

From embarrassing Facebook posts to controversial Tweets, why are consumers oversharing online?

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Increased use of digital communication is causing consumers to lose their inhibitions and "overshare" online, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Sharing itself is not new, but [consumers](#) now have unlimited opportunities to share their thoughts, opinions, and photos, or otherwise promote themselves and their self-image online. Digital devices help us share more, and more broadly, than ever before," writes author Russell W. Belk (York University).

Blogging beckons us to tell all. YouTube's slogan is "Broadcast Yourself." Social media sites ask us "What do you have to Share?" Consumers can rate books, movies, or restaurants online and engage with other consumers on forums and on the websites of sellers like Amazon, Yelp, or IMDB. The possibilities for sharing online are endless and many of the most popular websites and smartphone apps are devoted to sharing.

This week, the media was abuzz with the news that the 70-year-old Geraldo Rivera had shared a shirtless "selfie" on Twitter. Countless celebrities, from "30 Rock" star Alec Baldwin to Miami Dolphins wide receiver Mike Wallace, have lived to regret controversial tweets. Meanwhile, ordinary consumers routinely post photos online of themselves nude or engaged in embarrassing activities.

While a limited number of people see our physical selves, a virtually infinite number of people may see our online representations of ourselves. Appearing literally or figuratively naked online can come back to haunt consumers in future school and job applications, promotions, and relationships.

"Due to an online disinhibition effect and a tendency to confess to far more shortcomings and errors than they would divulge face-to-face, consumers seem to disclose more and may wind up 'oversharing' through digital media to their eventual regret," the author concludes.

More information: Russell W. Belk. "Extended Self in a Digital World." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2013.

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