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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY

**THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN THE
VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Differences in Young Adults' Strategic Self-Presentation and
Social Comparison on Facebook*

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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CLUJ-NAPOCA

2016

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KEY-WORDS

Self-presentation, ingratiation, self-promotion, social comparison, virtual environment, Facebook, young adults, survey, in-depth interviews

INTRODUCTION

The current paper approaches the topic of self-presentation in the virtual environment and particularly focuses on potential differences in young adults' strategic self-presentation and social comparison on Facebook. With over 1.5 billion monthly active users (We Are Social, January 2016), Facebook is today the most popular social networking site in the world. 1 in 5 people on the planet has a Facebook account. In its attempt to offer its users a complete experience, Facebook took over multiple social functions and monopolized almost all other communication channels. It has also offered individuals numerous features to strategically manage the way in which they present themselves, transforming Facebook self-presentation into a prolongation of the real self in the virtual environment. Facebook self-presentation differentiates itself from other social networking sites presentations through its culture of online real representation, by constantly encouraging individuals to use their real names and to provide personal information.

Facebook broke down numerous communicational and social barriers. Now, individuals have hundreds of virtual friends and disclose a tremendous amount of personal information to a wide audience. Through Facebook multiple social functions, the demarcation line between offline and online contexts has become almost invisible. Even the gap caused by the virtual environment asynchronicity has been diminished. Street actions have started on Facebook, communities around common interests have been formed on Facebook and offline events are organized through Facebook.

There is nowadays a massive intrusion of Facebook into individual's social life which has multiple socio-psychological effects on social interaction and individual behavior. This is why in recent years Facebook has become a standalone topic of research in social sciences. By reviewing the existing literature on virtual self-presentation, I noticed that the focus has been quickly restricted from social networking sites in general to Facebook exclusively.

For investigating the differences in young adults' strategic self-presentation and social comparison on Facebook, the current research starts with the review of classical theories on the concept of self from social psychology and continues with the analysis of contemporary literature concerned with the socio-psychological impact of Facebook on the individual's social life.

I. THE CONCEPT OF SELF IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In contemporary societies, there have been significant changes in the ways in which individuals interact, present themselves and are identified by the others. In order to understand the construction of postmodern identity, it is necessary to review the main theories of self and identity developed in social psychology. **The first chapter** of the thesis presents an analysis of the diversity of perspectives on the self-concept and the main theories attached to it.

The self-concept has known a solid and complex development within social psychology. In time, two different paradigms of the self stood out: the structural-functionalist perspective, which sustains that identity emerges from social structure (Parsons, Erikson) and the symbolic interactionist perspective, which considers that identity is the result of the individual's interpersonal interactions (James, Cooley, Mead). Through his dramaturgical approach, Goffman (1959) conceptualized identity as the result of the individual's performances and introduced the notion of impression management in the theorization of the self. Later on, two distinct identity theories were developed around the socially constructed self: the identity theory and the social identity theory. The former places a great emphasis on role identities, while the latter focuses on norms, stereotypes and prototypes (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995).

Furthermore, the social psychologists explored the various determinations of the self-concept and developed multiple valuable theoretical frameworks. Luft and Ingham constructed in 1955 the Johari window model, a tool for understanding the human interaction. The social awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) distinguished between subjective and objective social-awareness, while Buss offered a theorization of the private and public self-consciousness. The theorists have paid particular attention to the process of self-presentation and self-disclosure. Jourard (1958) analyzed the role of self-disclosure in the development of interpersonal relationships, while Altman and Taylor developed in 1973 the social penetration theory.

In 1982, Jones and Pittman introduced the taxonomy of five self-presentation strategies. Later on, of great importance for the analysis of self-disclosure in the virtual environment proved to be Joseph Walther's theory of hyperpersonal communication (1996). In recent years, other essential contributions to the theorization of the self-concept were made, that could serve to a broader understanding of online self-presentation.

II. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION IN SOCIAL NETWORKING ERA

The analysis of the self in the virtual environment, a social construct that emerges from social interaction, requires not only the review of classical theories from social psychology, but also the exploration of contemporary literature concerned with the socio-psychological impact of technological progress on the individual's social life. The origins of social networking era, marked by the shift from the utilitarian use to the social use of the internet, positioned the individual in the middle of online activity. This generated profound changes in the process of identity formation, interpersonal communication and social interaction.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on the conceptual frameworks developed within the scholarly literature that can be used in the analysis of social interaction and interpersonal communication in social networking era. Hartley's model of interpersonal communication (1999) analyzed the social perception and social identity formation, while Schutz's (1958) theory of interpersonal human behavior shed light on the individual's fundamental social needs. The social exchange theory looked into social interaction through the reward-cost interdependence, whereas Daft and Lengel's media richness theory (1984) has highlighted the richness of communication in virtual environment. The theory of Transformed Social Interaction focused on the self-presentation transformations in the virtual environment. Walther's social information processing theory of CMC (1992) addressed the differences between offline and online social interactions, while his hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication (1996) spoke about the altered and socially desirable self-presentation enabled by computer-mediated-communication. Later concerns that online self-presentation is not a unidirectional process were conceptualized as the *Proteus effect* by Bailenson, Yee, Blascovich and Guadagno (2008). The research of the socio-psychological impact of the exponential numeric growth of social networking sites can benefit from theories developed in somewhat older technological contexts. If at the beginning, the social networking era was characterized by user-generated content, nowadays a shift towards other generated-content is perceptible.

This is an aspect that definitely must be taken into consideration in the analysis of online self-presentation in present times. The "*landscape*" of social networking sites has entirely changed with the advent of Facebook in 2004, the first social network that has reached 1 billion users.

Its innovative characteristics and unmatched popularity led to the emergence of new forms of social interaction and self-presentation, perhaps the most intriguing types that have ever existed.

III. SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FACEBOOK USE

It is already known that, in recent years, the use of social networking sites has become a widely researched topic in social sciences. In order to understand how the individual presents himself/herself on social networking sites, the third chapter of the thesis focuses on individual's motivations for using social networking sites and the role of personality in this process. Across the literature on individual's motives for engaging in SNS use, two major conceptual frameworks stood out: the uses and gratifications theory and the social enhancement versus social compensation theory. As for the investigation of the relationship between personality traits and SNS use, in the scholarly literature was heavily used the Five Factor Model, also known as the "*Big Five*" personality traits (i.e. extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience).

Further, a part of the most prolific research in this area that is significant for the analysis of the self in the virtual environment, specifically on Facebook, is presented here. The literature concerned with the individual's motivations of using Facebook and personality traits revealed that the individual's behavior on Facebook revolves around impression management and self-enhancement. The network incorporates numerous permissive self-presentational tools that transformed Facebook in a venue for self-regulation. The frequency of using certain Facebook functions, the content of the self-presentational information and the two basic needs which Facebook use serves (the need for self-presentation and the need to belong) are all regulated by the individual's personality.

