIn. Though the participants shared instances of wanting to avoid "context collapse", they also shared examples of intentionally blurring boundaries by incorporating more of their personal and intersectional identities. The data reveals that there are inherent tensions in the articulation of these identities because of the front stage and back stage. But, through the strategic process of authoring their own narratives, the participants attempt to make themselves visible and distinctive in the pursuit of their career goals. Additionally, as migrants and women, they strive to challenge the structural issues that impact their lives. The two other interesting findings that emerged from the study were: a) interpersonal interactions as examples of how personal branding offers opportunities of self-realization; and b) how personal branding is employed by the African participants to address structural inequalities caused by media representations at a collective level.

The results of this study indicate that self-presentation involves a complex process of negotiations that are executed at technological, personal and societal levels, requiring constant reflexivity of the self in relation to these factors. Building upon this, I argue that though promotional practices demand the packaging of the self, they also provide space for addressing structural challenges, albeit at the high cost of personal labour. Thus, a balancing act is underway during the construction of the digital self on LinkedIn.

This study aims to make an original contribution related to the relatively newer and under researched phenomenon of LinkedIn posts as a medium for identity construction and promotional practices of migrant women in Germany. With the rise in migration numbers in Germany, integration of migrants at the workplace and in society is vital. Studies like this could be useful to organizations that are serious about their diversity, equity and inclusion agendas as well as governmental organizations that train migrants to gain access to opportunities in the German labour marketplace.

Having adopted qualitative interviewing as the methodology, the results of this study are not generalizable and cannot represent the experiences of other migrant women in Germany. Future research could include a broader cross-cultural focus, comparing the experience of migrants from collectivist and individualistic societies. Inter-generational research on personal branding practices between Gen Z and other generations may also provide a fruitful starting point.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's (1985: 165) quote perfectly captures the negotiation process involved in the construction of plural identities of the participants:

> Human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mother gives birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.

REFERENCES

Adgully Bureau. (2022) Pooja Chhabria on LinkedIn's ambitious plans to empower the creator ecosystem, URL: https://www.adgully.com/pooja-chhabria-on-linkedin--s-ambitious-plans-to-empower-the-creator-ecosystem-121992.html [Last consulted 16 August 2023].

Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G. and Lawless, M. (2019) Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (vol. 18), URL: https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596 [Last consulted 10 August 2023].

Arkin, R. M. (1981) Self-Presentation Styles, pp 311-334 in J. T. Tedeschi (ed.) *Impression Management Theory and Social Psychological Research*, New York, NY: Academic Press, Inc.

BAMF - Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2023) The Migration Report 2021, URL: https://www.BAMF.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2021.html [Last consulted 16 August 2023].

Banet-Weiser, S. (2012) *Authentic (tm): Politics and Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, New York, NY: New York University Press.

Barbour, R. (2018) *Doing Focus Groups*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bargh, J. A., McKenna, K. Y. A. and Fitzsimons, G. M. (2002) Can You See the Real Me? Activation and Expression of the 'True Self' on the Internet, *Journal of Social Issues* 58(1): 33–48.

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2007) *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity.

Baumeister, R. F. (1997) The Self And Society: Changes, Problems, And Opportunities, pp 191-217 in R. D. Ashmore and L. Jussim (eds) *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baumeister, R. F. and Vohs, K. D. (2012) Self-Regulation and the Executive Function of the Self, pp. 180-197 in M. R. Leary and J. Price. Tangney (eds) *Handbook of Self and Identity*, New York: Guilford Press.

Bekele, W. and Ago, F. (2022) Sample Size for Interview in Qualitative Research in Social Sciences: A Guide to Novice Researchers, *Research in Educational Policy and Management 4*(1): 42-50, URL: https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.3 [Last consulted 9 August 2023].

Bhatti, U. (2023) Linkedin's Latest Features and How Creators Are Using Them, URL: https://buffer.com/resources/linkedins-latest-features [Last consulted 14 August 2023].

Binder, J., Howes, A. and Sutcliffe, A. (2009). The problem of conflicting social spheres: Effects of network structure on experienced tension in social network sites. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 965–974. https://doi.org/10.1145/1518701.1518849 [Last consulted 13 August 2023]

Boland, J., Banks, S., Krabbe, R., Lawrence, S., Murray, T., Henning, T. and Vandenberg, M. (2022) A COVID-19-era Rapid Review: Using Zoom and Skype for Qualitative Group Research, *Public Health Research & Practice*, *32*(2), URL: https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp31232112 [Last consulted 13 August 2023]

boyd, d. (2011) Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics and Implications, pp 47-66 in Z. Papacharissi (ed.) *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

boyd, d. and Ellison, N. B. (2007) Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13*(1): 210–230, URL: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x [Last consulted 12 August 2023]

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101, URL: https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa [Last consulted 14 August 2023]

Brennen, B. S. (2017) *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, London: Routledge.

Brewer, M. B. and Gardner, W. (1996) Who Is This 'We'?: Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 71*(1): 83–93.

Brinkmann, S. (2013) *Qualitative Interviewing,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2015) *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc

Brubaker, R. (2020) Digital Hyperconnectivity and the Self, *Theory and Society* 49(5–6): 771–801, URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-020-09405-1 [Last consulted 13 August 2023]

Castells, M. (2013) *Communication Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chiang, J. K-H. and Suen, H-Y. (2015) Self-presentation and Hiring Recommendations in Online Communities: Lessons from LinkedIn, *Computers in Human Behavior 48*: 516–524, URL: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.02.017 [Last consulted 10 August 2023]

Cunningham, C. (2013) *Social Networking and Impression Management: Self-presentation in the Digital Age*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Damnjanovic, V., Matovic, V., Cicvaric Kostic, S. and Okanovic, M. (2012) The Role of the LinkedIn Social Media in Building the Personal Image, *Management - Journal for Theory and Practice of Management 17*(65): 15–24, URL: https://doi.org/10.7595/management.fon.2012.0036 [Last consulted 10 August 2023]

Davis, A. (2013) *Promotional Cultures: The Rise and Spread of Advertising, Public Relations, Marketing and Branding*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Davis, J. L. and Jurgenson, N. (2014) Context Collapse: Theorizing Context Collusions and Collisions, *Information, Communication & Society* 17(4): 476–485, URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.888458 [Last consulted 11 August 2023]

DeKay, S. (2009) Are Business-oriented Social Networking Web Sites Useful Resources for Locating Passive Jobseekers? Results of a Recent Study, *Business Communication Quarterly 72*(1): 101–105, URL: https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569908330378 [Last consulted 10 August 2023]

du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work,* London: SAGE Publications, Limited.

DuBrin, A. J. (2010) *Impression Management in the Workplace: Research, Theory and Practice*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Ellis, C. and Berger, L. (2001) Their Story/My Story/Our Story: Including the Researcher's

Experience in Interview Research, pp. 849-875 in J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (eds) *Handbook of Interview Research*, California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Ellison, N. B. and boyd, d. (2013) Sociality through Social Network Sites, pp. 151-172 in W. H. Dutton

(ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A. and Alkassim, R. S. (2016) Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling, *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5(1): 1-4.

Flick, U. (2018) *Designing Qualitative Research*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1988) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P. H. Hutton, Eds.; Vol. 18). University of Massachusetts Press.

Fuchs, C. (2013) Social Media and Capitalism, pp. 25-44 in T. Olsson (ed.), *Producing the Internet: Critical Perspectives of Social Media*, Göteborg: Nordicom.

Galletta, A. (2013) *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Ganga, D. and Scott, S. (2006) Cultural "Insiders" and the Issue of Positionality in Qualitative Migration Research: Moving "Across" and Moving "Along" Researcher-Participant Divides, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7(3), URL: https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-7.3.134 [Last consulted 10 August 2023]

Ghaffary, S. and Molla, R. (2023) You're Laid Off, So You're on LinkedIn, URL: https://www.vox.com/recode/2023/2/10/23591790/layoffs-linkedin-tech-media-social-network [Last consulted 8 August 2023]

Gibbs, G. (2007) *The Nature of Qualitative Analysis*, London: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Gibson, W. J. and Brown, A. (2009) *Working with Qualitative Data*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (2009) On Rereading The Presentation of Self: Some Reflections, *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(4): 290–295.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Gill, R. (2017) The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20(6): 606–626.

Goffman, E. (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre.

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* New York, NY: Doubleday.

Gross, R. and Acquisti, A. (2005) Information Revelation and Privacy in Online Social Networks, paper presented at the WPES '05 Proceedings of the 2005 ACM workshop on Privacy in the electronic society, New York, NY, 07/11.

Hall, S. (1992) The Question of Cultural Identity in S. Hall, D. Held and A. G. McGrew (eds) *Modernity and Its Futures*, Oxford: Polity Press in association with the Open University.

