To What Extent is the Designing and Manipulating of a Persona on Facebook a Form of Escape from Ourselves?

By

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Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture
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This Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN, from Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

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“To what extent is the designing and manipulating of a persona on Facebook a form of escape from ourselves?”
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Abstract

This research paper aims to find out the possible effect of an individual designing their persona on Facebook using the various tools that it offers, as making us escape from ourselves. Conclusion to the question is developed through analysis of existing literature and the process of interviewing people related to the field of psychology, marketing and arts.
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Introduction

The world we live in today is full of distractions. We often find ourselves questioning why there is never enough time to get everything done and never enough time to do the things we want to do. But on closer inspection of the problem one can deduce that it is not the physical lack of time that is deterring us from completing that ‘to do’ list but rather our own mental diversions that lead us into a different time dimension. Recently there has been a boom of social network sites. In their journal, ‘Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship’, the authors Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison give their description of social network sites as follows:

‘We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.’

These sites allow people to interact as they would in real life but with the added advantage of creating a profile for themselves that will exist on the internet for however long they wish it to exist. Just as we would in real life, we present ourselves to others in a way that we want them to perceive us and try to maintain that image using various tools. Facebook fits the above mentioned criteria for social network sites adequately but what makes it more popular than other sites is the increasing amount of options it gives to its users to express themselves. State the authors of the study titles ‘The Benefit of Facebook “Friends”: Social Capital and College’

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2 http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites
Students, ‘Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each others’ hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles.’

However, we need to think that by having such readily available convenient tools to develop an alternate persona, are we consequently becoming passive, receding into ourselves and increasingly becoming concerned about how we are perceived online? Also, with the amount of time we spend online, is it possible that we may be building and escaping to an alternate self?

The research topic I have undertaken broadly comes under the realm of social science. Having been, and still being an active participant of the social media age, mine as well as other peoples’ behaviour started coming under my notice ever since Facebook became a component of my daily life starting in 2008. To check whether it was just my bias or a genuine trend, I asked some of my peers if they had noticed the same trends emerging. Their answer in the affirmative led me to question the source/factors of such change. Coming from a design field however, I found it almost natural to attempt to link those trends to design and what possible role it could play in leading to such trends.

With this research I hope to explore the extent of the role of design in making people escape from themselves. I felt it was important to research this because it concerns the youth of the nation. I started to wonder why 18-24 year olds are spending an increasing amount of time on social networking sites like Facebook. If we suppose that it has such profound effects on the

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4 Pakistan Facebook Statistics
youth as allowing them to *escape* on a regular basis, which often times becomes too much, does that not affect the productivity of our nation in some way or another?

I had noticed a change of habit in myself as well as others and in my interactions with the people I had on my friend list on Facebook. There was a noticeable gap between the kind of interaction online and in-person interaction. And it was not just myself, but my peers too who had noticed something similar. Researching about an online phenomenon, while being an active participant of it, does create a window for any subconscious bias in my views. Another factor of influence that pushed me to question the influence of Facebook on our youth is my personal interest in human psychology in general. Having said that however, I will make all possible efforts to ensure the subject is studied and researched on as objectively as possible.
Literature Review

Much has been written about social media and their effects on people. The shift in communication mode from ‘face-to-face’ to electronic screens has opened our eyes to the way our communication changes depending on what the medium is. To understand the context in which this research aims to understand Facebook personas, we must first understand the reasons behind an individual’s motivation to create a digital version of them-selves. Before delving into that however, a brief explanation of what motivates us to behave a certain way is as follows.

‘Why People Watch Reality TV’ is a chapter authored by Steven Reiss and James Wiltz (Ohio State University) taken from the book *Media Psychology*. It aims to prove scientifically that there is a link between the sensitivity theory and what people choose to watch on television, in this case reality TV.5

After testing thousands of people the authors conclude that there are sixteen basic desires that influence a person’s behaviour. This is the basis of the sensitivity theory.6 When one of the desires is achieved, there is a feeling of joy and happiness. There are variants of that feeling, based on the type of achieved desire. For example, one basic desire is power, which is the desire to influence (including leadership) and efficacy is the resultant joy of having achieved this desire.7 The arousal of these basic desires may be through two kinds of experience: direct or vicarious.8 However, the intensity and duration of the joy experienced as a result of a vicarious

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experience is less than that of a direct experience. So why, then, do we resort to means like watching television to satisfy these desires?

‘Sensitivity theory holds that people pay attention to stimuli that are relevant to the satisfaction of their most basic motives, and they tend to ignore stimuli that are irrelevant to their basic motives,’ explain Reiss and Wiltz. The Reiss Profile is a standardized personality test based on the sensitivity theory, developed by Professor Steven Reiss in the 1990’s. It measures human motivation and assesses individual personality. That, along with various questions regarding preference of reality TV shows was included in a questionnaire that 239 individuals filled out. The article attempts to take an objective approach to finding a connection between our basic desires and watching reality TV.

The point to be taken into account here though is that vicarious experiences do not necessarily satisfy the pursued desire to its full extent. According to the theory, every joy has a rebounding nature and a certain rebound rate. That is, when a certain feeling of joy is experienced, it needs to be re-experienced after a certain period of time to satisfy the recurring desire for it. It is possible to say then, that because television is an easy means of achieving that - mainly because we a) have ready access to it and b) have so many options to choose from in terms of content – we resort to it as frequently as we do to experience the sixteen basic joys over and over again.

The study concludes that given a choice of how to experience life in a sense, people opt for the easier way, that is, television. The content that they chose to watch is based on the pursuit of the

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sixteen joys that are a result of achieving the sixteen basic desires (according to the sensitivity theory). Since the nature of these desires is short-lived and less intense in a vicarious experience, it compels the viewer to increase their dosage of viewing.\textsuperscript{13}

As per Reiss’s research, the reason for the popularity of reality TV is that people watching ordinary people doing extraordinary things gives them a sense of self-importance. They being ordinary people can relate to the person they see on screen and so, can more easily imagine themselves doing the same as the ‘ordinary hero’ rather than a super human fictional character. By creating that alternate reality in their minds, they satisfy their desire for status and ultimately boost their self-esteem.\textsuperscript{14}

Applying the same reasoning to social network sites, a similar deduction could be made in regards to social network sites like Facebook. One could say that people derive a basic joy out of presenting themselves in a certain way. When they create and maintain a certain image of themselves, they get acceptability which in turn makes them preserve that image that they had created. But being able to do that online is far easier than doing it in real life. Just as people opted to watch television to achieve the basic desire for self-esteem because it was easier, it is possible that we could be resorting to creating and maintaining a persona online because it is far easier to appear to be say, socially responsible, than actually being that way consistently in real life. But the advantage is that the same end result is achieved; feeling accepted and being liked. The pleasure derived from being able to present ourselves how we wish to be perceived more

\textsuperscript{13} Reiss and Wiltz, ‘Why People Watch Reality TV’, p 369.
\textsuperscript{14} Reiss and Wiltz, ‘Why People Watch Reality TV’, p 369.
conveniently could be similar to the example of the viewer getting a boost by watching ordinary people do the extraordinary in reality shows. This is possible because social networks are made up of ordinary individuals. The difference is that watching reality TV only gives the viewer liberty to imagine whereas Facebook gives one the liberty to be actively involved by giving them control over what they choose to share. Unlike everyday life where real circumstances and situations affect the way we act, in an online environment we are more in control of what we say and do. Not only that but we can exaggerate an aspect of ourselves however we want to and in that sense achieve something we would not be able to achieve otherwise.

From the article on mass media as escape we learn that there are two approaches of questioning when it comes to mass media. Although Facebook being an SNS (Social Networking Site) differs in function from mass media in that it allows direct involvement of the user and gives them more control. From a uses and gratification theory’s perspective, there are several factors that contribute to a medium being an ‘escape’. This study re-examines the notion of mass media as escape in the light of ‘uses and gratification’ theory of assessment.

State the authors Elihu Katz and David Foulkes ‘In the forties, a "use" study typically was reported in terms of a list of functions served by a given type of communications content.’ 15

In the light of the uses and gratification theory one can say that Facebook’s functionality is as Mark Zuckerberg, pioneer and CEO of Facebook said in a F8 conference Keynote speech:

. . .The last 5 years of social networking have been about getting people signed up and getting people connected with all of the people in their lives. And until recently a lot of people who

15 Elihu Katz and David Foulkes 'On the Use of the Mass Media as "Escape": Clarification of a Concept' The Public Opinion Quarterly
weren’t sure how big this phenomenon of people connecting online would be or how long it
would last but by now I think that most people see that social networks are gonna be a ubiquitous
tool used by billions of people around the world everyday to stay connected everyday.  

He goes on to reveal statistics:
So just last week was a pretty cool milestone in Facebook. For the first time ever a single day we
had half a billion people use Facebook. Half a billion people. And more and more people
continue to sign up and then use the service everyday. But going forward what’s even more
interesting and exciting than getting people connected and into signing up is all the things that
are now possible now that all these connections are in place. So, the next five years, the next era
is gonna be defined by the apps and the depth of its engagement that is now possible now that
everyone has their connections already in place and this whole network has already been
established. Today, I wanna start off by talking about the heart of your facebook experience, the
profile. Because for every major evolution of the product that we’ve ever done, the profile is at
the centre. People feel an intense ownership over their profile.  

How we achieve the end goal of being accepted is examined in an article by Stephanie
Rosenbloom published in the New York Times. As the title of the article *Putting Your Best
Cyberface Forward* suggests, we are constantly altering our self-presentation in an attempt to
shape others’ perception of us.

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16 F8 keynote speech by Mark Zuckerberg
17 F8 keynote speech by Mark Zuckerberg
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/fashion/03impression.html?pagewanted=print [Date accessed: 16th June 2012]
Rosenbloom writes that, ‘impression management’ is the term given to such a process by social scientists. The study that originally explored this aspect of human behaviour and according to Rosenbloom “likened human interactions to a theatrical performance.” 19 Was conducted by Erving Goffman in 1959 in a paper titled The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. 20

“Coming clean about misrepresentations is less of an issue on social networking sites, where people are not as likely to deviate too far from the truth because their network of friends will simply call them on it,” says Stephanie Rosenbloom, in an article for the New York Times. 21 Although Stephanie’s statement stands true, one is compelled to question whether there is a less obvious form of deviation from the truth. Facebook is one of the social networking sites where one is most likely to have a list of friends that one interacts with in real life on a regular basis. Users of the site say that they find they have to pretend to be a certain way. Whereas on a site like Twitter for example, where their communication is, for the most part, with strangers they feel they can express themselves without any inhibition. Also, presenting and amplifying an aspect of oneself online that one does not express in real life can be classified as deviation from the truth on some level. But that of course brings the very definition of what the ‘truth’ is for every individual under consideration.

‘Keith N. Hampton, an assistant professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania said the notion of impressing “everyone out there” is the fundamental problem of networking sites. They are designed so that millions see the same image

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of a member. But he also says that that in itself is a good thing for some people’ writes Rosenbloom. 22

Hampton goes on to suggest that similar to how our audience determines what aspect of our personality we choose to present to them, social networking sites should be designed so that the our need to segment our social circle can be applied there too.23

‘Some people seem to pick an audience. Other people pick and choose the best parts of themselves. . .’ says Mark R. Leary, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke. 24

It seems that whatever choice we make in regards to our method of communicating to others about ourselves, the end goal is always the same – being accepted.

I am looking at Facebook profiles in the context of virtual reality. That is to say that one has the liberty to create themselves in whatever way one wishes. The only factor that could be a possible limitation is the fact that it is a forum where we interact with people we know in real life. Knowing that makes one conscious of the extent to which they exaggerate certain aspects of themselves online.25

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In her essay ‘Constructing the Self through the Photo selection – Visual Impression Management on Social Networking Websites’, Andra Siibak quotes:

Therefore, when communicating online the impression management is formulated into an “ever-present worry of needing to perform oneself appropriately, and the twin need to be constantly evaluated as acceptable, or simply okay, in the context of one’s peers” (Clark, 2005, p. 217). These different “performances” need to be modified according to the received feedback, so that the messages given off could be read out as impressions the person was trying to convey.  

If there is a constant concern of the necessity of acting appropriately, it could imply that such concerns constitute most of our thinking. If the feedback received is positive, the person must feel compelled to continue acting in the manner that first got him/her approval, even if it may deviate from the truth.

‘What we attribute to our virtual representation is, however, only partly conscious. Part of the transfer of ideas and feelings constitutes projections in the form of fantasies, visions, unconscious tendencies, wishes, and complexes.’

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Research Methodology

For this research I will firstly define what is meant by online personas, the concept of online impression management and the scope of escapism for my defined target group by referring to existing literature on the topic. I will also be looking into existing studies conducted regarding Facebook. Since most material available on the mentioned topics is from foreign writers and researchers, because no official study has been conducted in regard to Facebook in Pakistan, I will be using that information as a starting point to define the parameters of my research. However I will be referring to blogs and newspaper articles about Facebook from Pakistani writers to get an idea of local opinion on the topic even though such sources of information are limited to being just opinions and not academic research. Secondly, I will briefly outline what elements Facebook personas consist of. This will include first-hand observation of the format of the relevant features on Facebook profiles, which is my primary area of study.

The Pakistani youth from ages 18-24 is the fastest growing population on Facebook according to a website called Socialbakers. In order to monitor the statistics first-hand, that is, by checking available statistics over a fixed period of time (four months for this study). A site specifically dedicated to recording monthly, half yearly and weekly statistics country-wise called Social Bakers was used.

The method of primary research is mainly of interviews. Since I will be applying available research to the local context I felt it was necessary to get insight from people who in some way or another were from fields related to this research. I have categorized the interviewees as

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28 Socialbakers (upload date unknown)  
follows: psychologists, marketing and media managers and people working in the advertising industry. Interviews conducted in the initial stages of research were kept semi-structured and open ended in order to avoid imposing researcher’s bias on the subject and aid my own understanding of the topic. Some basic questions were kept constant for everyone but other questions varied depending on what field the interviewee was from so as to get more specific insight into the topic. Interviews with psychologists proved to be more insightful as they delved into the psyche of Facebook users. Alongside the professionals, I will also be holding small group discussions with fellow students and peers who may or may not use Facebook to get their opinions on the topic.
Discussion and Analysis

As mentioned in the section about research methodology, statistics on Pakistan for Facebook were observed. The site Social Bakers suggested, on 1st February 2012, that Pakistan ranked number 26 in the world in terms of Facebook population in the world with a numerical value of 6,078,780. Over about two months, the ranking has gone down by one spot that is Pakistan now has the 27th largest population in the world but the population number has grown to 6,547,500. As of the most recent findings, that is after a period of yet another 2 months, Pakistan has the 28th largest Facebook population at 6,451,120 users. These statistics show that the worldwide ranking of the Facebook population of Pakistan has declined but has more or less been increasing in number. The largest group is currently 18-24 with total 3,273,750 users, followed by the users in the age of 25-34.

These statistics merely indicate that the popularity of the site is increasing in Pakistan, especially so with the age group of 18-24 year olds. Facebook being a site open to all, might suggest margins for people faking their real age but again, the fact that one’s network is primarily composed of offline connections means that there are more chances of truest representation of the self, possible.

My research initiated with looking up existing literature on the subject. Upon finding that there was very little research in the local context on Facebook, I decided to conduct interviews with people who I felt would be able to help me fill in for the missing information as well as broaden

29 Socialbakers (upload date unknown) http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/ [Date accessed: 1st February, 2012]
30 Socialbakers (upload date unknown) http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/ [Date accessed: 18th April, 2012]
31 Socialbakers (upload date unknown) http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/pakistan [Date accessed: 9th April, 2012]
my own view on the subject. Naseem Mughal is a senior psychologist, having practised for over thirty years now and still practising her field of study. She is also the official school psychologist for Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVSAA). On being questioned whether she felt there had been a shift in communication from then and now, she replied “Yes, it is a very different world, it has become a global village, it used to be more personal. Communication is very accessible.” However she also mentioned that the personal touch from communication had diminished.

“These things (reference to online interaction, texting, social networking sites etc.) are isolating us from each other. People feel they are in touch with each other however they don’t realise the personal touch is missing. There is a feeling of self which is fragmented from the self (the actual self). There is disparity between the two. When we use Facebook, or any communication through networks, we are actually losing the sense of the body. Only the mind sense remains,” she goes on to elaborate. “When mind sense and body sense combine, the result is mind sight which is our eighth sense. Information by itself is not complete. That is why information on Facebook cannot tell you about a person.” One could not agree more to Mughal’s statement, which brings to light the pace at which Facebook has developed options for the user to express himself/herself or rather, an in-depth way of presenting ourselves online as Mark Zuckerberg puts it. This shows the inadequacy of the electronic medium to represent a person in his/her entirety but at the same time indicates that people still want to communicate via the internet albeit with ever-increasing and varying options to best present a ‘picture’ of themselves.

32 Naseem Mughal interviewed 15th November 2011. [Interview was conducted in person and was transcribed from notes].
33 Naseem Mughal interviewed 15th November 2011. [Interview was conducted in person and was transcribed from notes].
34 Naseem Mughal interviewed 15th November 2011. [Interview was conducted in person and was transcribed from notes].
35 F8 Keynote speech Mark Zuckerberg http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r46UeXCzoU&feature=related
Having just started out with my research at the time could be a possible reason that she felt, as I too realised later, that the interview was biased because I was of a certain view and was unknowingly directing the answers toward my personal opinion. By pointing this out to me, she helped give the discussion a broader scope. Whereas I was of the view that designing online personas is making us escape into virtual worlds and in the process making us escapists, she helped clarify that the ‘escape’ might not necessarily be running down so deep that it makes us escapists. She further explained that just as one would only be temporarily absorbed into a virtual world while watching a movie and then coming back to reality when the movie ended, online personas are the same. However, according to Bushra Khan, a student and teacher of psychology, studying at Karachi University (KU) and teaching at IVSAA, individuals who have a tendency to escape in real life, or in extreme cases, suffer from Avoidant Personality Disorder, are most likely to take it to a whole new level with virtual worlds and online social forums\(^{36}\) in contrast to other people for whom, as Seher Khan, who has been in the advertising industry for a while (currently working at The Circuit (PVT) LTD.) said that the internet itself is an addiction, Facebook is just an extension of it. \(^{37}\)

\(^{36}\) Bushra Khan interviewed on 3\(^{rd}\) February 2012 [Interview was recorded and transcribed].

\(^{37}\) Seher Khan interviewed [Interview was transcribed from memory].
Mona Hussain is a Masters in Psychology with a specialisation in Clinical Psychology. She has counselled students and has been teaching A-level students since five years now.

‘Escapism is basically seen in those people who basically are unhappy with reality. They need a mode of substitution, any which will help them get away from whatever problem they are facing in their life or whatever insecurity or self-esteem they are facing in life’ she says.38

Hussain says she feels Facebook in itself is just a mean of communication but has unnecessarily been stereotyped as a bad thing when in fact it facilitates, as a teacher, staying connected with her students and for personal purposes, finding old friends and staying in touch with current ones.39

Hussain goes on to clarify the concept of addiction: ‘Addiction basically has to have psychological dependence. Psychological dependence means if you don’t have it you will suffer from some kind of withdrawal syndrome. For example, you will get irritated, get annoyed. When Facebook was banned people lost it. People started going on proxy servers to try and access it; that showed addiction.’40

There are two types of addiction withdrawals: psychological and physical withdrawal. Obviously it’s not a drug so you might not have physical withdrawal symptoms. But actually you might have sleeplessness, irritate-ability, anger issues.

‘Escapism is not a disorder. It might be a part of a disorder but not a disorder. Addiction is a disorder. Escapism will be a part of addiction but addiction will not be a part of escapism.’

38 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
39 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
40 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
Hussain clarifies that escape can come under the problem of addiction but addiction is not a part of escape. This means that even if we are spending a great amount of time on Facebook everyday, it can imply that we are addicted to it, but that does not necessarily mean that we are ‘escapist’. However in the case of it becoming a hindrance in the performance of daily activities, ‘. . .when you can’t function adequately in your everyday life’, says Hussain, ‘that is when it becomes a disorder.’

Hussains says that what contributes to Facebook being an addiction is that ‘its fun’, as she says and that ‘There is nothing on Facebook that isn’t promoting that.’

I can be sitting here and telling the world I’m being interviewed. Since I have two Facebook accounts, one for my personal and the other for my students, I see the gap between the Facebook activities of the age group. For example my first batch would be 23 years old by now and current would 16-18years old, plus I have friends older than 30-35 years old as well. The young generation is just about showbaazi (showing off).

Hussain elaborates on her personal observations of teenagers who she describes as the elite of the society who attempt to adopt foreign trends and conform to their peer groups in order to seek approval:

They will put all those things to show off until and unless they got a little nude in few then they will use the limited privacy. The pictures of parties where they would go would be uploaded to let the ones who weren’t invited know that they weren’t invited. Secondly, girls do a lot to attract boys, vice versa. They will try to put up pictures with the hottest boys and girls. Girls with pouty

41 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
42 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
lips, side pose bang seeming to be together but not really. Such hot pictures will be uploaded, if not liked by bazillion people they will be changed immediately. They want approval. They look for approval on Facebook.’ Hussain says for the age group of 16-21 years, being on Facebook is all about showing off.43

Seher Khan was of the opinion that it is not the tool that should be blamed, just how it is used.44 Even though her statement stands true for the most part, I feel that when a tool has such a profound effect on a large number of people that it becomes a daily ritual, the behaviour of people is questionable in any case but along with that, the tool can be questionable too. In a sense this takes us back to the alternating approaches of questioning the effect of mass media on people. That are ‘what do the media do to people’ and ‘what do people do with the media’.45

When Facebook first started, it was a basic layout of a picture and one’s basic information which would otherwise constitute the first five minutes of conversation when meeting someone new, as Mark Zuckerberg describes.46 The latest addition to the Timeline feature has had more negative reviews than positive ones so far, yet one can observe some people embracing it happily and others adapting to it, including the ones who speak against the design. Users feel it is too complicated in its layout. But for some, it is a welcome change where they feel they can browse through someone’s life history in a much more streamlined way.

A basic Facebook profile page consists of a picture of the person and information about them. This information includes general facts like birth date and year, hometown, place of study and place of work. The places of employment can be further expanded, giving descriptions and dates

43 Mona Hussain interviewed 13th June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
44 Interview with Seher Khan. [Interview conducted in person, transcribed from memory.]
45 On the Use of the Mass Media as "Escape": Clarification of a ConceptAuthor(s): Elihu Katz and David Foulkes
46 F8 Keynote speech Mark Zuckerberg http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r46UeXCzoU&feature=related
of where and for what tenure the person worked at those places. The same goes for places of
study. There is a wide variety in quality of answers as far as this bit of information goes. Some
quote only the main institute they got their degree from and their current workplace. Some give a
detailed account of every single place and the people in their friend list that they went to those
places with. This bit of information appears on the top most part of the profile page and
depending on the person’s choice, there is an option of displaying the main information in a
smaller, thumbnail view of the person when people see them in another person’s friend list or in
the search results. This is similar to a person who might present their business card to another
person but with added advantage of being able to show it to anyone and everyone without the
right opportunity to have to arise for a business card to be shared. People feel like they have an
edge in their personality if they show off their credentials. But this aspect of the Facebook profile
can only lead us so far from our real selves because there is not much deviation possible from the
truth since people around you are witnesses to where you have worked and studied and where
you have not. Other features, however allow a greater degree of experimentation with personality
construction such as one’s likes and interests,

Zuhaib Shaikh is a graduate from IBA with a degree in Business Management and is currently
the CEO of Firefly Communications and Theatre. In December 2011 he conducted a workshop at
the PNEC auditorium about branding the self. Although the content of his talk was primarily
targeted toward creating a brand of oneself to give one’s professional image a boost, the same
theory could be applied to just about any walk of life. I felt the content he presented was relevant
to my subject of research in the sense that Facebook profiles are, to some extent about branding
oneself.
In an interview with Zuhaib, he explained that the impression of a person on sites like Facebook is ‘more important than what you actually are because that is the first impression you get.’\textsuperscript{47} For him, first impressions are made by what you appear to be and in an online environment like Facebook, impressions are there to stay for some time, if not forever. Shaikh admits that when he adds somebody on Facebook, he goes through their profile and tries to determine what kind of person they are by the kind of information they put up, “like what they have written on their walls, what pages they have liked, and what they say in their status updates.”\textsuperscript{48} Just like in online dating environments where ‘. . .in the absence of visual and oral cues, single people develop their own presentational tactics. . .’, as stated by professors at Rutgers,\textsuperscript{49} over time Facebook has grown from a basic layout of text-based information with an allowance of a single picture to being a huge display of various types of audio and visual pieces of information. According to Shaikh, “Facebook has its own magic, it takes you away from real life.”\textsuperscript{50} Zuhaib says he means this in multiple contexts, one being the hampering of social skills. Here what he means by social skills is the art of conversation; listening to someone and being tolerant about their views. He feels everything has just become about the individual. This point reinforces the view that Facebook as a product, rather than as a medium, might be all about the individual rather than about connecting with other individuals.

Aisha Omar, who teaches at IVSAA and is a Masters in Arts and Politics says ‘. . . I will argue that it is a very Capitalist mode of thinking, because Capitalist mode of thinking is all about you.

\textsuperscript{47} Zuhaib Shaikh interviewed 15\textsuperscript{th} February 2012. [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
\textsuperscript{48} Zuhaib Shaikh interviewed 15\textsuperscript{th} February 2012. [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
\textsuperscript{50} Zuhaib Shaikh interviewed 15\textsuperscript{th} February 2012. [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
About you, and how you market yourself and how you sell yourself, to be attractive, to be accepted in society.’ Her point is in agreement with what Shaikh said about first impressions, and those to online, being very important.
Conclusion

During the course of this dissertation we have discovered that designing online personas has become an integral part of our daily lives and that a majority of people are actively doing it. The statistics for Facebook show that the 18-24 year old age group is most active in Pakistan\textsuperscript{51} with a rising number of users.

Escape is something we all do from time to time, on varying levels. In light of the uses and gratifications theory the functionality of Facebook seems to be a mix of building a network of offline as well as online connections but for the said age group serves more as a platform to display and experiment with their self-image. Facebook offers a wide variety of tools to help design our personas. And it is taking up an increasing amount of our time. The need to maintain such a persona comes from our basic need to be accepted socially. In the age of branding and marketing bombarded from every direction, one cannot help but be influenced to present oneself in a way that appeals to others’ standards of desirable.

Over time, the changes that have been made to the design of Facebook, specifically the profile, have piqued greater interest in its users and has increased our involvement in it. The psychologists interviewed for this research are in agreement with the fact that it is affecting adolescents in that they are addicted to it. As Mona Hussain points out, experience of psychological withdrawal symptoms indicates that there is addiction to something, referring to the outrage caused amongst the users when Facebook was banned in Pakistan in 2011 – people used proxy sites to log in to the website.\textsuperscript{52} However, Hussain further clarifies that escape is only

\textsuperscript{51} Socialbakers (upload date unknown)
\textbf{http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/pakistan} [Date accessed: 9th April, 2012]
\textsuperscript{52} Mona Hussain interviewed 13\textsuperscript{th} June 2012 [Interview was conducted in person, and was recorded and transcribed].
a part of addiction and by itself is not a disorder. It is fair to say that one cannot blame the tool itself, as Seher Khan says.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, whether the design of Facebook is to be held responsible for people’s use of it, or people to be held responsible for how they use Facebook is still an inconclusive question.

\textsuperscript{53} Socialbakers (upload date unknown) 
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Socialbakers
(upload date unknown)

Appendix I
Interview with Bushra

Conducted on 3rd February 2012, one on in person, was recorded and transcribed

Interviewer: Okay. Mhmm. I’m doing my dissertation on- I started out with virtual realities and escapism. I mean trying to find a link between the two because there’s continuous growth of these kinds of you know like media and virtual realities are becoming more and more creative with that.

Bushra: Virtual realities kya hoti hain?

Interviewer: Virtual reality is a simulated reality, it’s not an actual reality because it’s on a screen or anything that simulates reality and gives you control and –

Bushra: Video games ki tarha?

Interviewer: Video games hotay hain aur those sci-fi like those are in movies but they’re actually also happening, like you know Matrix. It’s a very aagay ka concept but they are working on such things kay you wear these gadgets and you know these glasses and then you can see a whole screen around you and you go in to another environment where it feels real and you have you know the capability to jaisay aap yun yun karte ho so you’re performing the same actions in that world but it obviously isn’t real so that’s virtual reality. But virtual realities – I was also looking in the context of social media websites.

Bushra: Social media website acha

Interviewer: In social media websites like facebook where you have the power to design an alternate persona online and you can do that to whatever extent that you want and the only factor that limits that is that you have a circle of people who you know in real life as well and if you push and push that image beyond a certain point which becomes unrealistic they can always you know people you know in real life and online can always distinguish that and they’re going to say ‘no, that’s kind of weird.’ So aksar log kehtay hain kay itna zyaada hum kar nahi saktay facebook pai.

But you know having said that it’s a virtual reality in the sense that you might not necessarily be that person in totality in real life, so in that sense. But from there my question developed in to you know, the extent to which having the ability to make such an online persona, design that persona and then being able to manipulate that persona, is it leading us to escape? Escapism, you know?

Bushra: Okay. Okay. Escapism ko tum kaisay define kar rahi ho?

Interviewer: But that’s what I want to be clear about.
Bushra: Okay. Abhi tou tum apnay questions generation phase pai ho.

Interviewer: Actually we were supposed to be past that phase, but because I’ve been getting stuck, kind of, in the whole escapism thing, which I’m trying to figure out.

Bushra: Acha dusri cheez tum mujhe yeh batao kai tum is ko kyun karna chahti ho? You’re from communication design, tum isay kyun karna chahti ho?

Interviewer: I feel that it’s important because all of these things come under communication design. When we had email and msn initially, it was just limited to verbal contact, and it was a lot like letter writing. So there was only so much you could say or express in a different way. But then video came along and pictures you were able to send; attach files and then sites like - even in msn you could have a webcam conversation. Then emoticons started coming in, then those animated emoticons, so the modes of expression grew, the tools that you had to express yourself increased and that changed the dynamics of conversation. How you communicated. And with social media sites like facebook and twitter and all these, us mein bhi facebook mainay is liye choose kiya because there’s a wide range of things you can do on facebook. And the population that’s growing on facebook in Pakistan these days - because I’m limited to research in Pakistan - it’s growing. And also matlab wohi baat hai kay even facebook grew from being a simple presentation of yourself to a LOT more; you can share links, you can share articles, you can write you know, your interests.

Bushra: Interaction ki aik source hai?

Interviewer: Interaction ki aik source hai.

Bushra: Haan magar tum is escapism say tumhaaray zehen main kya hai? Mein batati hun magar tumhaaray zehen mein escapism kya hai?

Interviewer: Um. Right. Meray zehen main yeh tha kai - because I’ve also been part of facebook I’ve been, you know , just as much a part of it as anybody else - what I noted was in my time that I’ve been on facebook, um, I felt that people were withdrawing in to themselves and it’s become a lot about myself. You know. How I present myself. Mera online image, mera self presentation, even the videos that we share online like I was reading an article and it says that viral videos ka jo concept hai it’s not the video, it’s not viral in itself; it’s the people who make it go viral and that is a key factor in making something viral and which is important for marketers and for marketing people is that they want to make a video that people can relate to; people can feel will tell their story. Um for example if I’m sharing a video about a social cause. I myself might not be very interested in that social cause but because I want to show people that I’m interested or I’m somebody who cares about the environment I’ll pass that on. There’re a lot of times people feel that you know they haven’t really read the content. There’s a lot of you know useless information but they pass it on because
A) Everybody might be passing it on and if they don’t pass it on – you know those things like “if you like this it will generate this much money. Please help. This kid is in need of help.” - it might not be a genuine or authentic source but if you don’t pass it on it might look bad because everyone can see, wo wali cheez hai. And I just felt that slowly it might be a very subtle change but it might be leading us to withdraw within ourselves and hum log ka fragment ho raha hai. And you know like we have an online persona that we like to manipulate and update all the time and then we have our real selves but you know us mein discrepancy jab aanay lagti hai and when you start focusing on that and your attention goes to that rather than reality because it’s easier to do online than in real life; changing yourself.