Hereinafter, the presented research on the self-presentation process in the virtual environment embodies the ways in which the motives behind Facebook use and the individual's personality interrelate with self-disclosure, self-presentation and social comparison.

IV. PARTICULARITIES OF THE SELF-PRESENTATION PROCESS IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The subject of this unprecedented growth of online social networks and its effects on individuals' life was approached in several studies. It is already largely acknowledged that the virtual environment enables the construction and validation of rich online identities. On this line, personal information is disclosed online through multiple channels: directly by users in their online profiles, indirectly by users through their actions, by others or observed (social status) and various self-presentation strategies are adopted by the individual in his/her online social behavior. Congruent with the aim of the present research, the main scientific contributions on the topic of self-disclosure, self-presentation and social comparison through social networking sites are presented in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

The prevailing theoretical frameworks used in the research of self-disclosure in the virtual environment are the social penetration theory, the incremental exchange theory, the social contract theory and the uses and gratifications theory. Of late years, several dimensions of the self-disclosure in the virtual environment were emphasized. Looking into both quantity (i.e. breadth) and quality (i.e. depth) of the information disclosed online, researchers proved that the amount of self-disclosure is positively associated with intimacy and the motivation for relationship initiation. Still, people usually disclose more information to their face-to-face friends than to their Facebook friends and they are more willing to disclose personal information to the persons with whom they interact more often. According to their goals, SNS users were categorized into broadcasters (main goal – self-promotion) and communicators (main goal – maintain relationships). It seems that communicators have more anchored relationships and broadcasters promote a more desirable self to the detriment of the interaction's quality. Individuals who use Facebook to get attention and to maintain existing relationships post the largest amount of personal information about themselves. It appears that online communication enables a sense of belonging and self-disclosure. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that SNS users struggle to balance two contradictory needs: the need of increasing intimacy and relieving distress through self-disclosure and the need to protect their privacy. Recent research has begun to outline a pattern of the individual's self-disclosive behavior on Facebook. The virtual self has become a new component of one's overall identity, existing in conjunction with the public and private persona.

Facebook's complex features afford the gratification of multiple personal and social needs, transforming Facebook in a very powerful self-presentation tool. Desiring to create a positive and authentic self-presentation, Facebook users are attentively selecting and editing publicized content, monitoring content posted by others and using feedback to negotiate one's self-presentation. In contrast to the self-provided information, other-provided information reduces the individual's control of online impression management. Facebook's affordances of untagging and deleting photos posted by others were conceptualized in the scholarly literature as suppression tools for identity management. Across the literature, three types of self-presentation stood out: ingratiation, supplication and enhancement. Ingratiation proved to be the most popular one, followed by enhancement. It was shown that Facebook users mostly want to be seen as fun, outgoing, nice, popular, friendly, not boring, not mean, and genuine. An interesting fact is the users' awareness that Facebook creates a highly critical environment where they can be judged and that is why many of them withhold some information that it would not look good on Facebook.

Apparently, there is *"a code of being on Facebook [...] it revolves around a common understanding of what information is right or wrong to put on Facebook"* (Feehan, 2014: 24). Social networking sites proved to be a very rich environment in opportunities for social comparison. Therefore, researchers extended the analysis of the social and psychological implications of social networking sites use by investigating social comparison in online contexts. Considering the individual's motivations to engage in social comparison (i.e. self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and self-improvement), three types of social comparison were identified: lateral comparisons (i.e. selecting similar standards), downward comparisons (i.e. selecting inferior standards) and upward comparisons (i.e. selecting superior standards). It seems that Facebook affordances allow users to engage constantly in social comparisons, which can trigger jealousy, anxiety, and other negative emotions that affect the individual's well-being. Apparently, Facebook users frequently engage in negative upward comparison, which leads to a poor self-impression.

In the end, the negative effects of using online social networks might trigger an online social *burnout*, defined as the *"individual's response to experiencing unconscious, potentially threatening, painful, and stressful situations resulting from SNS usage, such as social overload"* (Lim & Yang, 2015: 301-302).

V. A MIXED METHODS RESEARCH – “*Differences in Young Adults’ Strategic Self-Presentation and Social Comparison on Facebook*”

V.1. *Problem Statement and Rationale of the Thesis*

It is becoming increasingly clear that, in the current information society, social networking sites have generated profound changes in the structure of sociability. The impressive technological progress, the widespread internet access and people’s rapacity for any type of information have almost erased any temporal, spatial or cultural barriers. Due to their distinctive features, social networking sites are considered in our days a huge uncontrolled public space with unspoken rules or constraints, where young people can see and be seen in ways that encourage a fervent social interaction and an elaborated self-presentation. Over the past few years, the number of studies that tried to explain the SNS users’ behavior has increased tremendously. The existing literature sought to prove that social networking sites encourage new forms of socialization, through innovative communication tools and methods, which allow users to manipulate their virtual identity. The topic of social interaction and self-presentation in the virtual environment turned out to be very dynamic, with many distinctive facets. Some key-elements stood out in the specialized literature.

At first, researchers focused on the individuals’ *motivations for using social networking sites* (Subrahmanyama, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008; Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012 etc.) and their *personality traits* (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Underwood, Kerlin & Farrington-Flint, 2011; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Oldmeadow, Quinn & Kowert, 2013; Seidman, 2013; Lee, Ahn & Kim, 2014 etc.). Later on, greater emphasis has been placed on *the online self-disclosure process* (Park, Jin & Jin, 2011; Underwood, Kerlin & Farrington-Flint, 2011; Sheldon, 2013; Vitak & Kim, 2014; Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014; Chang & Heo, 2014; Utz, 2015 and so on) and *the virtual self-presentational behavior* (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008; Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nuijten, 2010; Strano & Wattai, 2010; Wong, 2012; Tosun, 2012; Rui & Stefanone, 2013; Toma, 2013; Feehan, 2014; Bareket-Bojmel, Moran & Shahar, 2016 etc.).

A noticeable thing is that very few of these studies have *a unit of analysis other than Facebook*. At the beginning, Facebook's structure was similar to other social networking sites. Over the years, its basic features "*faded away*", as Facebook constantly developed new instruments that are now allowing users to interact and express themselves in an unprecedented way. At functional level, some of the network's functions that have completely changed the experience of online interaction are: "*like*", "*wall*", "*news feed*", "*life events*", "*timeline*", "*events*", "*tag*", "*graph search*", "*interest list*", "*friendship history*", "*activity log*" and many others. These are all notions that have quickly rooted in the culture of internet users. In addition, Facebook created *a culture of online real representations*. Facebook's sign up policy clearly requires users to provide their real names "*Facebook is a community where people use their real identities. We require everyone to provide their real names, so you always know who you're connecting with. This helps keep our community safe*" (*Facebook policy on user's name*). Another aspect worth to be reminded here is that Facebook was one of the first social network sites that did not let people track who viewed their profiles. Thus, by enabling individuals to selectively self-present and to secretly observe others self-presentations and through its constantly reinforced culture of real representations, Facebook has become probably the most popular instrument of social comparison and self-validation. This is why, nowadays, strategic self-presentation on Facebook is a topic of great interest in social research. It is not only because this network is gaining more popularity year after year, but also because these permanently amended affordances transformed the online self-presentation in a continuous social process.

