

TO REVISIT BUT NOT REPOST, HIDE BUT NOT EDIT: PERSONAL ARCHIVING ON FACEBOOK

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Abstract

This exploratory quantitative descriptive research looks at personal archiving on Facebook. