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Szulc, L. (2019) Profiles, identities, data: making abundant and anchored selves in a platform society. Communication Theory, 29 (3). pp. 257-276. ISSN 1050-3293

https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qty031

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Profiles, Identities, Data:

Making Abundant and Anchored Selves in a Platform Society

Abstract

The practice of profile making has become ubiquitous in digital culture. Internet users are regularly invited, usually required, to create a profile for a plethora of digital media, including mega social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Understanding profiles as a set of identity performances, I argue that the platforms employ profiles to enable and incentivize particular ways and foreclose other ways of self-performance. Drawing on research into digital media and identities, combined with mediatization theories, I show how the platforms (1) embrace datafication logic (gathering as much data as possible and pinpointing the data to a particular unit), (2) translate the logic into design and governance of profiles (update stream and profile core), and (3) coax—at times coerce—their users into making of abundant but anchored selves, that is, performing identities which are capacious, complex, and volatile but singular and coherent at the same time.

Keywords

identity, profiles, social media, platforms, mediatization, data

Author's biographical note

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank Myria Georgiou (LSE), Nick Couldry (LSE), and Jędrzej Niklas (LSE) for their comments on the first draft of this article. I am also grateful for the feedback I received from the editor and reviewers of Communication Theory as well as from the participants of LSE Research Dialogues, KCL Digital Self workshop, ECREA Digital Culture and Communication Section conference in Brighton in 2017, MeCCSA conference in London in 2018, and ICA conference in Prague in 2018. This research was conducted during my postdoctoral research stay in the LSE Department of Media and Communications and funded by the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, grant number: 699745 - FACELOOK - MSCA-IF-EF-ST.

Introduction

The practice of profile making has become ubiquitous in digital culture. Internet users are regularly invited, usually required, to create a profile for a plethora of digital services, including online banking, gaming sites, dating apps, as well as Social Networking Services (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, and many, many others. Constructing a profile is not unique to digital culture: it can be traced back to such acts as filling in an application form, participating in a research survey, or summarizing one's career in CV. But it is only in digital culture that this practice has reached such an unprecedented scale. And the role of SNSs is crucial in this respect for a number of reasons. First, the most successful SNSs have gained an immense popularity: Facebook announced in mid-2017 that it had neared two billion monthly users (BBC, 2017). Second, the most successful SNSs have started to colonize the web by becoming infrastructures, or platforms, for other types of digital media (e.g., Helmond, 2015; van Dijck, 2016). Third, SNSs are becoming increasingly embedded in everyday life, especially through the popularization of smartphones. And profiles—as popular definitions of SNSs attest (e.g., boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211; Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 158)—are the essential component of SNSs: making a profile is not only most often a prerequisite of SNS use but also structures the use: We search for profiles, connect to profiles, and interact with profiles.

This proliferation of the practice of profile making through increasingly popular, powerful, and pervasive SNSs is closely related to the performance and construction of identities.[1] As boyd (2011) explains, profile making is "an explicit act of writing oneself into being in a digital environment" (p. 43). Acknowledging that online and offline experiences are mutually constitutive, I draw on Cover (2016) who understands profiles as "a series of performative acts which constitute the self" (p. 14). In this conceptualization of profiles, Cover builds on Butler's (1990, 1993) theory of identity as performative, according to which identity is constructed in

the process of repetitive acts of self-performance. Like a theater play, identity is constrained by a pre-existing script (power of structure), which nonetheless can be enacted differently every time it is performed (potential for agency). At the same time, particular reiterative performances of particular aspects of identity (e.g., performances of gender as masculine males and feminine females), stabilize these categories and, retroactively, create the illusion of their coherence (Butler, 1990, p. 143). Profiles are therefore understood here as a set of identity performances which, along with other online and offline identity performances, contribute to the constitution of the self (Cover, 2016, p. 14).

Specific affordances of profiles, however, limit the form in which identities can be performed on SNSs. Like any other "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988), profiles are "being developed, implemented, and effective as integral to the complex ideological, political, economic, and environmental arrangements that constitute social and cultural life" (Slack, 2017, p. 193). The very requirement to interact through profiles, specific SNS architectures, as well as distinct profile design and governance, reflect both conscious decisions and unconscious biases built into this particular technology of the self. Consequently, SNSs enable and incentivize particular ways and foreclose other ways of self-performance. Questions about the structure and origin, as well as potential effects of the ubiquitous practice of profile making for the performance and construction of identities lie at the heart of this article: What are the forms of self-performance afforded by SNSs? What kind of expectations are built into design and governance of profiles? What are the motivations behind them? And, most ambitiously: What potential consequences may they have for identity performance and construction?