In this context, even though the scholarly literature has increased at a fast pace, it would seem that it does not keep up with the continuous changes in the structure of social networking sites, especially those of Facebook. This is what makes Facebook a strategic site for the analysis of the self-presentation in the virtual environment. However, there is a broad consensus that Facebook use it is not comparable with the use of other social networking sites, such as *Twitter*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *Skype*, *Viber* etc. Because it greatly differs from other online social networks through its users' engagement mechanisms, its self-presentational tools and the total share of global social content distribution, Facebook has become a standalone topic of analysis in social research.

V.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The way in which we portray ourselves on Facebook has become an unneglectable part of our social life. It has become customary to share on Facebook life events, new experiences, personal and professional accomplishments, interests, opinions and so on. Although at first sight it would seem that we do this in a random way, I personally believe that behind all these actions there is a latent strategy that encompasses the impressions we want to convey about ourselves on Facebook. It is already acknowledged that there is "*a code of being on Facebook*" (Feehan, 2014), people constantly striving to bring out a socially desirable image. In the process of making a good impression to their Facebook audience, individuals resort to various methods. Some of them use compliments and flattery or are doing favors to others in order to be liked; others may agree with someone against their own beliefs or in some cases, individuals falsely present themselves in a favorable light by maximizing their qualities and minimizing their weaknesses. This type of strategy is called ingratiation and characterizes individuals who seek to achieve likability (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Roekelein, 2006). Complementary, another way in which individuals try to make a good impression is through convincing others of their competences and qualities, exaggerating their own accomplishments, bragging about possessions and their value, a strategy that is categorized as self-promotion (Jones & Pittman, 1982). In addition, in the process of making themselves liked and perceived as competent by others, individuals relate to a set of cues that define what is socially desirable. On this line, Facebook constitutes itself in a boundless realm of social cues, offering individuals a wide range of ways to engage in social comparison. This puts even more pressure on the individuals to present themselves in the virtual environment in a positive light.

Even though, there is a rich and comprehensive literature on the presentation of self in the virtual environment, I strongly believe that the topic of strategic self-presentation on Facebook has not been explored enough. Researchers were mainly preoccupied to test the applicability of classic self-presentation theories to the virtual environment (Zarghooni, 2007) and focused more on identity construction (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008) and identity management on Facebook (Strano & Wattai, 2010, Feehan, 2014). They distinguished between active and passive online behavior (Tosun, 2012) and raised questions about the impact of other-generated-content on the self-presentation process (Rui & Stefanone, 2013).

The few studies that approached the issue of strategic online self-presentation concentrated on the selectivity and editability of the content (Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman & Nuijten, 2010) and on the self-promoting and self-derogating characteristics of Facebook status updates (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran & Shahar, 2016). One study that did investigate strategic self-presentation in a more structured way, by using Jones and Pittman's taxonomy of five classes of self-presentational strategies (i.e. ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification and supplication), is the one of Wong (2012), which measured the frequency of ingratiation, self-promotion and supplication self-presentation strategies use on Facebook. A major limitation of researches on this topic is the fact that, for reasons of convenience, most studies utilized undergraduate student samples, with a slight majority of women. There may be age-related differences in the individual's self-presentation and social comparison on Facebook, but in these conditions of sampling, they become imperceptible.

Building on Wong's research, which proved that, among Chinese Facebook users, ingratiation and self-enhancement are the most commonly used strategies of online self-presentation and considering the individual's main motivations for engaging in social comparison (i.e., self-evaluation, self-enhancement and self-improvement - Gibbons and Buunk, 1999), the current research aims to explore the relationship between these two types of strategic self-presentation (i.e. ingratiation and self-promotion) and social comparison on Facebook.

Social comparison is a relatively new concept introduced in the analysis of the individual's online behavior and most of the studies focused on the negative psychological outcomes of social comparison through social networking sites (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Lin & Utz, 2015; de Vries & Kuhne, 2015; Lim & Yang, 2015). A source of inspiration for the current research were two of the studies that introduced the notion of social comparison orientation in the analysis of Facebook use, namely Lee (2014) and Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles & Franzl (2015). **The main objective of the current research is to explore young adults' differences in strategic self-presentation and social comparison on Facebook.**

Building on the existing literature, the research will provide a deeper understanding of Facebook users' self-presentational behavior and will shed light on how individuals engage in social comparison on Facebook. In addition, the research expands the investigation of this topic beyond student populations, to young adults (18-35 years old).

The specific objectives of the current research are to:

RSO1. Identify age-related differences in young adults' Facebook usage.

RSO2. Identify which self-presentation strategies (*i.e. ingratiation vs. self-promotion*) prevail in young adults' Facebook use.

RSO3. Measure the social comparison orientation of young adults Facebook users.

RSO4. Identify the ramifications of Facebook social comparison.

RSO5. Examine if age can predict the self-presentation strategies used by young adults on Facebook, their social comparison orientation and the ramifications of social comparison on Facebook.

RSO6. Test the relationship between Facebook self-presentation strategies and social comparison (*i.e. social comparison orientation and social comparison ramifications*).

RSO7. Identify the particularities of young adults' Facebook self-presentational behavior.

RSO8. Explore the ways in which young adults Facebook users engage in social comparison and "lurking" and what effect do these actions have on them.

RSO9. Explore the ways in which young adults handle self-presentational predicaments on Facebook and the underlying motivations behind these actions.

V.3. A Mixed Methods Research

The quantitative and qualitative research methods have a long history in the social sciences. The defining characteristics of quantitative research are the active manipulation, the linear design, the deductive and explanatory approach and the random sampling. Meanwhile, the qualitative research is defined as a naturalistic inquiry, with emergent design flexibility, using an inductive and descriptive approach and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2003). The current mix methods research uses *an explanatory sequential design* which consists of two different strands realized in sequence (*i.e.*, a quantitative and a qualitative study) and it begins with the quantitative data. Technical details will be provided below.

V.4. The 1st Study – A Survey on Young Adults’ Self-Presentation Strategies and Social Comparison on Facebook

V.4.1. Short Presentation

Considering Jones and Pittman’s taxonomy of self-presentation strategies (1982) highly valuable for the analysis of self-presentation in the virtual environment and given the fact that it was rarely used in research on this topic, the current study represents a good opportunity to explore strategic self-presentation on Facebook through this theoretical framework. Given that Facebook is perceived as *"a constant flow of edited lives which distorts our perception of reality"* (The Happiness Research Institute, 2015), where individuals strive to present their ideal selves, the current study relies on two of the self-presentation strategies included in the above mentioned model, the ones that I consider the most probable to be used by individuals in the process of self-presentation: *ingratiation* and *self-promotion*. Further on, because *"there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities"* (Festinger, 1954: 117) and given the fact that Facebook abounds in social comparison mechanisms, I consider useful to include social comparison in the analysis of Facebook self-presentation strategies. To the best of my knowledge, there is no research that associated self-presentation strategies with social comparison. A novelty element of the present research is the expansion of investigation on a wider population than students, namely young adults. This will allow me to identify the differences in self-presentation strategies and social comparison of Facebook users, assuming that these may deeply vary depending on age. Besides measuring the young adults’ social comparison propensity, I will also look into the ramifications of Facebook social comparison, because there is very little research on the social cues that matter for Facebook users.

Bearing in mind the above mentioned aspects, the survey addresses the first six specific objectives of the current research (*RSO1-RSO6*), trying to identify the potential age-related differences in young adults’ Facebook usage, which self-presentation strategies (i.e. ingratiation vs. self-promotion) prevail in their Facebook use, how social comparison oriented are young adults on Facebook, which are the ramifications of Facebook social comparison and what is the relationship between Facebook self-presentation strategies and social comparison orientation, respectively social comparison ramifications.

Additionally, I intend to examine if age is a predictor of self-presentation strategies, social comparison orientation and social comparison ramifications. In order to achieve these objectives, several research questions and research hypotheses were formulated.

V.4.2. Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

Relying on the literature review, the current study uses both inductive and deductive reasoning processes. In this sense, seven general research questions were formulated:

RQS1.1. Are there any age-related differences in young adults' Facebook usage?

RQS1.2. Are ingratiation and self-promotion (competence) part of the self-presentation strategies employed by young adults on Facebook?

RQS1.3. Are there any age-related differences in young adults' Facebook self-presentation strategies?

RQS1.4. How social comparison oriented are young adults Facebook users?

RQS1.5. Are there any age-related differences in young adults' social comparison orientation on Facebook?

RQS1.6. Which of the social comparison ramifications prevail on Facebook?

RQS1.7. Is there a positive relationship between age and the ramifications of Facebook social comparison?

RQS1.8. Is there a positive relationship between Facebook self-presentation strategies and social comparison orientation, respectively social comparison ramifications?

Derived from the research questions, I also formulated three broad hypotheses. I do believe that the individual's self-presentational behavior on Facebook varies deeply according to age. I presume that so does the social comparison orientation and the individual's personal attributes subject to social comparison (social comparison ramifications). I structured my assumptions around the idea that for younger individuals, Facebook is a source of entertainment and a venue for exhibiting their physical assets and fun personality, being more inclined to compare themselves with their Facebook friends and looking to affirm their social identity. On the other hand, I assume that, as they grow older, the individuals' social comparison orientation decreases. For them, Facebook is a constant source of information about others accomplishments and life events, determining them to look for self-validation and acceptance. I also presume that there is a positive relationship between self-presentation strategies and social comparison orientation and social comparison ramifications. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated:

HS1.1. Facebook ingratiators are individuals in their early twenties, highly social comparison oriented, inclined to compare themselves in terms of physical attractiveness and good personality.

HS1.2. Facebook self-promoters are individuals in their early thirties, less social comparison oriented, more inclined to compare themselves in terms of intelligence and wealth.

HS1.3. There exists among young adults Facebook users a category of transition – late twenties – that are using both ingratiation and self-promotion self-presentation strategies, with average social comparison orientation, comparing themselves in terms of physical attractiveness, good personality, intelligence and wealth.

V.4.4. Research Instrument

The research instrument used for this study is an online questionnaire, built on four major dimensions: *socio-demographic data*, *Facebook usage*, *Facebook self-presentation strategies* and *aspects of social comparison on Facebook* (Appendix A, Appendix B). By developing this questionnaire I intended to obtain a comprehensive instrument for measuring the self-presentational behavior of Facebook users and social comparison on Facebook. In order to measure the employed variables of the current survey, namely young adults' self-presentation strategies and social comparison on Facebook, I had a gradual approach in the questions ordering, from a series of aspects of Facebook use to self-presentation strategies, and ultimately to social comparison. Just a few of the respondents' **socio-demographic characteristics** are of interest for the current study: age, gender, nationality, current city and occupational status. Moreover, **Facebook usage** is measured here on five operational dimensions: users' engagement, primary motivations for using Facebook, aspects of Facebook user's behavior, interest for friends' Facebook activities and Facebook's role in the individual's life. Further, for measuring **ingratiation and self-promotion as self-presentation strategies** employed by young adults on Facebook I extracted from the Self-Presentation Tactics Scale (Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett & Tedeschi, 1999) the 8 items that refer to ingratiation and the 5 items that refer to self-enhancement (self-promotion) and adapted them to Facebook use. Additionally, I also used 3 items for ingratiation and 2 items for self-enhancement from Wong's modified version of the Self-Presentation Tactics Scale (2012).

One more item was added to the self-promotion dimension. In the end, a scale consisting of 19 items resulted for measuring Facebook self-presentation strategies, with two subscales: ingratiation (11 items) and self-promotion (8 items). Therefore, **Facebook ingratiation** is measured here through the following indicators: posting interesting news, articles or photos, uploading attractive photos, emphasizing their positive qualities, trying to look good, flattering their friends through likes and laudatory comments, complimenting the experiences of their friends through likes and appreciative comments, expressing same attitudes as their friends to be accepted, expressing similar opinions as their friends, doing favors to be liked, offering help to get helped and commenting on their friends' photos to express caring. Complementary, **self-promotion on Facebook** is measured here through: telling people when doing well at tasks others find difficult, emphasizing to their Facebook friends the importance of a task when succeed at, telling people about possessions and their value, putting up posts to show knowledgeable and intelligence, sharing their life experiences (travels, life events etc.) and their personal or professional accomplishments and exaggerating the value of their accomplishments. In order to test the validity and reliability of the scale, I kept the original response scale - a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very infrequently) to 9 (very frequently). The reliability level of each subscale (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) will be reported in the results section.

The fourth and last dimension of the questionnaire covers some **aspects of social comparison on Facebook**, on two sub-dimensions: social comparison orientation and ramifications of social comparison. In order to measure Facebook users' **social comparison orientation**, the current study uses the short version of Gibbons and Buunk's Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Scale (1999) which consists of six statements which measure individual's social comparison orientation in terms of life accomplishments, the way of doing things, how his/her loved ones are doing compared with how others are doing, being the type of person who compares often with others, comparing how well has he/she done something with how others have done and the tendency of socially comparing himself/herself with others. Participants are asked to relate to their Facebook friends in their answers. Beyond the Facebook users' tendency to compare themselves with others, of particular interest for the current study are also **the personal attributes that make the subject of their social comparisons**. Therefore, inspired by previous research (White, Langer, Yariv & Welch, 2006), the following four ramifications of social comparison will be tested here: physical attractiveness, good personality, intelligence and wealth.

In the end, an item to measure **young adults' concern about how they are perceived on Facebook** was added. In order to keep the respondent focused and to avoid monotony throughout the completion of the survey, for some of the questions, the response options were shuffled.

V.4.5. Population under Study

As mentioned before, the investigated population of the present research consists of **young adults**. In the specialized literature there are different delimitations of this age category, but generally young adulthood is the period from (roughly) 18 to 40 years old and marks that stage of the individual's development between adolescence and adulthood. According to Erikson's theorization of the individual's psychosocial development stages (1959), young adulthood – the six stage of psychosocial development – is characterized by the individual's psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation. In terms of age categorization, young adulthood is a broader category than emerging adulthood (individuals between 18-25 years old), the latter being defined by Arnett (2000: 473) as *"the period of life that offers the most opportunity for identity explorations in the areas of love, work, and worldviews"*. As opposed to Erikson, who argues that adolescence is the period marked by identity formation, Arnett claims that most identity exploration occurs in emerging adulthood rather than in adolescence. Taking into consideration that the intention of the current study is to extend the investigation to a broader population than students and to identify potential age-related differences, the investigated population of the current research comes down to **young adults Facebook users between 18 and 35 years old**. Besides the fact that some social scientists used this age delimitation to explore young adulthood, this age category was also chosen because it brings together almost half of the Facebook users (Business Insider Intelligence Report, June 2015).

In order to identify age-related differences in young adults Facebook users' behavior, I constructed three proportional age categories: 18-23 years old, 24-29 years old and 30-35 years old, which for functional reasons were defined here as *early twenties*, *late twenties* and *early thirties*. The reasoning behind this categorization was based on the normative transitions that mark young adulthood. Being such a broad age category, it cannot be assumed that, regardless of their age, individuals between 18 and 35 years old have the same life goals, principles or interests, value the same things or express themselves in the same way.

This is way I have chosen to delimitate individuals in their early twenties, which are mainly students (i.e., leaving their parents' home, increasing their social capital) from individuals in their late twenties, which are just starting their adult life (i.e., looking for a job, starting their career, become more independent, engaging in meaningful relationships) and individuals in their early thirties, which tend to become more oriented towards marriage, starting their own family or consolidating their career. I do believe that this gradual passing from the individuals early twenties to their early thirties, an ongoing process of secondary socialization in which individuals consolidate their identity, it will also be visible in the use of social networking sites, respectively in the way individuals choose to present themselves on Facebook.

V.4.6. Research Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected from a sample of **510 young adults Facebook users** through an **online survey**, which was administered in April 2016 with *Google Forms*. The questionnaire was available in both Romanian and English language. The total sample consists of 255 Facebook users between 18 and 23 years old (49%), 155 Facebook users aged between 24-29 years old (30.4%) and 105 Facebook users between 30 and 35 years old (20.6%). The majority of participants are female (78.8%), the proportion of male being of only 21.2%. A total of 94.9% of the respondents are Romanians, the remaining 5.1% being of other nationality (i.e., Hungarian, British, French, German, Israeli, Latvian and some others). Half of the participants live in Cluj-Napoca (50.2%), but the other half are from all over Romania (67 different Romanian towns/localities) and a few other cities abroad. A mix of non-probability sampling methods was used for data collection (i.e., convenience and snowball sampling techniques). A call for participation was posted on several channels, starting with the researcher's Facebook page and Facebook groups, asking friends to post the link on their wall and mailing survey invites to researcher's acquaintances. The requirement for participating in this study was having a Facebook account and being between 18 and 35 years old. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Considering the exploratory approach of the current research, I do believe that this non-probability sampling methods will ensure an accurate sample for a proper survey on young adults Facebook users' self-presentational behavior. The sample is clearly not representative of the entire Facebook population between 18 and 35 years old and the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire investigated population.

V.4.7. Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used for data analysis. In line with the structure of the questionnaire, the main variables used in testing the hypothesis were: Facebook self-presentation strategies (i.e., ingratiation and self-promotion), social comparison orientation and social comparison ramifications. Besides these, there is a set of variables which refer to young adults' habits in using Facebook which are included in the research questions, but they are not part of hypothesis testing. Still, these variables were constructed in a complementary way and measure collateral aspects of ingratiation, self-promotion and social comparison in the context of using Facebook. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of young adults' Facebook self-presentational behavior and its age-related differences, descriptive results will be provided. Reliability tests were conducted for ingratiation, self-promotion and social comparison orientation scales. The main statistics techniques used for answering the research questions and in testing the hypotheses were: *Frequencies, Compare Means, Crosstabulations, Cronbach's Alpha, ANOVA, MANOVA, Tukey's HSD post-hoc test, Pearson Correlations.*

V.4.8. Survey Findings

Several age-related differences have been noticed in young adults' Facebook usage. Overall, all study participants proved to be heavy Facebook users. Among the three age categories, participants in their early twenties remarked themselves to be heavier Facebook users than those in their late twenties or early thirties, by spending more time per day on Facebook and by having significantly more Facebook friends. They also value to a greater extent others' feedback on their Facebook updates, are very interested in the achievements of their Facebook friends and use to frequently compare themselves with others on Facebook. Data revealed quite a high frequency of activities such as checking up people or looking at others' profile and also a high interest for the activities of their Facebook friends, which points out towards a "*lurking*" side of young adults' Facebook behavior.

Both ingratiation and self-promotion are used to some extent by the surveyed young adults as self-presentation strategies on Facebook. Ingratiation is mainly employed through complimenting the experiences of their Facebook friends through likes and appreciative comments, trying to look good on Facebook and posting interesting news, articles or photos on Facebook. In the same time, individuals who have a self-promotional approach

to Facebook use frequently share their life experiences and their personal and professional accomplishments with their Facebook friends and emphasize to their Facebook friends the importance of a task when succeeded at. Participants in their early twenties scored higher in both ingratiation and self-promotion than those in their late twenties and early thirties, but no significant difference was noticed between participants in their late twenties and early thirties. In the same time, the surveyed young adults in their early twenties also proved to be more social comparison oriented than participants in their early thirties, while there were no significant differences between participants in their early twenties and late twenties or between participants in their late twenties and those in their early thirties in terms of social comparison orientation. In the end, data revealed that younger participants (i.e., early twenties) notice to a greater extent whether they are more or less attractive, fun, intelligent or wealthy than their Facebook friends, as opposed to those in their late twenties or early thirties. The surveyed young adults in their early twenties seem to pay greater attention to their Facebook friends' physical attractiveness and fun personality, than to their intelligence or wealth.

In the methodology section I also formulated three broad hypotheses, derived from the research questions, assuming that young adults' self-presentational behavior, their social comparison orientation and the ramifications of Facebook social comparison varies deeply according to age. I presumed that the strategic self-presentation of younger individuals on Facebook is driven by ingratiation (i.e., getting people to like them), being more inclined to compare themselves with their Facebook friends, especially in terms of physical attractiveness and fun personality. Data showed that, indeed, the surveyed young adults in their early twenties scored higher in both ingratiation and self-promotion, used as Facebook self-presentation strategies, than participants in their late twenties or those in their early thirties (*Table V.5, Figure V.1, Figure V.2*). Likewise, younger individuals (i.e., early twenties) seemed to more social comparison oriented than individuals in their late twenties and early thirties (*Table V.8, Figure V.3*) and tend to compare themselves with their Facebook friends in terms of physical attractiveness and good personality to a greater extent than older individuals (i.e., late twenties, early thirties) (*Appendix C*). Therefore, ***Hypothesis 1 is fully supported.***

Contrariwise, I assumed that individuals in their early thirties have a Facebook self-presentation based on self-promotion and that they are less social comparison oriented than younger individuals. I also presumed that they are more inclined to compare themselves with their Facebook friends in terms of intelligence and wealth.

The data analysis results proved that the surveyed young adults in their early thirties make use to a smaller extent of ingratiation and self-promotion Facebook self-presentation strategies than participants in their early or late twenties (*Table V.5, Figure V.1, and Figure V.2*). Indeed, participants in their early thirties proved to be less social comparison oriented than younger individuals (i.e., early and late twenties) (*Table V.8, Figure V.3*), but as opposed to what I assumed, they do not tend to compare themselves with their Facebook friends in terms of intelligence and wealth more than they compare themselves in terms of physical attractiveness and good personality and nor to a greater extent than younger individuals (i.e., early and late twenties) (*Appendix C*). In conclusion, **Hypothesis 2 is just partially supported**. I also have hypothesized that individuals in their late twenties represent a category of transition by using both ingratiation and self-promotion self-presentation strategies on Facebook, with average social comparison orientation and comparing themselves with their Facebook friends in all four tested aspects: physical attractiveness, good personality, intelligence and wealth. Participants in their late twenties indeed positioned themselves as a category of transition. In all measured aspects (i.e., ingratiation, self-promotion, social comparison orientation and social comparison ramifications) this age category differentiated itself from individuals in their early twenties (*Table V.5, Table V.8, Figure V.1, Figure V.2, Figure V.3, Appendix C*), but across all data analysis there were small and insignificant differences between participants in their late twenties and those in their early thirties. So, **Hypothesis 3 is just partially supported**.

V.5. The 2nd Study – In-Depth Interviews on the Particularities of Young Adults’ Self-Presentational Behavior and Social Comparison on Facebook

V.5.1. Short Presentation

The survey results reinforced the fact that Facebook enables individuals to selectively self-present through its various affordances and to secretly observe others self-presentations. It was shown that, for young adults Facebook users, giving likes to others’ shared content, checking up on people, chatting with their friends or sharing media content has become customary in their daily life. Among their top favorite Facebook features are those affordances that facilitate communication, social interaction and information (i.e., chat, events, content sharing, groups, news feed). Besides creating and maintaining social capital, another motivation for using Facebook proved to be looking at others’ profile.

A significant percentage of the study participants admitted that they frequently wait for others' feedback on their status updates, they are very interested in others' achievements and they do compare themselves with others on Facebook. Both ingratiation and self-promotion proved to be to some extent part of the surveyed young adults' self-presentation strategy on Facebook, looking to be liked by others and perceived as competent. So, behind their Facebook activities, there is a self-presentation strategy which helps young adults to present a desirable self on Facebook.

Strategic self-presentation and social comparison proved to be two psychosocial constructs difficult to quantify. The survey comprised a series of self-reported measures on these sensitive topics, relying therefore on the honesty of the participants. This may have generated some social desirability bias. Taking into consideration that the presentation of the self is to some extent a subconscious process, it definitively requires in-depth exploration. In order to understand how young adults construct their self-presentation on Facebook, I will further explore this topic through in-depth interviews. Given the fact that survey data also confirmed that young adults Facebook users engage to some extent in social comparisons, but the results presented some inconsistencies, further exploration of young adults' social comparison on Facebook is also required. So, to more fully understand the findings of the survey, I have decided to conduct in depth-interviews with young adults Facebook users. The three major themes of the interview schedule are *Facebook self-presentational behavior, Facebook "lurking" and social comparison* and *Facebook self-presentational predicaments*.

Building on Feehan's research (2014) that tried to identify the impressions that Facebook users want to convey and how they do it which results pointed out that there is *"a code of being on Facebook [...] it revolves around a common understanding of what information is right or wrong to put on Facebook"* (2014: 24) and that Facebook users mostly want to let the impression that they are *fun, outgoing, nice, popular, friendly, not boring, not mean, and genuine* (Feehan, 2014), I will further investigate the self-presentational behavior of young adults Facebook users. What I find particularly interesting in Feehan's results is that the images Facebook users want to convey highly correspond to ingratiation self-presentation strategy. Feehan also proved that Facebook users are aware of others' biased online self-presentation and of the highly judgmental nature of Facebook use. In this context, I consider useful a deeper exploration of young adults' Facebook self-presentational behavior.

Due to the fact that survey data frequently pointed out towards a passive Facebook behavior, which is called “*lurking*” (Tosun, 2012), I will further explore this type of Facebook behavior hand in hand with social comparison. In the process of self-presentation, individuals sometimes confront themselves with situations that contradict the impressions they wanted to give off, situations called “*self-presentational predicaments*”. These are embarrassing situations that “*clearly (and, sometimes, irrevocably) damage a person’s image in others’ eyes*” (Leary, 1996 in Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008:13). Taking into consideration that Facebook is a highly interactive environment, I presume that Facebook users are frequently confronting themselves with this type of situations. Therefore, I am particularly interested in how do young adults handle these self-presentational predicaments on Facebook. The scholarly literature did identify several available Facebook *suppression tools for identity management*, such as untagging or deleting photos (Strano & Wattai, 2010). So, the young adults’ underlying motivations of using such suppression tools on Facebook will also be explored here. The current study brings a few elements of novelty to this research topic. The characteristics of Facebook self-presentational behavior will be explored in relation with social comparison, lurking and self-presentational predicaments. In addition, the research will address a broader population category (i.e., young adults) than previous research, which was mainly targeting college students’ populations. Considering the above mentioned aspects, the in-depth interviews address the following three specific objectives of the main research (*RSO7-RSO9*), trying to identify the particularities of young adults’ Facebook self-presentational behavior (*RSO7*), the ways in which young adults engage in Facebook social comparison/“lurking” and their effects on them (*RSO8*) and the ways in which young adults handle Facebook self-presentational predicaments (*RSO9*). The below research questions were formulated in order to achieve these specific research objectives.