Bushra: Acha is ko tum escapism mein rakhna chahti ho?

Interviewer: Um, A few people, actually most of the people you I know talked about this to, said that “escapism is a strong word to use.” So I might change this.

Bushra: Acha khair dekho escapism ka jo basic concept hai who yeh kay; hota yeh kay Freudian concept tou parha hai na - tum meray saath thi. Usi kay concept jaisay defense mechanism. Defense mechanism basically yeh hota hai kai jab bhi aap kisi anxiety related situation mein atay hain tou unconsciously aap kuch aisy mechanism deduce kartay hain to avoid that anxiety related situation. Theek hai? 😊 Aik us mein yeh hota hai kay rationalize kartay hain kay dair say aaye hain tou “gari band ho gayi thi falaana dhamaaka.” Usi mein say aik jo hota hai wo hota hai fantasy jis ko escapism kay saath bhi link kiya jaata hai. Fantasy yeh hota hai kay bohat saaray log jo hain, wo jab bhi unhein lagta hai kai wo kisi maslay ko hal karna chahtey hain tou wo is fantasy waalay phase mein jaa kay cheezon ko dekhtay hain. Aur us mein yeh hota hai kay it could be positive and it could be negative. Negative yeh hai kai misaal kay taur pai aap yeh dekhein kay mein kahin pai job kar rahi hun aur saath saath mein soch rahi hun kay meray pass yeh job honi chahiye; job mein yeh ho, log aisy hon, boss aisy hon, yeh saari aasaishain hon; to hoga kya kay parallel jo meri job chal rahi hai us mein dissatisfaction aati chali jaaye gi. Mein kabhi us say khush nahi hon gi kyun kay meri fantasy, meri expectation bohat zyada hai. Wo fantasy agar unreal hai tou definitely meri qualification meri cheezain wo hisaab say jo mein possibly le sakti hun wo lungi. Ya agar meri fantasy real hai achievable hai magar mein achieve nahi kar rahi tou it means I’m lacking the skills to achieve such a thing.

say hotay hain. Aik aap ka expression hota hai jo aap kay behavior kai through aap reflect kar rahay hotay hain. Aik hota hai jo aap ka internal expression hai magar aap lay kar nahi aa rahay hotay hain. Tou facebook yeh jo virtual media hota hai na yeh aap ko aik outlet deta hai to express yourself. Aik hadh tak expression lenay aur main samajhti hun kay aap jab express karnay ki baat kartay hain tou agar aap kay andar

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resilience say bana hua aik shaks hun, matlab I’m such a resilient person chahay koi bhi haalat koi bhi cheezein aa jaein. Yeh kya hota hai, yeh hamaaray haalat aur waqaiat humein banatay chalay jaatay hain. Jaisay kuch log mujhay kehtay hain kai tum listener ho. Tou mainay kaha kay haan shayad is ka bhi hissa hai kay mainay training li hai na is ki; being a psychologist I’ve been trained this way. Ya tum falaani ho, tum yeh cheese ho. Ab hota kya hai kai aap ki societal expectations bhi aap ko shape karti hain. Aap nai aam zindagi mein dekhein aap kai kisi bachay ko aap kehtay hain kay tum yeh is tarah jo shaping ka yeh phenomena hai kai tum jab is tarah say baat kartay ho to bohat acha hai ab jaisay parents hain ghar walay us ko kar rahay hain kay jab tum hastay ho tou bohat achay lagtay ho. Bacha learned how to smile, first thing, and when not to smile, theek hai na yeh waali cheez hai yeh kai kab us ko dena hai aur kab usay nahi dena hai. Dusri cheez who yeh bhi seekhta hai kai kya wqai muskuraa kay saaray kaam ho saktay hain? Wo meri pilayetek bhi ho sakta hai magar muskura kay bhi ho sakta hai. Tou focus kahan pai ho gaya? Is nay cheez kahan say seekhi.

Facebook jaisi cheez pari hota hai kai aap nai aik dafa apna persona create karnay ki koshish ki; normal sa aap nai aik profile banaya magar aap nai dekha kai jo aap kay ird gird kay log log hain who kaisi kisi ki shaksiat ko pasand kar rahey hain. Aur agar aap us cheezon ko adapt kar sakhtay hain, haqeeqat zindagi mein nahi magar waisay ki aap agar cheezon ko le saktay hain tou aap un harkaton ko karnay ki koshish kar raha hai. Aap ko lagta hai kai aisa jumlajeh do ya koi funny si line daal do, koi video upload kar do kuch aur; anything. Tou log us ko respond karein gai. And this happens. Tou yeh video usechee hai. Toh wo jo aap persona create kartey hain agar who creative hai tou basically wo aap kai aik desire hai. Agar aap us desire ko wahan manifest kar rahey hain aur real life mein nahi kar rahey tou who phir definitely aik bara gap hota hai. Who gap aap kay andar bhi nazr aata hai dusron ko bhi nazar aata hai. Aap kay andar is liye nazar aata hai kay waisay tou aap bari achi tarah say baatein kartay hain magar jab aap real life mein aatay hain tou aap ke tou zabaan matlab aap hoklaanay lagtay hain matlab aap bol nahi paatay. Tou isi tarah yahan pai kya hota hai kay kyunke real life mein mey kya hota hai kay aap aik aajeeb si you feel like you’re being evaluated, like you’re being judged. Magar us mein aap ko nahi lag raha. Us mein aap kahain gai kai agar meray 500 dost hain tou us mein say 200 baat nahi kar rahay tou nahi kar rahay, who cares? Baaki 300 tou kar rahay hain na?

Lekin phir facebook ka aik pressure bhi hai. Facebook kabhi kabhi mujhey bara overwhelming lagta hai. Kyunke who pressure create karta hai. Wo yeh hai kay aap ko rehna bhi hai update ap nay aap ko kartay rehna hai, agar aap cut gaye logon say tou pata hi nahi hai. Jaisay meray saath, mein apna batati hun kay main socially waisay meray interpersonal relationships bohat achay hain magar I’m not a facebook person. Tou meray saath kya hota hai kay theek hai main aik hadh tak rahi, aur mein gayi aur mein nai koi cheez upload kar di, koi aaye huay hain messages who mein nai dekh liyay magar aaj kal jo mera jaisay mera thesis ka kaam chal raha hai us mein mein bilkul deewani hun, that’s the only thing I’m teaching I’m doing, aur tou kuch nahi kar raha us kay ilaawa.


Wo log jinhein escapism ki taraf un ki tendency hai, not everyone can go towards escapism. My point is this: if a person has a tendency to escape from reality, who yeh hota hai kay agar bachpan bhi aap dekhein tou kuch log waakifan jab unhein koi pareshani waali situation aati hai tou who us mein say niklnay ko koshish kartay hain. Ya who apni khaabon ki dunya mein rehtay hain. Tou hum jaisay log ya aur log kehtay hain ki “tum practical bano”. Yeh bara common jumla hai jo families mein bola jaatra hai. Practical ka matlab kya? Kay matlab dekho kay situation kya hai. Kay mein tou yeh waala kaam karun ga aur mein yun karun ga aur mein tun karun ga. You’re not taking any actions. Kuch bhi nahi. Aap kuch karain tou pata chalay na kai aap kuch kar rahay hain. Aap kuch kar tou rahay nahi hain, but you have such a high plan. Tou yeh wali cheez kya hai? This is fantasy.

Dusri aik aur perspective hai jis ko tum dekhtey ho which is avoidance personality disorder. Which is a personality disorder. Avoidance personality waala jo group hota hai wo yeh hota hai kay wo shy hotay hain, matlab introvert type kay log hotay hain. Dusra aik unhein fear bhi bohat hota hai. Fear yeh hota hai kay kahin khuda na khwasta kuch ho na jaaye, log mera kya sochein gai, yeh waali cheez aa jati hai. Aur teesri cheez in logon mein yeh hoti hai kai isi fear ki wajah say yeh logon say ghabratay bhi hain aur phir yeh apni aik imaginary world mein bhi rehtay hain. They have their own fantasies. Tou aik yeh bhi cheez un kay upar aati hai but it doesn’t mean that if somebody is relying on fantasies then the person is suffering from this disorder. Aisa nahi hai. You can’t generalize it.

I think jo escapism waali kahaani hai wo yeh hai kai it could be a blessing, and this is something that I would like for you to look in to, is that aik shakhs, lesson kaisay ho sakta hai. Aik tou yeh kai fantasy ko mein kabhi bhi ghalat nahi kahun gi. Imagination hai na. Aap ki apni soch hai. Magar us kay saath apne actions lay kar aa jaein. That’s a very very healthy thing. Saaf dekhnay baha hota hai aur khuli aankhon say dekhnay tou bohat hi acha hota hai. Dusri baat agar aap facebook mein jaatai hain tou this could also be a blessing. You can make a NUMBER of friends, provided, jo persona aap create kar rahay hain wo wohi person hai jaisay aap hain, ya jaisay aap ho saktay hain. Tou yeh cheez sahi hai. Matlab aap escape toi kar rahay hain reality say, magar aap aisy ho bhi saktay hain. For instance, log kehtay hain kay bhai aap – mein batati hun hamaray aik conference ka. Wo UK mein conference honay wali thi. Unhon nai do mahenday pehlay sab logon ka naam facebook pai de diya aur kaha kay aap log interact karein, especially who log jo speakers hain jinhon nai jaa kar presentations deni hain who aapas mein interact karein aur topic koi share karein aur us pai baat karein taakay jab aap milein tou you would have so many things to talk about. Tou hum logon nai kya kiya kai mera jo topic tha wo mainay isi tarah share kiya kai us pai do teen baatein
kar leen. Aik hadh tak jitna bhi kar sakti thi mainay us ko kiya. Jab mein gayi, tou wahan pai jo sab say interesting baat jo mujhay lagi who yeh thi kay us kay nay mujhey kaha kay aap nai jo baatein - matlab kehnay lagi kay mujhey clash nahi laga tumhari personality say. Yeh us nay mujh say kaha. Us ko laga kay jo mera persona jo us ko mera wahan nazayar aaya tha wo wohi tha more or less. Mein usi tarah say baat kar rahay thi, wohi cheezain keh rahay thi, meray wohi ideas thay jo us wakt thay aur wo usi tarah say articulate ho rahay thay.

Tou kehnay ka matlab yeh hai kay agar aap wohi behavior rakhtay hain jo aap normally rakhtay hain ya agar aap ko us ko thora behatar banana chahtey hain magar who achievable ho, tou people are fine with that, it’s something really good.