While the growing number of works offers detailed discussions of specific profile categories (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity) on specific SNSs (e.g., Bivens, 2017; Bivens & Haimson, 2016; Byrne, 2007; Shield, 2017), there is still a scarcity of comparisons between different SNSs (Zhang & Leung, 2015), which could point to some broader tendencies across SNSs.

Therefore, in this article my aim is to build on the previous works on digital media and identities to discuss the rise of the practice of profile making more generally, to propose a theoretical move towards a more overarching examination of entire "profile culture" (Donnelly, 2011). To this end, I will marry a vast body of research on digital media and identities to the theories of mediatization, which are concerned with long-term and far-reaching changes of media and society (as I will explain in more detail further in this article), and thus become useful to zoom out to some more fundamental issues of profile culture in relation to identity.

In my discussion, I will focus on the so-called "affluent West," characterized by "ubiquitous digitality" where, as Cover (2016) explains, "identity is always online" (p. x):

> We are, in some ways, always performing ourselves online because even when we are nowhere near a digital communication device (which is now extremely rare), we leave traces all over the Internet, social-networking pages, blogs, Twitter, and other sites that are actively contributing to elements of our identity. (Cover, 2016, p. x)

Specifically, I will examine Western "mega social media platforms" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 7)—in particular Facebook and Twitter but also Apple, Google, and Yahoo—which dominate digital culture in the West and vigorously try to extend their reach beyond the West. After presenting relevant research on digital media and identities, and introducing mediatization theories, I will argue that in the digital media-saturated West it is the self that bears one of the clearest marks of mediatization—because of the proliferation of the practice of profile making—and that the ways the self is mediatized on SNSs reflect their particular logic, which is the logic of datafication: a double imperative to gather as much data as possible and to pinpoint the data to a particular unit. I will then show how SNSs translate this datafication logic into design and governance of profiles, coaxing—at times coercing— their users into making of abundant but anchored selves. In conclusion, I will relate these dominant tendencies towards abundant and

anchored selves in the profiles of mega social media platforms to some other digital media profiles, arguing for a more comparative and longitudinal research of the entire profile culture.

Digital Media and Identities

Media in general play an important role for how we come to understand ourselves, as Wood (2010) asserts in an article "From Media and Identity to Mediated Identity." The author asks to understand "media and identity formation as co-constitutive and context-dependent" (Wood, 2010, p. 269) and points out, for example, that engagements with media help to rehearse identities. Other authors (e.g., Georgiou, 2017; Thompson, 1995) explain that media also expand the repertoire of symbolic resources for identity (re)constructions, as well as loosen (but not break) the connection between identity and location. These developments can be considered as having a number of consequences. On the one hand, media provoke more reflexive identity projects. When people are exposed to a variety of identities via media, it becomes more difficult for a particular identity to uphold the claim to its universality (Georgiou, 2017, p. 95), which may additionally result in the proliferation of more postmodern conceptualizations of identity understood as decentered, multiple, and volatile. On the other hand, and for the same reason, identities become more fragile, which may provoke questions about the authenticity of identities as well as result in ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1990, p. 92) or symbolic overload (Thompson, 1995, p. 216).

In digital culture, the questions about media and identity have, to a large extent, remained the same. They too deal with the possibilities of a more reflexive and postmodern self, potentially more anonymous and disembodied online (e.g., Turkle, 1999; Zhao et al., 2008), the authenticity of the self (e.g., Bargh et al., 2002), or the power of digital media to foster isolation versus connection (e.g., Turkle, 2012). At the same time, scholars observe some crucial differences between traditional and digital media in relation to identity.

One of the differences is that digital media have proliferated the practice of explicit self-performance, to the extent of making the practice "pandemic," in the words of Marshall and Barbour (2015, p. 9). People have done identity work also with traditional media but what is new about digital media is that they invite—indeed strongly urge, often require—many and explicit identity performances (e.g., Altheide, 2013; Marwick, 2013a; Thumim, 2012, 2017). Therefore, Couldry and Hepp (2017) suggest that "[a]nything less than performing itself in the connected, archived space of the web amounts, it seems, to a failure of the self" (p. 145). Most evidently, it is the rise of digital media—along with the popularization of smartphones and the growing "postmodern self-obsession," as Peraica (2017, p. 25) claims—that accounts for the emergence of the selfie culture (Senft & Baym, 2015). In the context of SNSs, self-performances are additionally intertwined with the specific architecture of SNSs, which place each user at the very center of their networks. Writing particularly about Facebook, van Dijck (2013) comments that this architecture "gives each member page the look and feel of a magazine—a slick publication, with you as the protagonist" (p. 55).