V.5.2. Research Questions

RQS2.1. What characterizes young adults’ Facebook self-presentational behavior?

RQS2.2. How do young adults engage in Facebook “*lurking*” and social comparison and what is the effect of these actions on them?

RQS2.3. What type of self-presentational predicaments do young adults have to deal with on Facebook and how they do it?

RQS2.4. Which are young adults’ underlying motivations for handling Facebook self-presentational predicaments?

V.5.4. Research Instrument

The research instrument used for this study is a semi-structured interview guide built on four major dimensions: *socio-demographic data*, *Facebook self-presentational behavior*, *Facebook “lurking” and social comparison* and *Facebook self-presentational predicaments* (Appendix F, Appendix G). By developing this interview guide I intended to expand the exploration of young adults’ self-presentational behavior and to gain a deeper understanding of their self-presentation strategies. The interview guide consists of 18 main questions. In order to keep the discussion focused on the pre-established topics I used a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions with probing that stimulated the production of more information, where needed. I had a gradual approach in the questions ordering, from a series of aspects of Facebook use to self-presentation strategies, to social comparison and ultimately to self-presentational predicaments.

The **socio-demographic data** dimension comprises the participants’ *age, gender, occupational status and their current city*. **Facebook self-presentational behavior** is measured here through the following indicators: *main activities, most enjoyable things on Facebook, shared information, posting process, profile picture, internal thinking on posting, feedback expectations, given impressions and opinions on inappropriate content*.

In order to explore **Facebook “lurking” and social comparison** I heavily relied on others’ Facebook actions and investigated *participants’ interests for their friends’ Facebook activity, others’ profile analysis, perceptions on others’ authenticity on Facebook, feelings associated with others’ self-presentations and Facebook’s role in the individual’s social life*. Ultimately, **Facebook self-presentational predicaments** are explored here through the *Facebook users’ actions of deleting own photos/posts, untagging from others’ photos/posts, things that bother them on Facebook and the intention of quitting Facebook*.

V.5.5. Research Sample and Data Collection

The investigated population of this qualitative study consists of those 510 young adults Facebook users between 18 and 35 years old that participated in the online survey. At the end of the questionnaire participants were asked to provide their contact data (Skype ID or email address) if they are interested to participate in the second phase of the research. Therefore, a non-probability sampling method was used here (i.e., voluntary sampling).

A total of 112 participants (48 out of those between 18-23 years old, 40 out of those between 24-29 years old and 24 of those between 30-35 years old) have volunteered through the survey to be interviewed (21.9% of the survey respondents). All the 112 volunteers were then contacted via Skype or email and were asked to electronically sign the interview consent form (*Appendix D, Appendix E*). Instructions were provided on how to sign the PDF file. They were also asked to communicate a time and hour at their convenience for the interview to take place. Out of the 112 individuals that volunteered for the interviews, only 20 actually responded to the message in due time. Therefore, **a voluntary sampling of 20 Facebook users between 18 and 35 years old was established for this study**. The total sample consists of 4 Facebook users between 18 and 23 years old (1 male/3 female), 11 Facebook users aged between 24-29 years old (1 male/10 female) and 5 Facebook users between 30 and 35 years old (3 male/2 female). Sample's age distribution doesn't allow me to keep the same age categorization as in the survey. Still, in the coding of the interviewees I used the letters A, B, C to differentiate individuals in their early twenties (A) from those in their late twenties (B) or early thirties (C). The interviews were conducted in May 2016. All interviews, except one, were done through Skype Chat. One of the participants expressed his preference for conducting the interview on another platform, so it was done through Google Hangouts. The interviews length ranged from 29 minutes to 2 hours and 7 minutes ($M = 70$ minutes). They took the form of a friendly conversation in which I encouraged participants to expand on their answers and to give examples. One of the main advantages of this type of online synchronous interviewing via Skype Chat was that it allowed me to gather a large quantity of data, in a short period of time, with no material costs.

V.5.6. Data Analysis and Results

In order to analyze the interview data, first I transcribed all Skype/Google Hangouts interviews into Word documents exactly how they were. By transcribing the interviews, I got familiar with the data and gain an insight on it. Then I organized and prepared the data for analysis. I looked for patterns, themes and differences by constantly comparing the answers and coding directly into English. Then, I systematically analyzed the data by using the interview guide framework to classify and summarize the data. I manually extracted the data from the transcripts and summarized it onto a series of concepts.

When what was said seemed important for explaining or illustrating a certain idea/concept, I selected several quotations which then I translated from Romanian to English. For a better visualization of some of the results I chose to use word clouds – *“a special visualization of text in which the more frequently used words are effectively highlighted by occupying more prominence in the representation”* (McNaught & Lam, 2010: 630). Further, the main findings of the analysis are presented.

V.5.7. In-depth Interviews Findings

Presuming that the whole ensemble of the actions undertaken on Facebook is part of a strategic self-presentation which helps individuals to present a desirable self to a widespread audience, the interview focused on how these actions compose the image young adults want to convey through Facebook. The interview data highlighted the fact that Facebook took over multiple social functions that facilitate social interaction, communication, information and expression. The interviewed young adults showed themselves thrilled by Facebook’s unitary structure that offers them everything they need in one place. Facebook has also offered them the opportunity to look into others’ life and looking at others’ Facebook profile has become customary for the interviewed young adults. Through its complex design, Facebook came to fulfill multiple functions in the interviewed young adults’ life. It has in the same time an entertainment, utilitarian, professional and informational role. Not only it has eased the access to communication, but it almost seized it. According to the interviewed young adults, Facebook has become the fastest way to get in contact with people and sometimes the only place where meetings are established and events are promoted.

Data also revealed a young adults’ constant struggle to balance two contradictory needs: the need of networking and openness and the need to protect their privacy, but the concept of privacy deeply varies from one person to another. Data also stressed out a young adults’ enthusiasm to massively self-disclose in the first years of Facebook use. Then, the fear of losing control over the shared information, together with a growing up process and social status changes, made them aware of the consequences of sharing a tremendous amount of personal information online. The process of presenting themselves on Facebook proved to be well thought out. The interviewed young adults pay great attention to what they post on Facebook (i.e., checking for spelling and grammar mistakes, post’s privacy, immoral or offensive content) and there is even a *“weighing”* of the post’s

worthiness (e.g., to be fun, interesting, important or good enough to be posted). Profile pictures and status updates are two self-presentational tools carefully used for self-expression, the interviewed young adults proving to be highly concern about how they are perceived on Facebook. They have high expectations when it comes to others' feedback on their posts. Likes and comments are associated with positive feelings (e.g., feeling seen, appreciated or validated), while not receiving them provokes disappointment and frustration.