Lekin ab aa kay aap kay itnay dost kyun ban rahay hain? Bohat saaray log hain jin kay koi dost nahi hain unhon nai jis tarah networking kar kay dost banaye thay. Pata hai, wohi cheez escapism ki taraf us waqt jaati hai, aur aap ko waqai shatter kar deti hai, kyunke phir aap reality say hat jaatay hain na, aap usi dunya mein rehna chahtey hain. Aap kay liye who haqeeqat ban jaatay hai.

Tou wo tou phir aap ko definitely leads to somewhere jahan pai aap ap ne aap ko samajhtay hain kai bhai - I mean mein aisey kahun gi kay shayad yeh mentally healthy ho gaya ho.

Another thing that you mentioned kay you know, for example if you’re passing around a message about koi event hota hai, tou bohat dafa there’s a possibility that it’s just being passed around for the sake of it. Ya yeh hota hai kay jaisay breast cancer. Yeh pichlay saal bhi hua tha, we talk about this year but this was to spread awareness, apparently. There’s this joke sorta thing that if you’re supporting breast cancer then apnay status pai yeh likh dein. And it was a coded message which couldn’t be deciphered. Something like that, like you take the name of a – your name, jo aap ka date of birth ka jo month hai, us ka number like seven, like July seven, tou us kay hisaab say your colour would be red. So your sentence would be something like I’m wearing red today at Eiffel tower. Is tarah ka na. And it was supposed to spread awareness about breast cancer. But how is that spreading awareness about breast cancer, actually? It was just for the sake of fun. It was in the name of spreading awareness. That’s because it became popularized and everybody was like ‘Oh, you know. If I’m spreading awareness about breast cancer, I should keep this status.’ But who usi hadh tak bas reh gaye.

Nahi hai na, exactly! Sub kar rahay hain. Conformity le kar aatay hain.

**Interviewer:** Is there a danger that we become dormant? I mean if it comes down to you know conforming, and presenting yourself as somebody who’s socially conscious.

**Bushra:** It depends, it certainly depends. Yeh zaruri nahi hai. Aap baaz aukat conform kartay hain kyunki aap chahtay hain. Kyunki aap ko lagta hai kay yeh thora sa karnay mein kya harj hai. Aap ko attention chahiye, aap ko log chahiyein aap aisa karna chahtey hain. Magar wahan pai aap ko yeh zaroor pata hota hai kay mujhey kahan pai apni lines draw karna hain. Kis hadh tak rakhna chahiye kis hadh tak nahi rakhna chahiye. Kahan tak sahi hai, kahan pai mujhey sochna hai zyaada kahan pai nahi sochna hai. Mujhey baaz aukat samajh nahi aata log kisi bhi

**Interviewer:** Also, is it affecting you know, there’s a lot of increased interaction on facebook, and like you mentioned also, that aap thoray din facebook pai nahin jaatay and people start thinking aap pata nahi kahan chalay gaye. Even though there are other means of communication also. But if you’re out of the circle online, then you’re, you know, gone.

**Bushra:** Haan exactly, ab jaisay aaj bhi humara ye hai kay emails hum log professionally tou FB pai nahin bhejta. Magar aaj kal yeh aik trend bohat zyaada hai kay kuch bhi aap kaam shuru kartay hain wo facebook pai sub say pehlay yeh group bana hui hai aap is ko join kar lein wahan say aap ko job hi information chahiye wo aap le lein. Lekin professional hai yeh ya non professional? Tou yeh hata hai. Logon nai bhi tou apnay aap ko restrict kar liya na communication ka jo mode hai contact karnay ka. Aur restrict karnay ka basic wajha yeh hai kay kjahsd there should be a valid reason to

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**Appendix II**
Interview with Aysha Omar

Conducted on 24th January 2012, one on one in person, was recorded and transcribed

Interviewee: And I’m trying to look into the factors that could promote it. One of the things I observed, and Facebook knows that too and it functions on that principle, is that it’s all about you. It’s about promoting yourself. Because when they came out with this new design, ‘Timeline’, you must have seen it, the maker, the creator of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, in one of his Ted Talks, mentioned that it’s a whole new experience, it’s a whole new way to tell your story. And even if you look at the design, it’s sectioned year wise. Like you know if you go to this year, these are all the updates that happened in specific. And when it came out initially, a whole new level of stalking. And however mixed reviews have been given about Timeline, people are still adopting it. Why? Why is that? And if it’s so open to stalking, why would they want that? They want to be read about? They want to be looked at? Or that’s one side of it. --- biased. I’m not sure if you want that...

Aysha: Okay so... this is quite interesting, and you know that I’m new to all of this, so my opinion will perhaps be coming from a place where, I don’t know enough about dissertations. But I’m just curious, does this have to relate to your actual study of Textile?

Interviewee: I’m not Textile, I’m Communication Design.

Aysha: Okay. Well that’s better. I thought you were Textile. So... well this is right up your alley. I have a question about... Why you’re interested in all of this?

Interviewee: Because it’s affecting our behaviour. It’s affecting how we interact with each other online and offline. The same circle of people I have on Facebook, half of them don’t even come up and say “Hi” in real life and it’s really weird, and they feel like they can say a lot on Facebook. Even if they don’t say it verbally, they feel that they have some sort of liberty to, self-imposed liberty, they feel that they’re at ease to express themselves, like a picture maybe?

Aysha: Zady Smith. She’s a writer. And when the movie The Social Network came out, she wrote a review of the movie. And you should read it online. Uss main she said something like... kind of quoting what you’re saying, that interpersonal relationships are being destroyed because people don’t know how to connect and communicate face to face. Physical communication. It’s jeopardising ---. Then she went on to say that, she gave an example of her own cousin, who can’t meet friends and say hello, like people who really have problems in communicating. But on facebook, he’s king. He has this persona. Where he is very cool and he is the “In” kid and he knows exactly what’s going on and whatever’s cool and hot and things. And so it’s almost like it takes people to this really false, but at the same time really attractive platform to represent...
themselves. And I will argue that it is a very Capitalist mode of thinking, because Capitalist mode of thinking is all about you. About you, and how you market yourself and how you sell yourself, to be attractive, to be accepted in society. And I think that in social media, networks have kicked off because society --- not an obsession but --- marketing. Very individual centred values in society were already present. And they were the right --- for Facebook being launched off. But that’s just the economics of it. Or the... But I would argue that there’s a --- . A lot of our conversation so far has been about Psychology and about... Have you done some initial research on --- ?

Interviewee: I have, but a point of the Oracles, one of them that stood out, this was initially when I was working on virtual reality and hadn’t really come onto Facebook yet, but I thought it was pretty relevant... It’s a study done about watching reality TV. The Reiss Profile... Steven Reiss, he’s this psychologist who did this test on people --- he found out that there’s these sixteen basic desires. He didn’t actually find out or discover those, it was a pre-established thing that he worked on further. These sixteen basic desires that every human being has within themselves, things like protection, love, and self esteem, and these various things. And achieving any one of these sixteen desires gets you a certain feeling. Like...

Aysha: Things like positive feedback.

Interviewee: Yeah positive feedback. And all your life you keep on running after these --- these desires. Anything you do, however fancy or complicated or executive it might seem on the surface, deep down there’s this little one basic desire that’s driving you to achieve... a joy, in the end. So he said ke jo abhi recently reality TV shows ki popularity bohat ziada barh gayi hai, like chefs and idols, like American Idol type shows and all these adventure shows that do daredevil things, the hero is an ordinary person. And we being ordinary people, can relate to those ordinary people and when we watch them doing extraordinary things, it makes us think that we can do them too, and because of that we experience a joy in ourselves. It’s just mental. It’s all mental. We’re not even doing anything. But just by watching that we get a sense of joy, and so --- start putting them up on the pedestal now. So basically a desire to achieve --- self esteem. And ---- reply to television by going on Facebook.

Aysha: Yeah, there’s also this thing where... Have you ever watched any reality TV shows?

Interviewee: Yeah, I used to but now I think they’re ---

Aysha: Yeah --- marketing and --- with reality TV, but it’s not reality. And the idea of... even in reality it’s very melodramatic, highly dramatic, completely different. These people --- celebrities present. So the marketing and packaging is very... it’s false. It’s giving people the idea that it’s reality but it isn’t. And even, I think I would like to also add a different type of twist to --- it’s interesting how a lot of these platforms, social networks, have now been used for activism work. And think about Youtube, think about --- and Facebook. And how a lot of people argue that because they’re so open and everyone can join and they’re free and whatnot, people have the
opportunity to connect. Not just connect, but also to make some --- relations --- without connecting. And so, it’s a really interesting dynamic, because one can gauge the value of that connection. If it’s not really physically, presence, but it’s a long distance or virtual thing. So it’s interesting that these dynamics ---- need to study, So it’s perplex and it’s so problematic. So have you found any article which --- on facebook?

Interviewee: Yeah. A lot of blogs actually. But yeah, there’s this study on Facebook profile pictures and what they say and why people choose to put up certain pictures. And I also read this in a lot of place, that people tend to befriend people on Facebook who have a lot of friends. That and another thing was that people who have a lot of good looking friends are considered to be good looking even though they might be very average.

Aysha: Wow.

Interviewee: That’s just something that’s weird. And I’ve heard a lot of... people have narrated anecdotes about their friend’s saying ke I’ve put up something on Facebook, why aren’t you liking it.

Aysha: Yeah, the idea of that kind of friendship... As you mentioned that half of the people you’re friends with on Facebook. *ta tatata tatata tatata* ---. There are some people who pretend that you’re never going to talk to them again... --- it’s one of those things, the idea of virtual friendship. I mean you think back in the day you had pen pals and whatnot. Do you remember that?

Interviewee: I actually did write to someone back in fifth grade.

Aysha: Yeah. And that was a very interesting letter writing ---. And a lot of people now, in fact one of my recent projects was a letter writing project, and it’s about writing letters, the idea of you handwriting your signature, and in longer format ---, it was more personal, in fact it’s really more representing yourself because that is where your handwriting, your words and your signature and not some virtual language font system. And a lot of people are now converting to the original style of letter writing. People --- Facebook. Even email for that matter. You can’t attach pictures and documents, and the technology has its thing. So that kind of detachment, I think it also has to do with... escapism. What you... which is the first thing you said to me. So why are you personally interested? You need to have a personal connection to the project.

Interviewee: I do, because I’ve been a part of Facebook. And it’s just been interesting to know how it affected me as well because I’ve been a part of it, and how it’s evolving interaction basically. It just... it makes you feel ---. And because I feel a sense of gap in interpersonal interaction. And you get to know so much that you should or shouldn’t be getting to know through Facebook. Because it’s so easy, it’s all out there... at some point you can’t stop, you kind of just lose control of information.
Aysha: Right, and you can even qualify that as information because it’s a lot of nonsensical... jargon that’s out there. Like “Oh I’m having breakfast right now”. It means nothing. Point is... that things like these status updates are completely foolish, and then things something like, when these protests were happening and people were updating. Or something that happened recently, I got this message in fact saying some kid --- cancer. ---, do you remember that initiative? And even if you like that, even that’s so problematic. If you like that page or you become a member of the page, then Facebook will donate this much too. It’s just so... it’s so weird. It’s like to do something good, you first have to get somebody to like a page, and I don’t understand that concept. But it’s so weird. Even the kind of good things that happen over Facebook are mediated through this very business like setting, because they get money out of this right. So, it seems like Masooma you have a lot going on. So, what is the question then? I mean, it seems like you have some initial --- research, or you have some idea of how to develop your concepts...?

Interviewee: Right now, the question that I have been sticking to so far is “to what extent is having the ability to design and manipulate an online persona a form of escapism”. But since I’ve already... It’s like to what extent is it a form of escapism. I kind of already established the fact that it is escapism. So the question of it being escapism is out, which could be incorrect.

Aysha: It’s an assumption.

Interviewee: It’s an assumption.

Aysha: By ---. Okay, so I suppose... let me just right that down. “to what extent...

Interviewee: ...is having the ability to design and manipulate an online persona a form of escapism”.

Aysha: Yes... You were saying something?

Interviewee: I was saying that initially they told us that it has to be relevant to you as a designer. As in being a designer why are you talking about this? What interests you? Why do you think it was important? Talk about it in the context of, because you’ll be doing your research in Pakistan and that too is a small demograph, and you should say... it should be relevant to that context.

Aysha: Okay, so Pakistan.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I found the relevant famous stat that the Pakistan population on Facebook, is number twenty-sixth in the world right now.

Aysha: Wow.

Interviewee: Yeah these are stats from a site called Social Bakers. They keep updating whatever happens on Facebook ---. And in Pakistan right now, Twitter and Facebook are one of the fastest growing sites. So, it’s already become problematic in the West. And a psychologist on TV was mentioning that it’s become a source of increased divorce rate, facebook.
Aysha: So she did that study. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah and as with all things that happen over there first and then transfer over here, it’s probably the same thing. And these people see a charm in --- and they don’t realise.

Aysha: But that’s... that’s also an assumption. --- happened there and --- Pakistani --- .

Interviewee: That’s an assumption based on other stats maybe or... There has to be a reason why they grow so fast. It could be positive you know, like you said it could help promote an activist movement.

Aysha: Well I don’t think Pakistan is doing that. --- happening. I think more of this is going on, which is promoting yourself, and also like ---

Interviewee: --- and maybe because of what all’s happening in Pakistan, people just want a respite or what is safe. Like something they wanted to be but haven’t had a chance to be.

Aysha: Okay... Interesting.

Aysha: Completely. Completely.

Interviewee: You know you can put up a picture, you can share. It just expands into so many things. You can like pages and then that says a lot about you. You’re interests and activities, the kind of movies you have, the kind of books you have, the kind of places you --- . The pages you like, you’re privacy setting, what you choose to say on your wall, what you let friends say on your wall. A lot of people are completely open. Their walls can be read by everybody and anybody. A lot of people are very very strict about that. If somebody put something that they think is inappropriate and people can read that, they’ll regulate it, they’ll take it off their wall.

Aysha: Okay. So I think... I think first we can word your topic a bit better. I think... this phrase... Because here what you’re referring to is the Facebook user and the kind of opportunities and resources that they have, the skills that they have, opportunities that they have to design a persona right. So I think it is better to say it as... not the ability... and here I can say that --- doubt in escapism. Is that what you want to call it? Or is it --- escapism.

Interviewee: I think it... would be more open ended if I didn’t say that it is a form, because I’m already establishing right now in my current question. I’m saying to what extent is it a form of escapism. So I’m already establishing the fact that it is escapism. Just trying to find out what form it is and to what extent it goes... So that would be presumptuous on my part.

Aysha: I think since you are being presumptuous in any case, it’s just better to be a bit specific about it. Let me tell you what I mean... --- Because when you’re talking about the ability to bla bla bla, you might as well jump to the point --- designing. Because you can’t have the whole... Facebook, and then all these people on it and then, --- . You’ll have to find an --- I think these days because designing an online persona... And you’ll have to get straight to the point. Because
your question has to be very sharp. It has to be concise, it has to be to the point right. If you add words --- to what extent having the ability... I think the --- in this particular statement is that kind of... assumption that you do have the ability to design an online persona. Which is why you’re designing one. And then what does that show about escapism.

**Interviewee:** I mean... Yeah I ---.

**Aysha:** Yeah. Okay so... If I were you I would define my question. I would also then start to define the terms that I’m using. For example some of the terms that you’re using are ‘Persona’ -- - I mean I could write down on a paper ---.

**Interviewee:** Break it down?

**Aysha:** Yeah, define it that’s what you need. And then escapism. And here you can talk about everything that you’ve read in books. It can be psychological, versus, note things like dependency, addiction, etcetera etcetera etcetera. And then even online... that’s something you can talk about --- virtual. If you were to really, really be specific, you can even use Facebook, in your question, because that would make it very...

**Interviewee:** Straight.

**Aysha:** Yeah. You don’t even have to mention... If in that advantage you were to compare between difficult sites, it’s very easy for you to do. You don’t have to --- . I would focus on Facebook, --- focus of your paper. So if I was you I would --- first. Then I would think about how would I define some of the terms. Then I would think of doing like an initial primary survey.

**Interviewee:** Do you think it would be relevant to talk about the --- . Marketing and management people to ---

**Aysha:** *Dekho* --- all about you, and your story. He’s not saying it because he needs it. He’s saying it because --- same thing. Because the idea of the word story, the word your story, is very popular right now and everybody’s even --- . It’s the ‘In’ term. --- the language *ki politics hoti hain*. They’re very --- . The other thing is... is that I think these designers are very... --- , marketing people --- friends who have studied marketing for example. Ask them about it, if you have friends who --- design. You can ask designers, what do you think about this... structure? --- facebook here but yeah, I was --- great to in fact study the design of it. Because --- design. You’ll probably have to talk a lot about that. You know, *uss main so far picture aajaye gi. Uss main...*  

**Interviewee:** Everything.

**Aysha:** Everything. Dos and, home and, share and, like and, friends and that concept of friendship that we talked about. History and... security. Settings, yeah. I also think you need to do a little more research on the terminology ‘escapism’.
Interviewee: I think it was a lot of different contexts.

Aysha: So then you must decide after, and I think you’ll be in a better position to decide once you have done the research on escapism in different contexts, because if you choose to then go strictly into the psychological context, then you can mention that straight up in your paper, I will be studying escapism in the context of psychology, and then develop that. Because escapism can be... It can be even like poetic or literary. It can be... humanities complex. Yeah, literature and whatnot. But psychological, I think that’s what you’re interested in too, from what I’ve gathered.

Interviewee: Narcissism would count as... Would it count as escapism?

Aysha: Not really. Narcissism is very different. It’s when you’re glorifying yourself. Because escapism is when you’re escaping from reality, as far as... the limited understanding that I have. And you might be escaping to a happier place or a tragic place. That’s both. You might escape through singing, attaching yourself to something else. And even if you were to use a dictionary, that term itself has a lot of connotations. So which is why I think you should really narrow it down.

Interviewee: Okay.

Aysha: Okay. Thank you.

Interviewee: No, it was really a ---.

Appendix III

Interview with Mona Hussain

Conducted on 13th June 2012, one on one in person, was recorded and transcribed
Interviewee:

**Mona:** I’m masters in psychology clinical specialization. I have done student counselling. I don’t like to counsel so I prefer to teach. This is my 5th year of teaching.

**Interviewer:** When I say facebook what’s the immediate reaction?

**Mona:** Addiction.

**Interviewer:** ... psychological opinion?

**Mona:** Okay. Escapism is basically seen in those people who basically are unhappy with reality. They need a mode of substitution, any which will help them get away from whatever problem they are facing in their life or whatever insecurity or self-esteem they are facing in life. They will look for an opportunity to drift away from that and escape in the world of life as we say it to be delusional and hallucination. So it can get that extreme to but in the neurotic level that is the normal level. Even the clothes you wear, the way we sit, the way we speak, the way we talk everything is escapism. Very few would be called individual. I Think Pakistani culture has a lot.

**Interviewer:** ....*tooonneeeeee

**Mona:** I Think Pakistani culture has a lot. I think abroad they promote individuality. Over here, they have fallen odds. If you aren’t apart of so and so you’re a loser. They might pick on such people, even abroad that happens but here the ‘burger lot’ (cool crowd), cool yo’s, are taking over the 90% of the school. Who are the individuals? There are individuals.

**Interviewer:** When does it become a hindrance in everyday routine?

**Mona:** Any disorder when you can’t function adequately in your everyday life. That is when it becomes a disorder; you might be depressed about something that happened in your life. Fine! But if you are going to school, you are studying, you won’t be clinically depressed but the second it starts affecting your everyday life that is when it becomes a problem. That’s the criteria of the formality so I’m just saying.

**Interviewer:** Bushra Khan mentioned, .... what extent is that?

**Mona:** There a lot of other people also like sex maniac or serial killers, they prey on the internet, cause their actual personality of dominie is something that might put off people. Nowadays a lot of criminal mind shows are showing a lot about the insight psychology of such people, who would search their prey online. They will set a meeting at a bar but won’t end up meeting there and kidnap or whatever. There personalities don’t exist. They all come under anti-social personality disorders, avoidance personality disorder, Narcissistic personality disorder come under this.
Interviewer: ... 

Mona: I’ll tell you honestly; nowadays I have two phone one work phone and one personal. Once a father came to complaining to make her daughter understand she’s always on the phone. I told him what I can say I have two phones. The thing is I get what he was saying but I was trying to bring across was that parents have a lot of generation gap. I am 29 years old but when I was 9 years old mobile phone did not existed. There have been a lot of changes in these 20 years. When I was in school I remember my dad had a mobilink connection for Rs.10,000. It was a big deal back then, people dint have cell phones. Now for the past 6-7 years everybody have their own phones. If God forbid some riots happen you would want your kid to have a phone, now where do you bridge the gap?

Facebook is just another communication. Hwo you use it is a completely different thing. Using it has I feel has become so stereotype. It’s not that bad. As a teacher I have a class group where we communicate. Obviously that will be a different story if I upload nude pictures of myself. Communication with my class has been helpful. Keeping in touch and finding old friend is great. Its okay. Its my point of view. But there is another point of view.

Interviewer: ... 

Mona: ...Nowadays facebook has come on your phones. I could be talking to you right now and be facebooking as well. Not that bad. But yes parents who do not allow their kids to be social as much will always have a lot of activities happening on facebook. By the way, my friend complains how I’m always online. Believe me I have quite the physical activity in my life but I end up keep using facebook which take a second.