Another major shift from traditional media-dominated to digital media-dominated societies, also related to the fact that digital media afford easy self-performance, has been the decreasing power of structure and the increasing role of agency, in the sense that internet users have gained more control over their own representations compared to traditional media. Writing in 1995 and mainly in relation to traditional media, Thompson (1995) did not deny the agency of active audiences but emphasized the role of structure in the traditional media-saturated world: The control of the few over the symbolic identity resources, which the media have provided to the many. In contrast, writing in 2017 and mainly in relation to digital media, Couldry and Hepp (2017, pp. 157) point to the greater agency in digital media-saturated world, arguing that the media have substantially enhanced the ability of the self to act. Dubbing these developments "a significant chapter in the history of the self" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 157), the authors argue

that digital media provide people with new possibilities for self-narration, self-representation, and self-maintenance, even though these possibilities become curtailed by specific designs, such as blogs' reverse chronological stream, as well as by specific social norms coming from, for example, selfie culture.

As the latter examples attest, it is important not to forget that digital media encompass different technologies, platforms, and devices, which afford different levels of agency. Bruns (2013) offers an overview of different phases of digital media's development with focus on how much power different digital media give their users as well as what level of skills they require from them in relation to identity performance:

- Early 1990s: HTML-coded homepages (increased agency, advanced skills)
- Mid-1990s: Mosaic graphical browser and GeoCities web hosting (reduced agency, basic skills)
- Late 1990s: Dreamweaver user-friendly software for creating websites (increased agency, [relatively] basic skills)
- Early 2000s: Web 2.0 (reduced agency, basic skills)
- Mid-2000s and later: SNSs (reduced agency, basic skills) (Bruns, 2013; for another review of "online auto/biographical technologies" see McNeill & Zuern, 2015)

Additionally, Bruns (2013) discusses a tendency towards decreased user agency not only in the history of digital media as such but also in the history of SNSs themselves. The author points out that users of MySpace had much more power over the look and feel of their sites (choice of style and design), than users of Facebook or Twitter (no choice over the basic style and design of profiles). Therefore, even though digital media as such have given their users greater control over their representations than traditional media did, the emergence and development of SNSs have observed the trend towards reduced users' agency as compared to many other digital media.

I will continue the discussion about digital media and identities by focusing on the very practice of profile making on SNSs as well as basic similarities in profiles' design and governance across mega social media platforms to consider their wider consequences for identity performance and construction. To this end, I will now turn to the theories of mediatization, which offer a conceptual toolkit to capture more profound changes in media and society.

Platformization and Datafication of SNSs

Despite some minor and some major differences in theorizing mediatization (see Finnemann, 2011; Lundby, 2014), scholars agree that, most broadly, mediatization is "a concept used in order to carry out a critical analysis of the interrelation between the change of media and communication, on the one hand, and the change of culture and society on the other" (Hepp & Krotz, 2014, p. 3). In this sense, mediatization tries to capture long-term and far-reaching transformations of culture and society, putting forward the idea that the rapid development of media and their growing permeation in our everyday life during the last century or so have played one of the key roles in these transformations (Krotz, 2007). The concept was originally developed in relation to traditional media (particularly television) and their influence on politics, pointing to the increasing dependence of politicians on the media. Nevertheless, some scholars relate mediatization to the broader history of media, arguing that the development of specific media technologies and media cultures have had important consequences for changes in societies. Couldry and Hepp (2017), for example, ask to recognize three main waves of mediatization: mechanization, electrification, and digitalization. While theories of mediatization tend to focus on media's major effects, they try to avoid the trap of technological determinism, emphasizing that media, while crucial for, are not the only or independent force of social change (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Finnemann, 2011; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2010).

Interested in the connection between changes in media and changes in society, mediatization theories are helpful to understand a broader relationship between SNSs' profile culture and the performance and construction of identities. To analyze this relationship, however, we need to first grasp recent changes in SNSs, especially in their business model, which translate into certain design and governance of SNSs. One of the key recent changes in digital culture has been the rise of mega digital media platforms—especially Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft—which have become infrastructures, indeed platforms, for other types of digital media (Helmond, 2015; Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards & Sandvig, 2018). Recognizing these developments, scholars speak of the rise of the "platform society" (van Dijck, 2016; van Dijck & Poell, 2015), emerging "platformativity" (Hands, 2013), or "platformization" of the web (Helmond, 2015). What it means for mediatization is that the originally open web—where potentially anyone could "create visible, findable, and linkable content that is encoded using public standards" (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 302)—has become increasingly dependent on a handful of commercially-driven and globally-operating platforms.