Hall, S. (1996) Introduction: Who Needs 'identity'?, pp. 1-17 in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Harold, C. (2013) "Brand You!": The Business of Personal Branding and Community in Anxious Times, pp. 341-356 in E. West and M. P. McAllister (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Advertising and Promotional Culture,* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hegde, R. S. (2016) *Mediating Migration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hemetsberger, A. (2005) Creative Cyborgs: How Consumers Use the Internet for Self-Realization, *Advances in Consumer Research* 32: 653–660.

Hogan, B. (2010) The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online, *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30(6): 377–386, URL: https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610385893 [Last consulted 9 August 2023].

Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. (1995) *The Active Interview*, California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). *Who is a Migrant?* International Organization for Migration. Retrieved 25 August 2023, from https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0 [14 August, 2023]

Jiménez-Martínez, C. and Edwards, L. (2023) The Promotional Regime of Visibility: Ambivalence and Contradiction in Strategies of Dominance and Resistance, *Communication and the Public 8*(1): 14–28, URL: https://doi.org/10.1177/20570473221146661 [Last consulted 14 August 2023].

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M. and Kangasniemi, M. (2016) Systematic Methodological Review: Developing a Framework for a Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide, *Journal of Advanced Nursing 72*(12): 2954–2965.

Kemp, S. (2023) Linkedin Users, Stats, Data, Trends, and More, URL: https://datareportal.com/essential-linkedin-stats [Last consulted 12 August 2023].

Khamis, S., Ang, L. and Welling, R. (2017) Self-Branding, 'Micro-Celebrity' and the Rise of Social Media Influencers, *Celebrity Studies* 8(2), 191–208.

Kitzinger, J. (1995) Introducing Focus Groups, *BMJ: British Medical Journal 311*(7000): 299–302.

Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K. and Teeger, C. (2022) Interviews in the Social Sciences, *Nature Reviews Methods Primers 2*(1), URL: https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6 [Last consulted 8 August 2023].

Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*, London: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Laclau, E. (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London: Verso.

Lair, D. J., Sullivan, K. and Cheney, G. (2005) Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self: The Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding, *Management Communication Quarterly 18*(3): 307–343.

Lane, C. M. (2011) *A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Leary, M. R. (2019) *Self-presentation: Impression Management and Interpersonal Behavior*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Leurs, K. (2015) *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0: Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Marin, G. D. and Nilă, C. (2021) Branding in Social Media. Using LinkedIn in Personal Brand Communication: A Study on Communications/Marketing and Recruitment/Human Resources Specialists Perception, *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4(1): 1-8, URL: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100174 [Last consulted 12 August 2023].

Marquez, G. G. (1985). *Love in the Time of Cholera*. London: Penguin.

Marwick, A. E. (2005) 'I'm a Lot More Interesting than a Friendster Profile': Identity Presentation, Authenticity and Power in Social Networking Services. *Association of Internet Researchers*, *6.0*.

Marwick, A. E. and boyd, d. (2011) I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience, *New Media & Society* 13(1): 114–133.

McNally, D. and Speak, K. D. (2002) *Be Your Own Brand: A Breakthrough Formula for Standing Out from the Crowd*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Meyrowitz, J. (1986) *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moeller, H.G. and D'Ambrosio, P. J. (2021) *You and Your Profile: Identity after Authenticity*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Nakamura, L. (2010) Race and Identity in Digital Media, pp. 336-347 in James Curran (ed.) *Mass Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Odendahl, C. and Springford, J. (2017) The Biggest Brexit Boon for Germany? Migration, URL: https://www.cer.eu/insights/biggest-brexit-boon-germany-migration [Last consulted 4 August 2023].

OECD. (2020) How to Strengthen the Integration of Migrant Women?, URL: https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/migration-policy-debates-25.pdf [Last consulted 13 August 2023].

Orgad, S. and Gill, R. (2022) *Confidence Culture*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Papacharissi, Z. (2009) The Virtual Geographies of Social Networks: A Comparative Analysis of Facebook, Linkedin and Asmallworld, *New Media & Society 11*(1–2): 199–220.

Papacharissi, Z. (2018) Introduction, pp. 1-11 in Z. Papacharissi (ed.) *A Networked Self and Platforms, Stories, Connections*, New York, NY: Routledge

Parks, M. R. (2011) Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities, pp. 105-123 in Z. Papacharissi (ed.), *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) Two Decades of Developments in Qualitative Inquiry: A Personal, Experiential Perspective, *Qualitative Social Work 1*(3): 261–283.