Interviewer: Addiction relation?

Mona: Addiction basically has to have psychological dependence. Psychological dependence means if you don’t have it you will suffer from some kind of withdrawal syndrome. For example, you will get irritated, get annoyed. When facebook was banned people lost it. People started going on proxy servers to try an access it, that showed addiction. I am addicted myself. Being without facebook is as a bad as being without phone. I don’t leave my house without my phone, I don’t think I can live without facebook for two days.

Interviewer: Withdrawals symptoms?

Mona: There are two types of addiction withdrawals: psychological and physical withdrawal. Obviously its a drug so you might not have physical withdrawal symptoms. But actually you might have sleeplessness, irritate-ability, anger issues.

Interviewee: ..
Mona: Not necessary. I have had very good kids who had the will power of not using facebook during their exams were going on. They just don’t, just need willpower. 90% kids while the exams will be going on they will keep accessing facebook. There might be overlapping of kids who are smart enough and keep their focus on exams when needed. Escapism is not a disorder. It might be a part of a disorder but not a disorder. Addiction is a disorder. Escapism will be a part of addiction but addiction will not be a part of escapism.

Interviewee: what do you think is attributing to addition?

Mona: Its fun. There is nothing on facebook that isn’t promoting that. I can be sitting here and telling the world I’m being interviewed. Since I have two facebook accounts, one for my personal and the other for my students, I see the gap between the facebook activities of the age group. For example my first batch would be 23 years old by now and current would 16-18years old, plus I have friends older 30-35 years old as well. The young generation is just about ‘showbazzzy’ (show off). They will put all those things to show off until and unless they got a little nude in few then they will use the limited privacy. The pictures of parties where they would go would be uploaded to let the ones who weren’t invited know that they weren’t invited. Secondly, girls do a lot to attract boys, vice versa. They will try to put up pictures with the hottest boys and girls. Girls with pouty lips, side pose bang seeming to be together but not really. Such hot pictures will be uploaded, if not liked by bazillion people they will be changed immediately. They want approval. They look for approval on facebook. I feel like that, its mere showbazzzy for teenagers that would be 16-21 years old. The older you go the more people look to keep in touch, to promote their businesses, etc. I would have 200 friends on my personal account but I won’t facebook with them every day. I would have set 10-15 people to facebook with but of course wouldn’t mind once in a blue to keep in touch or reply back to someone. One of the students told me the other day, they add random people if they can get a chance with the girl or at times girls do that too but usually conscious. They even do this for increasing their facebook friends.

Interviewee: How does that effect ..

Mona: I don’t think so. I know these people what they do is fight with their boyfriend or girlfriend and put up pictures ....always a game behind it. They will take pictures on purpose just to put them up, it’s not who they really are. People on facebook might look overly happy successful fulfilled but they aren’t in real life. Especially the ones who seem really happy sort and sorted are the ones who aren’t. People who actually, genuinely and this is I’m talking about my age have zero activity on facebook. Our age group is not bothered liking statuses, we live our lives. It would be considered in stalking for me, seem weird for me.. I am very variable people. I would allow zero insights to their lives but expect to know everything about your life; these are the people to be put on limited directly.
And as far as teenagers are concerned, definitely they have an image to show. Image has to be westernised, we are so cool, and we are so rich. For God sake i don’t understand why a seventeen year old would want to go to cafe flo or pompei. A sixteen year old going like ‘OMG my boyfriend took to cafe flo’ Its over 2000 per head. These are the places you would go would your fiancé. I haven’t gone to these places at such an age. These people have a battle of ‘my boyfriend took here..my boyfriend took me there’ ‘my boyfriend has a so and so car ..my boy’s house is so big’ These are the groups of burgers in every school who would take pictures in fancy places like big house with pools take pictures and put it up. It is just to show we are a part of that and we are different. The normal kids wouldn’t do that, might just put cute status.

Interviewee: That’s trying to fit in a part of that age group?

Mona: Yeah. At the beginning you lose your individuality. These are the people who would wear burqa’s and through it outside as soon as they get in the car. Parents don’t know where they are. It’s who you are as an individual? It’s a social pressure, it’s coming from everywhere. Islam says this, parents have to say that but the kid wants to party and drink. How many girls lie saying they go to their friends for stay over? I know for a fact, I should’ve been a therapist, rather a student counsellor, thus I know. They would jump over the walls; boy will be waiting outside in the car. They will go to parties, drink, sleep around and comeback home. Parents are just not aware to what their kids are up to. Parents aren’t on facebook so they don’t know much about their whereabouts. Even if the parents are on facebook the kids know perfectly about the privacy settings so they would limit their parents. Thus the parents would just see their cute little shalwar kamez picture and nothing else.

Interviewee: Limitation .... but now there is so much

Mona:Yeah. Everything is promoting that. Nowadays they have comment on one another’s post it was a year earlier. This promotes you as an individual. If you don’t want the world to know you would do wall-to-wall but if you do want to show off to friends so I would comment on the post.

Interviewee: ....

Mona: The other day my friend told me that you don’t have to be in place to check in. Just to sound cool tell the world you are sitting at ‘Buttler’s at 1:30am. This is creating a personality that doesn’t exist. Status updates ‘at fez night’, to create an impression. I know people who would take a picture six times until you get the perfect picture, in which you look flawless. How plastic can you get? Mirror gazing , a research study, was out in which you spent hours in front of mirror to look at an image that would make them look better in public, right left or something like that. I make fun of kids, by telling how much you could practice to get the perfect pouty side pose.

Interviewee: ..
Mona: Insecure people are looking for approval. There are people who don’t, there might be two likes so what.

Interviewee: change in ..

Mona: Definitely yes. Kids are becoming worse and worse. Levels of morality have been decreasing beyond level. If I compare my last batch to my current....boys who sit together infront of class where once high five wasn’t common neither hugging. Earlier the state of girls has become the state of boy and girl. I don’t understand if this is the state of boy and girl just being friends then what would their state be with their boyfriend/girlfriend. Well they do tell me, sleeping around has become so common, drinking and drugs as well. One of friends working in rehab told me about how many of my students visit the rehab for alcohol and drugs. Earlier options weren’t there. Now uploads are even a click away.

Interviewee: waste of time ..

Mona: Yeah. That is Neurosis, you know the problem but can’t do anything about it. Psychosis is when you know the problem you can’t do anything about it. I drink, I know I have issues so what. This acquaintance, who I know of, always drinks and fight and wonders the next day why people aren’t talking to him. Even i wonder where my hours pass by when I’m on facebook. I’m saying it is an addiction. You do get depress; it is effecting your life. If you were suppose to be doing an assignment and end up facebooking, you hinder your general performance. It’s an addiction; it’s a problem, its neurosis. Psychosis is a very bad degree of mental disorder which doesn’t have a treatment, depression, anxiety, OCD, phobia. I know I’m scared of lizards but I can’t help but be scared.

Interviewee: And there’s no treatment to it?

Mona: Ofcource there is. But Psychosis doesn’t have a treatment whereas neurosis does. There’s no treatment generally but yes it has a cure.

Interviewee: If facebook was to shutdown?

Mona: OMG! They would have withdrawal symptoms. People would stop hanging out, cause they wont find a point of hanging out. My friend, into digital marketing mentioned, people hang out just so they could upload a picture on facebook to act cool. Our purpose in life has become ‘showbassy’ (showing off), not as an individuality. People would just lie while sitting at home. 98% of teenagers are like that, lie about their facebook updates.
Appendix IV

Interview with Zuhaib Shaikh

Conducted on 15th February 2012, one on one in person, was recorded and transcribed
Interviewee: you give drama based workshops and you’ve been in the field of theatre for how long?

Zuhaib: 2.5 years

Interviewee: Have you studied theatre?

Zuhaib: I haven’t studied it but you could say I have researched it and am self-taught. I haven’t studied it formally but in my own I’ve done a lot of research. Watched a lot of theatre

Interviewee: are you familiar with the term impression management?

Zuhaib: I can get a sense of what it is yes.

Interviewee: ok ill just brief you on it. Impression management is all these things that a human being does to maintain a personality. Like you know with the way you dress, with the way you talk and now with all these social media websites psychologists and sociologists have officially come up with this term: online impression management. The same thing, but how you do that online. Ok since you’re not familiar with the official term, why do you think it’s important. You mentioned, you had a workshop about branding ourselves and you stressed the fact that in today’s world, the way society functions you know you always need to be top of the line. How important do you think it is to brand ourselves regardless of being professionals or not.

Zuhaib: what subject is this?

Interviewee: cd

Zuhaib: this isn’t purely psychology

m. no I started out with design actualy. Because I m dong cd all of these things count like websites, facebook and people keep updating their websites like timeline agya and that affects people, it affects how ppl interact with each other

Zuhaib: theek hai and what inst.

Interviewee: indus valley

Zuhaib: acha so just to ans your q first of all the importance is grand. Very grand. Why cuz I believe yeh jo mediums hai na, virtual reality you can call them facebook or whatever theyre mostly vidual mediums so how u appear on thses sites is more imp than what u actually r. cuz that’s the first impression that u get. In real life U lok at ppl and you form a certain image in ur hed ke this wha the persons about. The way he talks to you the way he walks to you. And impression management for me is the online version. Its very important. That’s the first impression people get of you. I always do this. Wgnever I add somebody in FB. Go thru his profile, what his likes are, konse pages like kiyay huay hain, what does this guy talk about, uh is
thwre any substance the stuff that he says. Status updates main dekhta hoon mujhe pata chal jata hai, ok where is he coming from. So it gives you that idea bout the persons personality. Now the point is online you have this advantage to faketit better than in actual life. In real life your face will give away a lot. But its much easier to do it online. But at the same time more difficult you have to keep that level of faking it. So that’s why its very important to manage your personality. And give everybody the view that you want themt o have of you.

Interviewee: um but with increasing time like u know how um day by day we’ve we’re FB is such an integral part of our lives now. It wasn’t before & u cud say that now that ppl have concentrate dtheir energies into maininaing an online persona. Do you think that’s taking away from them trying to work on their actual personality?

Zuhaib: I do . I think its taken away. Uh. I do ___ (know) a lot of people who are sort of very uh shllow is not the word. But they lack substance. Cuz I feel ke their focus is too much on how they appear rather than substance that they have within. So I do see that happening more & more esp with the fact ke even younger kids have access to FB at an age where they probably shouldn’t be exposed toFB. I don’t think 12 13 is an age jahan pe aapko FB ki zaroorat hai. It has its own magic, takes u away from real life. So I do see that happening. Ppl on FB are so cool but when u meet them theres just no substance.

Interviewee: u mentioned it takes them away from real life. What context do you say that in?