In platform society, SNSs have become "platformized" (van Dijck, 2013), that is, while the most popular SNSs were created as relatively self-contained "sites," they soon became "platforms" by offering Application Programming Interfaces (APIs); they allowed their data or features to be accessed and used by third parties (e.g., Flicker in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Facebook and Twitter in 2006; Helmond, 2015, p. 4). The consequence of this move has been, as Helmond (2015) explains, that the most successful SNSs have expanded into the rest of the web (e.g., by including Facebook and Twitter buttons or YouTube videos on other sites), requiring at the same time that other sites and apps make their data "platform ready," that is, compatible with the platforms' software. Combined with the immense popularity of the SNSs and their growing embeddedness in everyday life, this means that platformized SNSs have already accumulated great power over everyday digital communication. Not surprisingly,

therefore—and in the spirit of mediatization theories—van Dijck and Poell (2015) argue that "[t]he first decade of social media has given rise to an online infrastructure that is profoundly shaping the way in which societies are organized and publics are shaped" (p. 1) and Helmond (2015) writes about "platforms reformat[ing] the web according to the logic of social media" (p. 2).

But what is this SNS logic that Helmond (2015) mentions? The concept of "media logic" comes from mediatization theories: It was introduced by Altheide and Snow (1979) to explain the role of traditional media's distinctive features, formats, styles, or time schedules to which social actors (especially politicians) need to adhere to successfully function in the mediatized world. In the same vein, scholars have already taken first steps towards defining what they call "social media logic" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), "network media logic" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), or "platform logic" (Schwarz, 2016). All the authors argue that the logic is not entirely different from traditional media logic, that it is dynamic and multifaceted, and propose to consider its distinct elements. However, one of the key elements of the logic—discussed in all the works and explicitly acknowledged by van Dijck and Poell (2013)—is datafication, that is, "the ability of networked platforms to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before" (p. 9). Datafication lies at the core of the evolution of SNSs from sites to platforms, as van Dijck and Poell explain:

> […] (meta) data were often considered a byproduct of online networks, but as platforms gradually matured, they have turned more into data firms, deriving their business models from their ability to harvest and repurpose data rather than from monetizing user activity proper. (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 9)[2]

Arguing that "'data' and 'information' generated by systems of computers are today a precondition for everyday life," Couldry and Hepp (2017, p. 123) propose even to consider

datafication as the entirely new wave of mediatization, at the same level of prominence as mechanization, electrification, and digitalization.

My point is that platformization and datafication of SNSs have also major consequences for the performance and construction of identities because it is the self that bears one of the clearest marks of mediatization in the digital media-saturated world. While mediatization is usually considered to be an all-encompassing process—the "mediation of everything," as Livingstone (2009) puts it—scholars ask to recognize the degree and nature of the mediatization of particular social domains (e.g., Fornäs, 2014, p. 486; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2010, p. 226). In their classic study on (traditional) media logic, Altheide and Snow (1979) asserted that "politics [along with entertainment business] has been most closely aligned with the rise and evolution of media forms" (p. 103). I argue that it is the self that has been most closely aligned with the rise and evolution of SNSs because, most often, SNSs structure the entire interaction of their users on, between, and through profiles. Moreover, SNSs not only mediatize the self heavily but also mediatize it in particular ways: by embracing a business model based on gathering, exchanging, and monetizing data, SNSs subject their users' self-performances to the logic of datafication. In the rest of this article, I will discuss how platformized SNSs translate datafication logic into profile culture, coaxing—at times coercing—their users into making of abundant but anchored selves.

Abundant and Anchored Selves in Platform Society

One profound consequence of datafication as the key element of SNS logic is an intensified externalization and materialization of identity. Discussing the rise of "identity theft" in the broader digital culture, Poster (2007) argues to "account for the construction of identity as an object, not as a subject" (p. 118). The author shows how identity, commonly understood as an "interior consciousness," has become externalized and materialized as a series of numerical

indicators (e.g., date of birth, social security number, credit card number) and personal details (e.g., name, address, mother's maiden name).

With the increasing datafication, identity becomes even more externalized and materialized as a set—or multiple sets—of data. However, while those processes have originally been driven by states and their desire to surveil citizens, in times of datafication they have primarily been driven by platforms and their desire to monetize data, mainly for commercial advertisers (Turow, 2011) but also, for example, for social campaigners (van Dijck, 2013) and security services (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). The content of the identity as an object also expanded beyond basic numerical indicators and personal details to include what Rogers (2013) names "postdemographics," that is, "information that comprises an online profile and its accompanying baggage" (p. 154) such as information about joined groups, accepted invitations, and installed apps. In this context, commentators not only point to the emergence of our "data doubles" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) but also argue that "we are data" (Cheney-Lippold, 2017), "'walking sensor platforms' generating endless seas of data" (Hunt in Clough et al., 2015, p. 146).

At the same time, as many scholars note, SNS users are often unaware of having their data doubles or, if they are, they do not know how the data doubles are being created and used. Beer (2009), for one, talks about "technological unconscious," pointing to the unseen and unknown ways in which SNSs profile their users through algorithms. Pasquale (2015), in turn, proposes a metaphor of the "black box society," where the black box refers to both a recording device and a mysterious system: "tracked ever more closely by firms and government, we have no clear idea of just how far much of this information can travel, how it is used, or its consequences" (p. 3). Moreover, SNSs actively misrepresent their commercial motivations, framing their services in terms of "empowerment" and "democratization" (Gillespie, 2010), and their data gathering in terms of "helping users," for example: "Data helps make Google

services more useful for you" (Google), "Add a phone. Don't get locked out of your account" (Apple), or "Confirm your mobile number. If you forget your password, we'll be able to text you a new one" (Facebook). Therefore, van Dijck (2013) insists on calling SNSs not social but connective media, that is, media which make profits from turning human desire for connectedness into valuable resource of automated connectivity.

Because many SNS users are unaware of the existence of their data doubles and are unfamiliar with the datafication logic of SNSs (e.g., Beer, 2009; Pasquale, 2015)—unlike, for example, the politicians who have been more consciously adjusting their activities to the logic of traditional media—we may wonder how datafication logic may influence SNS users' identity performance and construction. I propose that this influence is exercised by translating basic premises of datafication logic into the very design and governance of SNS profiles. In essence, datafication is based on 1) gathering as much data as possible—the production of the so-called big data—and 2) pinpointing the data to a particular unit, most often an individual user but also, for example, a specific device or household. The design of SNS profiles reflect this datafication logic quite accurately: most often profiles consist of 1) a constant stream of updates such as tweets, Facebook posts, or Instagram photos (production of data), and 2) a profile core, which usually includes a user's name or nickname, picture, as well as basic personal details (pinpointing of data). SNS profiles work as data farms where the yielded data can be attributed to individual users and harvested for commercial purposes. The SNSs' use of the word "profile" as a noun, indicating users' capacity for self-performance, clearly overlaps with the use of the word as a verb in advertising: "to profile," that is, to classify and cluster users into commercially viable units or, as Turow (2011) puts it more drastically, to "divide people into targets and waste" (p. 7) (see also Elmer, 2004).

I will now move on to show how such design and governance of SNS profiles—in the way that reflects SNS logic to produce and pinpoint data—create an infrastructure which enables

and incentivizes specific identity performance and construction. To be clear, I do not suggest that design and governance of profiles determine identities but I argue that they influence them and, drawing on others' research into SNSs and identities, I point to some more and less successful efforts of SNSs into making of abundant but anchored selves.

Abundant Self

The word "profile" has originally referred to something concise: a short description, summary, outline, sketch, or blurb. In contrast to this etymological meaning of the word—but in line with datafication logic—SNS profiles are designed to provide an "endless and virtually unlimited information about their [users'] everyday life" (Beer, 2009, p. 997). When users of Facebook or Twitter, as well as of many other SNSs, click on their "profile" button, what they see at the very center of their screens is a stream of their updates in a reverse chronological order. This stream is anchored in a profile core—name, picture, and personal details—which, however, tends to be more often reduced to very limited information, basically equating self-performance on SNSs with constant posting of updates. A good example is Twitter where the profile core is so minimal that basically "You are what you Tweet!" (Twitter in van Dijck, 2013, p. 83) but it is also true for Facebook, where "the profile [core] has gradually become de-emphasized in favor of the ethic of constant updating" (Morrison, 2014, p. 127).

At the same time, SNSs actively encourage their users to post a plethora of information about themselves: at the top of the stream of updates, Facebook and Twitter prompt their users to post more updates by asking such general questions as "What's on your mind?," "Want to share an update?" (Facebook) or "What's happening?" (Twitter). These invitations to perform oneself, to exhibit different parts of one's life, relates to what Bauman (2007) names a "confessional society:" "a society notorious for effacing the boundary which once separated the private from the public, for making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private" (p. 3).