Peters, T. (1997) The Brand Called You, URL: https://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you [Last consulted 11 August 2023]

Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Robinson, O. C. (2014) Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11(1): 25–41.

Roulin, N. and Levashina, J. (2019) Linkedin as a New Selection Method: Psychometric Properties and Assessment Approach, *Personnel Psychology 72*(2): 187–211.

Rowlands, T. and Johnson, J. M. (2012) The Interpersonal Dynamics of In-Depth Interviewing, pp. 99-113 in J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. Marvasti, and K. D. McKinney (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Schau, H. J. and Gilly, M. C. (2003) We are What We Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space. *Journal of Consumer Research 30*(3): 385–404.

Schawbel, D. (2010) *Me 2.0, Revised and Updated Edition: 4 steps to Building Your Future*, New York, NY: Kaplan Publishing.

Schawbel, D. (2015) *Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future*, New York, NY: Diversion Books.

Schlenker, B. R. (2012) Self-Presentation, pp. 542-570 in M. R. Leary and J. Price. Tangney (eds) *Handbook of Self and Identity*, New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Seidman, I. (2006) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shao, G. (2009) Understanding the Appeal of User-Generated Media: A Uses and Gratification Perspective, *Internet Research 19*(1): 7–25.

Sharone, O. (2017) Linkedin or LinkedOut? How Social Networking Sites are Reshaping the Labor Market, pp 1-31 in S. P. Vallas (ed.) *Emerging Conceptions of Work, Management and the Labor Market*, Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Siles, I. (2012). Web Technologies of the Self: The Arising of the "Blogger" Identity: Web Technologies of the Self, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 17*(4): 408–421, URL: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01581.x [Last consulted 13 August 2023].

Silverman, D. (2020) *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis). (2023) Sharp Rise in Labour Migration in 2022, URL: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2023/04/PE23_165_125.html [Last consulted 2 August 2023].

Steinmetz, K. (2020) She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What it Means to Her Today, URL: https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality [Last consulted 14 August 2023].

Sundén, J. (2003) *Material Virtualities: Approaching Online Textual Embodiment*, New York, NY: P. Lang.

Terranova, T. (2000) Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy, *Social Text 18*(2): 33–58.

Tifferet, S. and Vilnai-Yavetz, I. (2018) Self-Presentation in Linkedin Portraits: Common Features, Gender, and Occupational Differences, *Computers in Human Behavior* 80: 33–48, URL: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.013 [Last consulted 12 August 2023].

Trang, N. M., McKenna, B., Cai, W. and Morrison, A. M. (2023) I Do Not Want to Be Perfect: Investigating Generation Z Students' Personal Brands on Social Media For Job Seeking. *Information Technology & People,* URL: https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2022-0602 [Last consulted 14 August 2023].

Trilling, L. (1972) *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Turkle, S. (1996) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

van Dijck, J. (2009) Users Like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content, *Media, Culture & Society* 31(1): 41–58.

van Dijck, J. (2013). 'You Have One Identity': Performing the Self on Facebook and Linkedin, *Media, Culture & Society* 35(2): 199–215.

Warren, C. A. B. (2001) Qualitative Interviewing, pp 83-102 in J. Gubrium and J. Holstein (eds) *Handbook of Interview Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Weaver, A. C. and Morrison, B. B. (2008) Social Networking, *Computer* 41(2): 97–100.

Wee, L. and Brooks, A. (2010) Personal Branding and the Commodification of Reflexivity, *Cultural Sociology* 4(1): 45–62.

Weller, S. (2017) Using Internet Video Calls in Qualitative (Longitudinal) Interviews: Some Implications for Rapport, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology 20*(6): 613–625.

Wernick, A. (1991) *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*, London: Sage Publications.

Zide, J., Elman, B. and Shahani-Denning, C. (2014) LinkedIn and Recruitment: How Profiles Differ Across Occupations, *Employee Relations 36*(5): 583–604.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you, followed by brief introduction about the researcher

(Recording begins)

Thank you so much for your time and patience.

Purpose of interview stated : Usage of Linkedin by expatriate women.

Reminder about consent: Your data will be anonymized and will only be accessible to me and my supervisor. Any other identifying factors will also be anonymized and your data will be stored securely.

Do you have any questions?

You don't have to answer any questions if you'd rather not or don't have time. Please feel free to skip over questions or tell me to stop or to go back to something you find interesting.

Answer in as much or as little depth as you feel like and take as long as you like. I will change your name to an alias in any printed quotations. No one will listen to the interviews except myself, the researcher.

