Social media users adapt personas specifically for platforms

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Researchers at King's College London, working in collaboration with Penn State University, have found that social media users adapt their behaviour to individual social media platforms in a way that is clearly identifiable and learnable when tested on a model.

Using the webpages of 116,998 About.me users, the research team extracted matched user profiles on several major social networks including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram and found that different genders and age groups adapt their behaviour differently from each other. Such behaviour includes the language they use in profile descriptions and the type of images they choose for their profile pictures.

Women were found to smile more than men in the profile pictures across all five of the social networks, while those under 25 were less likely to smile and this was suggested to be a result of the popularity of selfies amongst young people.

On LinkedIn, 90% of profile pictures were of a single person, while less than 60% of profile pictures on Facebook and Instagram were of only one person. Interestingly, on Facebook and Instagram, up to 40% of users used a picture that didn't include their face.

In contrast to statistics which show that women have a slightly higher myopia rate than men, more men were found to wear glasses in their profile pictures, suggesting that the two genders choose to fit in with

gender-specific norms or social pressures; men may want to appear more intelligent while women appear to give in to social pressure to not wear glasses.

The first author, Dr Changtao Zhong, now working for Twitter, says that the model developed by the researchers is able to automatically identify the network when given a profile picture or self-description.

The differences in behaviour were generally consistent across different platforms and these behaviour differences correspond to how informal or formal the network is. Networks that are more formal such as LinkedIn are easier to tell apart from networks that are less formal such as Facebook.

Dr Nishanth Sastry, Informatics, said: 'The results of our research have shown that different social networks do have different conventions, and users adapt their profiles to suit these conventions. Our findings have implications for advertising strategies. For example, brands that find a large audience on one particular social media platform may not be popular on another, because the expected norms and core demographic could be different.'

More information: Wearing Many (Social) Hats: How Different are Your Different Social Network Personae? pike.psu.edu/publications/icwsm17.pdf

Provided by King's College London