But what SNSs require is not just a confession of the private as such but a continuous confession of the private, a constant sharing of ever more details of one's life, accumulating into the abundant self.[3]

The mediatization of the abundant self, however, is not limited to SNS users' regular posting of updates about themselves but includes virtually all other actions they take, all the clicks they make on SNSs. Each like, comment, share, reply, poke, tag, or retweet, each new Facebook friend and Twitter or Instagram follower, establishes a connection which is turned into data that can be monetized. Geospatial tags too were introduced to Facebook and Twitter for targeted advertising. In the "culture of connectivity" (van Dijck, 2013), making connections is not only a social act but also a profit-yielding action. Therefore, it is in SNSs' own interest to encourage their users to make as many connections as possible. This, in turn, fosters the abundance of self-performances not only in terms of "posting about oneself" but also in terms of "making connections," which results in the abundant self taking on a more "networked" (Papacharissi, 2011) or "relational" (Ess, 2010; McNeill, 2012) shape. SNS users become identified and defined by their (abundant) connections: the Facebook friends they have may make them seem more attractive (if the friends themselves are considered as attractive, Walther et al., 2008) and the Facebook fanpages they like may out them as gay or lesbian (Kosinski et al., 2013).

Moreover, to this self abundant in data created by SNS users themselves—their updates and connections—adds even more data created by third parties. First, SNS users may contribute to other users' profiles: they may post texts and images to them, tweet at them, tag them in photos, check-in them, and comment on or reply to their posts. Even "liking" the updates of others contributes to the others' abundant selves as created through their profiles. In this sense, as McNeill (2012) notes building on the work of Smith and Watson (2010), SNSs emphasize the collaborative nature of identity with SNS users acting as "mutual 'coaxers, coaches, and coercers'" (p. 73). Second, the abundance of updates and connections is maximized by

algorithms. SNSs use data analytics not only to directly monetize data but also to yield more data. SNS algorithms work to choose adverts SNS users receive, as well as filter updates they see, fanpages they may be interested in, and people they may want to connect with. By doing so, algorithms feed into the abundant self. They not only create new tastes and desires (Beer, 2009) but also provoke more data production by suggesting to SNS users the variety of new connections which they would be most likely to make, based on the analysis of their already shared data. Therefore, Cheney-Lippold (2011, 2017) points to the rise of a "new algorithmic identity," emerging from this constant interplay of data shared by SNS users and interpretations of the data by algorithms, and McNeill (2012) compares algorithms to "shadow biographers" (p. 75), the co-producers of our already, if partially, posthuman digital identities.

Finally, SNSs provide their users with some results of data analytics in order to, again, encourage users to produce more data. Many SNS profiles display basic metrics about their users' activity. For example, Twitter, Instagram, and Goodreads show in their users' profiles the number of tweets, photos, or books the users added, along with the number of their followers and following users. The display of those metrics is not negotiable: they are included in profiles automatically and users are not allowed to remove them. More recently, Twitter made another step in this direction by providing its users with access to a more detailed data analytics (visible only to profile owners) under such titles as "Analytics" and "View Tweet Activity" (Beer, 2016, p. 92), as well as by introducing "verified badge" in 2009, which primarily works to verify the authenticity of prominent users but, at the same time, "encourages users to perpetually work at posting and crafting themselves online" (Hearn, 2017, p. 73). By exposing their users to these metrics and analytics, SNSs promote the culture of self-scrutiny, self-branding, and self-promotion where popularity and reputation become the most desirable commodities (Marwick, 2013b). Popularity and reputation, however, are understood primarily in numerical terms, which is in line with datafication logic, always in need of more data. Moreover, as van Dijck

(2013) points out, these quantifications alter the meaning of such concepts as "friends," "followers," and "well connected," which have originally indicated quality—strong ties, dedication, commitment—and on SNSs express quantity, the sheer number of people to whom SNS users are connected (p. 13) (see also Utz, 2010).

Anchored Self

The abundance of data produced through SNS profiles would be of much less value if it was not possible to anchor the data, to pinpoint it to a particular user. Therefore, before the entire SNS machinery of stimulating big data production is set in motion, SNS users are required to identify themselves by creating an account with their name, nickname, or e-mail address, as well as password. Thus, the anchoring of data is translated into the anchoring of the self through the profile core. Though, it may be realized to a different extent and in a different form on different SNSs. For example, YouTube allows but does not require registration because it has gradually prioritized television features over social networking features (van Dijck, 2013, p. 114). At the other end of the spectrum is Facebook, which not only requires from its users to sign up before using its services but also demands that they provide "the same name that you use in everyday life" (authentic self) and that they "create only one account" (singular self) (Facebook, 2018). These terms of service are in line with datafication logic: "If people maintain several different profiles on the same site or use obscure nicknames, they are difficult to track and there is no indication that the information they provide is accurate" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 357). At the same time, they promote an essentialist understanding of identity as authentic and singular, which has been long discredited in social sciences (e.g., van Zoonen, 2013) and is in opposition to some users' needs, for example drag queens using stage names on Facebook (Lingel & Golub, 2015).