This research goes towards my dissertation project on the use of LinkedIn by women expatriates.

This is NOT a questionnaire – There are no right or wrong answers. If you want to ask questions back, I'll happily answer. If you want to talk about something that is not on the list of topics here that's fine too.

- Reminder of consent form if not received before interview – Also, record oral consent in this case

Warm-up questions and prompts

Tell me a little about yourself - what brought you to Germany and how long have you been here for?

LinkedIn usage:

1. How long would you say you've been using LinkedIn for and for what do you use

LinkedIn?

2. Can you tell me a bit about your motivations about the content you post?

3. How do you decide what to share or post on Linkedin?

4. How often do you post on Linkedin and do you have a certain strategy currently?

- Follow up/probe : In an ideal scenario, what kind of strategy would you like to implement?

5. Is how you portray yourself on LinkedIn different from how you represent yourself on

other social media platforms

Self-Presentation/ Personal Branding

1. How do you present yourself on LinkedIn?

2. Many people have started sharing their failures, their difficulties, or very personal stories on Linkedin. What are your thoughts about that?

3. In terms of your own professional identity, how do you see LinkedIn as a platform?

4. Are there certain things that you do not post on Linkedin?

5.. Are there any advantages and disadvantages do you see in posting frequently about

yourself/your work?

Migration/ Gender:

1. Does your identity of being from another place reflected on your Linkedin page?

2. In what way do you think your factors like your age, culture, migration experience impact your self-representation on Linkedin?

Others/ Promotional Cultures

1.. How have employment prospects in Germany impacted your self-presentation?

Generic closing:

1. OPTIONAL question : . I saw this post on your feed (with reference to specific type of posts on their page). Can you share a little about the motivations behind posting this?

2. What personal values or characteristics of yourself do you want to highlight through

your use of Linkedin?

Concluding questions/ statements:

Thank you for your participation and insights. Is there anything you think we haven't covered yet that you would like to add to the conversation?

OR

Do you have any questions?

- Reiteration of confidentiality of the interview

- Share purpose of study and how their participation contributes to it.

- Thank you once again for participating in my research.

(Recording Stops)

Final goodbyes and thanks once again.

Appendix B: Thematic Analysis Grid

Global Themes	Themes	Quotes
LinkedIn as a Stage	Affordances and Constraints	I do believe that it's one of those digital platforms that is really creating and building up towards equity in the digital economy that we are seeing today. (Tamara)
		But, the disadvantage is also that sometimes, you have nothing to say, and if you stop posting regularly, even for a week, because you go on vacation, then it just fully drops cause you stopped. So, you really have to commit to, like, posting and, maybe, schedule posts. (Isabella)
	Context Collapse	Yeah, it is more about like loving yourself or something like this, it is a personal development topic. It is also, you have to share a bit of your vulnerability at some point, and as the team leader, like leadership position, you kind of should not. Or, if you are just new to a company, it's not the first thing you think of to show your exactly self, right? (Debbie)
	Comparison to Other Platforms	So, Sofia on LinkedIn … is me from (company name) and the work I do there. Then, on Instagram, it's very much about the sport I'm doing … And then, if you go on TikTok (Sofia)
Personal Branding	Front Stage	I've been very active on really talking about the topics … like diversity, equity and inclusion, company culture. I also talk a lot about being a working mom or being an expat in Germany. (Isabella)
	Back Stage	… there are certain things that come, being a woman…as in, if you're a leader, you are called aggressive, or if you're confident, you are called abrasive … these things, maybe, I would like to talk about, but then I do hold myself back. (Tisha)
	Strategic Decisions	… she interviewed me in her podcast and I asked her, hey, like, why don't you, like, work with me, because you have this sweet and personal, empathic way of writing. And, she writes my text, she is my voice. (Samantha)

	Motivations	I didn't understand how powerful the platform is, I just did not understand the power of visibility. And it showed me with the one post, you get a lot of eyeballs on you and a lot of opportunities come, you connect with people. (Tamara)
	Values	…my brand is about speaking up for other people, being an activist and really promoting activism in everybody. (Sofia)
Incorporating the Personal with the Professional	Responses to Structural Causes	…maybe people recruiting or people in these teams, they're not even aware of how hard it is for people to…or for women, and expat women to get an opportunity, even a fair opportunity, right? (Isabella)
	Personal is Political	… they're used to have this stage always, and they felt offended by me, you know, taking my own space and own stage, and this just showed me that we need to do it even more to challenge that status quo. (Vittoria)