The so called norm of reciprocity was observed here, in the sense that their feedback expectations are correlated with the feedback they offer in return and their number of friends. The self-descriptions of interviewed young adults point out towards a social desirable self presented on Facebook (i.e., fun, open, smart, active, discrete, with a sense of humor) and even towards ingratiation. In their own words, this is an image pretty close to reality, but it is not the complete image. They showed themselves pretty skeptical when it comes to Facebook' ability of reflecting an individual's true self and proved to be aware of the biased self-presentations. In the end, the interviewed young adults proved to have strong opinions about what is inappropriate to post on Facebook, reinforcing the so called code of being on Facebook and even pointing out towards another phenomenon of the virtual environment, online social burnout, caused by social overload. The interview data reinforced previous findings that labeled Facebook as *"a constant flow of edited lives which distorts our perception of reality"* (The Happiness Research Institute, 2015). *"Lurking"* proved to be part of the interviewed young adults' Facebook behavior, which showed a high interest for their friends' travels, recent activities, accomplishments, events and shared media content. There are even situations when important life events are firstly find out through Facebook (i.e., marriage proposal, unplanned engagement, giving birth, expecting a baby).

Even though there is among the interviewed young adults' a great awareness of the *"mystified"* version of the self presented on Facebook, looking at others' profile still can sometimes make them feel that they live less fulfilling lives than their Facebook friends, especially when looking at others' accomplishments, relationships, travels or social life. Although they believe people are not authentic at all on Facebook, these apparently perfect lives of others have repeatedly triggered the envy of the interviewed young adults. Some of them even think that others' Facebook posts can accentuate a certain negative feeling or trigger a self-evaluation process.

The interview data proved that Facebook is a very rich environment in opportunities for social comparisons through which the interviewed young adults frequently engage in negative upward comparison. It was also acknowledged a certain pressure that Facebook puts on individuals to improve their social life, but it is just a pseudo-improvement, the interviewees underlining the negative effects of Facebook on the individual's social life. A new Facebook phenomenon was also brought into discussion, the so called FoMO (i.e., fear of missing out). Through its technical affordances, Facebook allows individuals to carefully manage the impressions they give.

Growing up, transition to adulthood, certain life situations (e.g., break-ups), privacy concerns or concerns about how they are perceived were all motivations invoked by the interviewed young adults for deleting old Facebook posts or photos. The Facebook “*untag*” option is definitely used as an impression management tool. The interviewed young adults usually untag themselves from photos they do not like and would affect their image, from check-ins or posts that indicate where and with who they are and from impersonal posts. There is a certain degree of Facebook dissatisfaction, caused by some of the Facebook settings, safety concerns or concerns about Facebook being negatively used, but the things that deeply bother the interviewed young adults are Facebook's ubiquity, addiction and “*stolen*” time. Facebook is mostly perceived as a necessary evil. Even though they all intended to quit Facebook, already quitted or made some changes in the way they used it, they are still on Facebook. Their intention to quit was motivated by the time spent on Facebook. Many of them consider it addictive, intrusive or depressing. What prevented them to quit was the fact that, in their eyes, Facebook has become an informational and social necessity.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A mix-methods research design offered valuable advantages to the investigation of the self-presentation process in the virtual environment. This is a topic that requires not only quantifiable results, but also deeper insights on the reasoning behind using certain self-presentation strategies on Facebook and on the ways through which Facebook facilitates social comparison. The survey findings were meaningfully complemented by the interview data and offered a comprehensive analysis of the Facebook self-presentational behavior.

Still, in the investigation of young adults' Facebook strategic self-presentation and social comparison, the current research encountered certain limitations. First of all, I will mention the limitations posed by Facebook in data collection. Because probability sampling requires a clearly defined study population and implies randomization, process that requires a list of all people in the study population, impossible to obtain in this situation, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used for the survey and voluntary sampling for the interview. These sampling techniques allowed me to gather large quantity of data, in a short period of time, but it may have not produce representative results. Still, considering the exploratory approach of the current research, I do believe that this non-probability sampling methods ensured accurate samples for the research of young adults' Facebook self-presentational behavior. The samples are clearly not representative of the entire Facebook population between 18 and 35 years old and the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire investigated population. Yet, the survey sample size provides a minimum of representativeness for Romanian Facebook users aged between 18 and 35 years old. Other limitations of the current research are the existing disproportions in age and gender distribution of the samples. Intending to expend the investigation to a broader population than students in order to identify age-related differences in their Facebook self-presentational behavior, I partially succeeded (51% of the survey respondents are over 23 years old, 48.7% have other occupational status than high school or college students). As for the interview, it would have been useful to maintain the same age distribution in order to identify age-related characteristics of Facebook self-presentational behavior, but the voluntary sample used did not allowed me this. While for the survey younger individuals were more responsive, for the interview offered mostly individuals in their late twenties and early thirties. It would have been interesting to also explore gender-related differences in young adults' self-presentational behavior and social comparison on Facebook, but the gender distribution of the samples did not allowed this. Another limitation of the current research is the self-reported measures included in the survey, which made me rely on the honesty of the respondents. Last but not least, the data collection procedure used for the interviews it did not allowed the observation of visual and nonverbal cues that could have enriched the analysis of interview data.

The current research brought a significant contribution to this offering research topic. Both quantitative and qualitative data shaped out young adults' Facebook self-presentational behavior.

It proved that young adults are heavy Facebook users which strategically present themselves on Facebook by using both ingratiation and self-promotion as self-presentation strategies. Their virtual representations are highly elaborated and managed with the intention to present a socially desirable self. This is achieved through the use of compliments and flattery, systemically posting advantageous photos and interesting content and constantly sharing life experiences and accomplishments. Part of the young adults' Facebook behavior is also their social comparison orientation, both quantitative and qualitative data confirming that Facebook is, indeed, an endless realm of social comparison opportunities. The expansion of the investigation to a broader population allowed the observation of several age-related differences in young adults Facebook self-presentational behavior. Quantitative data revealed that there is a slightly decreasing tendency of the use of self-presentation strategies and social comparison orientation with age. Qualitative data brought richer insights on young adults' reasoning behind impression management and social comparison on Facebook.

In the end, the results of the current research reinforced some previous research findings and also brought new elements in the analysis of the strategic self-presentation in the virtual environment. This comprehensive approach to the topic of self-presentation on Facebook could be further explored through the observation of gender-related differences in strategic self-presentation, through the inclusion of other self-presentation strategies in the analysis and also through testing the relationship between strategic self-presentation, social comparison and subjective well-being.

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