In a broader landscape of SNSs, however, there are some tendencies to challenge the authentic and singular selves so strongly advocated by Facebook. Regarding the former, the

benefits of verifying users' authenticity—most often legal name—are not clear from the perspective of datafication logic. As Turow (2011) points out, for data analytics "[i]t matters little if your name is John Smith, Yesh Mispar, or 3211466" (p. 7). Traditional identity categories such as age, race, and gender also become more redundant. While they are still conventionally employed in digital advertising as predictive categories, the inaccuracy of their predictions can be alleviated thanks to big data analytics. The abundance of data about a particular user works to remove the unnecessary assumptions about the identity categories: for example, instead of advertising a lipstick to those legally recognized as females, it would be more profitable to advertise it to those whose previous data suggest they are more likely to buy one. Cheney-Lippold (2017) shows that although algorithms' designers still tend to cling to the identity categories, they redefine them not only by making them spectral instead of binary (you can be defined as "32 percent confidently 'female,'" p. 34) but also volatile instead of stable: "our algorithmic identities change by the input" (p. 6). Cheney-Lippold (2017) continues that it does not matter if you are "authentically" of a particular gender "so long as you surf/purchase/act like that gender" (p. 7). This reasoning is reflected in the design of profile cores, previously often extensive pull-down menus and recently usually brief fill-in boxes, provoking a move away from what Nakamura (2002) calls "menu-driven identities" and towards what we may call "postidentities," which—similarly to postdemographics (Rogers, 2013)—privilege spectral and violate identifying through diverse updates and connections over binary and stable identifying through traditional identity categories.

Regarding the singular self, its benefits for SNSs are more obvious than those of the authentic self: it helps to create a detailed customer profile of a particular user. But the singular self becomes challenged in the broader landscape of digital media by the proliferation of the practice of profile making across different SNSs. Papacharissi (2011) points out that internet users most often manage multiple SNSs and thus create and navigate multiple profiles. Besides, some users

create multiple profiles on a particular SNS, including Facebook, disobeying its terms of service. For example, researchers point to LGBTQs who create multiple Facebook profiles to protect their privacy (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016) or to young hires who maintain different professional and non-professional Facebook profiles (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). This, as Papacharissi (2011) notes, creates "the potential for multiple performances of the self" (p. 308). At the same time, the author argues that those multiple performances of the self do not necessarily lead to contradictory or incoherent identity performances but result in a more reflexive self: "Networked and remixed sociabilities emerge and are practiced over multiplied place and audiences, that do not necessarily collapse one's sense of place, but afford sense of place reflexively" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317). Nevertheless, the sheer possibility of creating multiple profiles across SNSs does provide digital media users with a greater agency for diverse self-performances.

At the same time, the possibility of the diverse self-performances across different SNSs has been curtailed by the platformization of SNSs. By offering their APIs and identifying users across different digital media, for example through the OAuth 2.0 authentication standard (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 48-49), SNSs have created "the conditions for frictionless and easy movement and transferability of individual users across platforms, devices, and apps" (Hearn, 2017, p. 71). This new thinking of selling, exchanging, and combining data between SNSs at the database level has been reflected at the surface level of profile culture with the emergence of what I call "meta profiles"—which use one profile for multiple services of one company, e.g., Yahoo ID (used also for Flicker) or Google Account (used also for YouTube)—as well as "super meta profiles"—which use one profile for multiple services of multiple companies (especially Google and Facebook profiles, the latter used also for e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, Netflix, Spotify, and Tinder).

SNSs frame the introduction of meta and super meta profiles in terms of benefits for their users, omitting the fact that they are first and foremost beneficial for SNSs themselves. Yahoo justifies the use of Yahoo ID to sign in to Flickr by listing the following benefits: "Easier password recovery," "Faster customer support," and "One login to rule them all" (Yahoo, n.d.). Similarly, Facebook explains that Facebook Connect (which allows to log in with Facebook to other services) "makes it easier for you to take your online identity with you all over the Web […]" (Chan, 2008). What this platformization of SNSs means for identity performance is that it becomes more difficult for SNS users to create diverse self-performances across different SNSs. The singular self becomes more "fixed" (van Zoonen, 2013) in the broader landscape of SNSs where, for example, a user's Facebook pictures and Spotify songs become automatically transferred to the user's Tinder profile.