Zuhaib: I think multiple contexts. First of all I see social skills being hampered. Um ppl talk about a lot of stuff. But theres very little substance about what they tak about. … maine us gap ke baad mba shuruh kiya tha and I took a lot of classes with morning students whu r comparatively younger. So I noticed keh their convos were basically about stuff that was so rudimentary. Stuff that’s just so unimportant and they just talking about it. Uh theres theres a lack of the art of argument has gone away. Pp r jut so imposing on each other. They dotn listen they don’t look back (?). all these skills I see people are not giving much ----? To. Theyre so engrossed in other stuff you know how they look and how they appear to other ppl. So I think social skills in that sense. Secondly I think mentally too the maturity, aik to they are mature more than we were at this stage but the direction again is something thatim not sure about. Kis direction main they are more mature. For example theyre very uh. Suppose for eg we talk about arts, you talk about literature. People atlk about movies or whats the latest fashion of the day. S I think who priorities us tarah se affect hoti hain. Im not sure if facebook and online presence is the only ----? But I do think it’s a -------? (7:00)

Interviewee: and like you know how Imran khan jalsa happened. Tahst abig positive aspect of you know something like facebook. But at the same time you know how you said that the convos lack substance. Is it possible that in trying to portray an image about ourselves, we end up actually not doing the thing. Rather we’re just spreading the msg to project a certain aspect of
ourselves rather than actually making a change. So something like you know promoting Imran Khan. A lot of people are just saying Imran Khan Imran Khan Imran Khan.

Zuhaib: you're right, I absolutely buy it. It's more like again, for example, *Harry Potter parhi hai apne?* (Have you read Harry Potter)

Interviewee: yeah only the first.

Zuhaib: do you like the book?

Interviewee: no

Zuhaib: why did you read that book? Because everybody else was talking about it. That's what I found I ost young people. Picked up Harry Potter because their friends were talking about it, they just wanted to be part of the discussion so they picked up a Harry Potter book. I picked up Harry Potter, I just shut it after like 20 pages. I thought what is this. I didn't go further. But people go forward because everybody else is talking about it. Aajkal, that that's the problem. We, especially the younger generation since they open their eyes they live in a world jahan pe marketing, branding, jahan shor ho raha hai na. that is the big thing. So we stated to think like that. Brands aur marketing msgs ne humain tune kariya hai is tarah se. so if everybodys talking about something irrespective of whether its really that good, we're more likely to go for it. Rather than something/a subject that’s actually good but because nobody talks about it, they just want to be part of the discussion so they pick it up. I think that can happen, yes. Its an art. These media/vj personalities or whoever the politicians they are if they can raise a noise they’ll be called successful. If they can’t, they're not in the game. So I think that can happen, yes.

Interviewee: I think you’ve already mentioned the fundamental difference between how people sort of perform their personalities online and in real life. Is there any point that you'd like to add to that?

Zuhaib: I think there's often a disconnect as well. Because you appear a certain way and you want to appear a certain way but you're evry different in real life. So its almost um some people but not everybody youre almost living a double life. One life is for that audience. They appear really cool you wanna appear happy you're less likely to talk about your failures you're more likely to talk about success so in this disconnect there might be personalities who are frustrated you know because the stuff that they really need to talk about they don't have an audience for it. Cause they're trying to appear a certain way. To aik to yeh disconnect araha hai I feel. Theres sites like Second Life. So that for me’s becoming second life the real life. Second life is the real life and here we are in our real life living a version of ourselves that we don’t really want. And I see that growing in the future. The online presence would be more ---? So for eg, if you apply for a job now, they don’t just look at your cv they also look at your facebook profile, they look at your Linkedin, they look at if you have a blog, you know, whatever. And then ---? They’ll make an opinion about you. --------? very smart way with this, you can manage your sites in such a way
that ppl have to call you for a job. If yo don’t manage it then youre in trouble. So yeh hai aur secondly theres a line between whats private and whats public has disappeared. I see people talking about stuff, I say take it to your drawing room or something. Don’t talk about it here. It has disappeared. You know so I just consider these mediums as an entertainment. Nothing private of my own I wanna share. But that line has disappeared for ppl whove been with facebook since --? So these changes I do see because of ----?

Interviewee:  but someone who might be very open on facebook might be very private in public.

Zuhaib:  yes, very private in public. And vice versa.

Interviewee:  is it promoting or does it have a potential to promote a sort of escapism?

Zuhaib:  I think it does, yes. I think it does. Yeh escapism jo hai na its at the centre of creativity actually. Aap agar drama, movies, theatre dekhain, theyre also that’s what they do. So theyre also a means to escape. Cinema is a means to escape. A park , going to a park is a means to escape. Yeh puraney tareeqay thay. Reading a book is a means to escape. To go into a story that you know is not true. But you believe so much of what you read is ----? Same with movies, dramas and theatre. This is the lure of escapism and I totally agree this is escapism. To be in certain world you want to be in, you keep certain friends, you like certain stuff that reflects what your feeling. Some research can actually identify psychologically your persanlity by the stuff that you like, stuff that you comment on. That tells you where the persons coming from. So unknowingly we do leave yhose traces which tell us ke what we actually are. But it is an escapist medium yes. And it might more be more so in the future.

Interviewee:  but more so in what sense I mean in terms of number of people who are on the website or in terms of

Zuhaib:  in the intensity of the escapsist experience. Intensity. What I mean is. So for example I might go twice a week on facebook. I try and talk about stuff just relax. But there might come a time very soon in the future where people just stay on facebook. Because their real lifes so boring this is so exciting, lets just stay here. Lets just stay in that escapist mode. Its very similar to drugs actually. Keep you in a certain world at the end you get really addicted.

Interviewee:  how would you compare theatre performance to performance online.

Zuhaib:  performance online matlab?

Interviewee:  matlab like you know how were acting out a persona.

Zuhaib:  first of all its different in the sense. With theatre you know itsacting. But youre acting online nobody knows if its acting or not. Theyre more likely to belief it as part of ---?. So I think In that sense theyre very different. But theyre similar in the sense ke like you quoted, ii think
they're both escapist mediums. You can go and escape. So there they're similar. There might be some catharsis involved but at the core they're very different.

**Interviewee:** alright that’s all the questions I had.

Zuhaib: that’s very brief.

M: yeah

**Zuhaib:** how did you arrive at this topic?

M: I'm a part of Facebook. And I noticed some discrepancy in how somebody was online and then in real life. And there's a lot of discrepancy in the way we interact with each other. I have so many friends online who definitely talk to or even make eye contact with. They’ll just, they’ll add you and then they won’t even acknowledge your presence in real life. You know so that’s awkward.

Zuhaib: it’s the other way around as well. Ppl that you don’t really talk to in real life, very talkative online. So they’ll have long convos with you but when you meet them they’ll just say hi and …. Im like, okay now is the time to converse. Where are you? So there’s a strange disconnect there.

M: okay coming back to the Imran Khan eg, how promoting his jalsi and all that, promoting a certain cause maybe but not really working towards it in real life cause that’s always harder. Do you think that can make us a passive nation?

Zuhaib: first of all to I don’t get why the idea keh it cannot be done practically online. I think online ke through buhat practical cheezain hosakti hain. All these revolutions in the middle east, so called revolutions, the driving agent was online coordination. You look at Obama's campaign, how he won, how he raised funds off the ground, online campaigns. So these are actually examples of real life events on the ground that were triggered online. So I think there are two sides to it: you could have yes, pure promotional no action. At the same time you could have action, brilliantly coordinated through these online facilities. So they're both sides to it. Its how you use it. So yes in our case if that is the case ke humaray politicians are using it just to hype things up and not really do stuff then that’s passive. We as a nation love to talk about stuff, don’t do stuff. So that is like a natural extension of who we are. You know in our drawing rooms, look at ppl talking about everything that is wrong with our country. Only the negative experience that they have. Never count the blessings that we have. And they never talk about solutions, always pinpointing problems. Aur discussion kahan hui hain, hum yeh karte hain we talk about stuff, fight over stuff, don’t look at solutions. So that’s how I think Facebook might be utilised in our country. Sort of reflects our nature. Jis tarah who road pe
driving hoti hai na, reflects what kind of ppl we are. Isi tarah jo online, it’s a reflection of who we are.

M; so you think generally, we’re just people who like to talk and not act?

Zuhaib: yes. There are very few people who act jin ki waja se hum agay barh rahay hain. Mostly we just talk?

M; why do you think its become that way?

Zuhaib: there’s a whole history behind it I think. I don’t know, I cant really put a finger on why. Just that that’s how we are. That’s what I’ve noticed so far.

M: and that’s reflected on facebook or do you think it’ll just take it further?

Zuhaib: I think, um, yeah it might take it further. It might. Because aksar Kbhi main dekhta hoon discussions shurooh hoti hain, they just talk about stuff. Comments ki line shurooh hoti hai, they start fighting online. Aik doosre ke comments rebuff kar rahe hotay hain and all and, discussion trails away into nothingness. So every discussion ends like that, koi constructive cheez aati nahi hai us main se. which again sort of feeds my

Appendix V

Interview with Naseem Mugal
Conducted on November 15, 2011, one on one in person and transcribed from notes, thus an un-biased, closest possible representation of her words is given but not a word-for-word transcription.

**Interviewee:** Your name?

**Naseem:** Naseem Mughal

**Interviewee:** How long have you been practising psychology?

**Naseem:** Since more than 30 years.

**Interviewee:** Do you feel there has been a shift in communication from then and now?

**Naseem:** Yes, it is a very different world, it has become a global village, it used to be more personal. Communication is very accessible.

**Interviewee:** Do you think communication in terms of quality has deteriorated?

**Naseem:** Person to person interaction has changed, the personal touch has gone out. The world has become very small.

**Interviewee:** Do you mean that in a positive sense (the world has become very small)?

**Naseem:** There are two sides to it. In a positive manner, it helps knowing more about people, you learn that there is more to life. The negative aspect is that acculturation of cultures has led to confusion.

Reality is only perception built on core beliefs and values. Core beliefs and values give raw information shape and that becomes your reality. When we watch a movie, we enter their reality, we cry, we laugh but there is always a distinction. There is a fine line between virtual reality and the real world.

These things (reference to online interaction, texting, social networking sites etc) are isolating us from each other. People feel they are in touch with each other however they don’t realise the personal touch is missing. There is a feeling of self which is fragmented from the self (the actual
self). There is disparity between the two. When we use Facebook, or any communication through networks, we are actually losing the sense of the body. Only the mind sense remains.

When mind sense and body sense combine, the result is mind sight which is our eighth sense.

Information by itself is not complete. That is why information on Facebook cannot tell you about a person.

The way the mind/brain functions is that it seeks easy solutions. Communicating on Facebook is so much easier. It is difficult to have a personal meeting. You have to make an effort, dress up, actually meet the person. A person on Facebook may be the sloppiest person but he could make people believe that ‘wow i’m so energetic.’