Conclusion

In this article, I drew on research on digital media and identities, and combined it with mediatization theories to reflect on a wider importance of the ubiquitous practice of profile making. I particularly focused on the profiles created by "mega social media platforms" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 7) of the affluent West, arguing that they heavily mediatize the self and that they mediatize it in particular ways. I showed how the platforms (1) embrace datafication logic (gathering as much data as possible and pinpointing the data to a particular unit), (2) translate the logic into design and governance of profiles (update stream and profile core), and (3) coax—at times coerce—their users into making of abundant but anchored selves, that is, performing identities which are capacious, complex, and volatile but singular and coherent at the same time. Cover (2016) points out that all contemporary media forms are located in the middle space between neoliberalism (the demand to "self-manage the production of identity through the fluid, changeable, and manipulable self-fashioning" [p. 46], corresponding to the abundant self) and the Enlightenment (the demand to "perform a coherent, intelligible, and recognizable identity"

[p. 46], corresponding to the anchored self). In case of mega social media platforms, however, this "push-and-pull" struggle between neoliberalism and the Enlightenment, as Cover (2016, p. 47) calls it, is not really a struggle but a generative force at the service of datafication. The combination of abundant and anchored selves is crucial for the platforms because it is not the production of big data itself but the ability to pinpoint the data to particular users that ensures its most effective monetization (Marwick, 2013a, p. 357).

Avoiding the trap of technological determinism, I suggested that the design and governance of profiles on mega social media platforms enable and incentivize particular identity performance and construction, both online and offline since the two are mutually constitutive. To answer how exactly and to what extent this influence is actualized, negotiated, or resisted requires further empirical research focused on profile uses. At the same time, it is crucial to note that many aspects of abundant and anchored selves are simply imposed by SNSs on their users and are hence non-negotiable. Most often, users cannot use a SNS without creating a profile; in some cases, they cannot use a SNS without having a profile on another SNS (e.g., Flickr requires Yahoo ID and some dating apps require a Facebook account, for example Feeld and Happn, as of June 2018). Users also cannot choose not to show their metrics to other users, for example on Twitter, Instagram, and Goodreads (unless they use Grosser's "demetricator," see https://bengrosser.com/). Finally, they cannot opt out of some gathering, analysis, and exchange of their data, at least in case of those SNSs which operate according to datafication logic. Therefore, while users can always choose not to use a particular SNS—though, such a choice has increasingly more far-reaching social consequences in "ubiquitous digitality" (Cover, 2016, p. x)—their agency to negotiate or resist the structures imposed by SNSs becomes limited by the very design and governance of SNSs (Bruns, 2013; McNeill & Zuern, 2015).

In terms of more far-reaching implications, this article advocates to think about the recent rise of the practice of profile making in digital culture from a wider perspective. I propose that

close analyses of particular profile categories on particular SNSs (e.g., Bivens, 2017; Bivens & Haimson, 2016; Byrne, 2007; Shield, 2017) should be complemented by comparative and longitudinal studies that employ broader theoretical frameworks—one of which, that of mediatization, was suggested here—so that we can arrive at better understanding of larger social phenomena. My own contribution is limited to the prevalent tendencies in profile design and governance across mega social media platforms, and should be advanced by the comparisons of these platforms to other digital media. After all, not all SNSs require profiles, not all profiles are the same, and not all users use the same profiles in the same way. For example, different SNSs make different use of anchored selves (e.g. in terms of use of meta and super meta profiles), while dating app profiles tend to promote anchored but not abundant selves (no streams of updates), which is in line with their own business models, still more often dependent on premium membership rather than data-based targeted advertising (but see Albury, Burgess, Light, Race & Wilken 2017). At the same time, all digital media function in the digital culture, which is currently dominated by a few mega platforms driven by datafication logic. Smaller players may negotiate and resist but not ignore these power structures. Therefore, broader comparisons between digital media profiles, combined with research into their developments over time and studies of digital structures and agencies are crucial for the identification of major differences as well as, and possibly more importantly, fundamental similarities between the profiles, so to better understand the implications of the rise of profile culture for identity performance and construction.

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Endnotes

1. Terms such as “identity” and “self” are used in humanities and social sciences in a myriad of different ways. In this article, I will follow sociological conceptualizations offered by Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin (2010), according to which the self is the most general concept standing for a reflexive subject (“I”), while self-concept is the object of that reflection (“me”), consisting of a) self-referring dispositions, b) physical characteristics, and c) identities. The latter include personal, role-based, and collective identities. At the same time, while reporting on works of others, I will stick to their preferred terms.

2. Other elements of “social media logic” discussed by van Dijk and Poell (2013), apart from datafication, include: programmability, popularity, and connectivity.

3. While in principle datafication logic drives SNSs to gather an abundance of any kind of data, specific SNSs engineer the process to favor one kind of data over other kinds of data. Twitter, for example, changed its prompt in 2009 from “What are you doing?” to “What’s happening?” (Morrison, 2014, p. 128). I want to thank Adi Kuntsman for pointing it out to me.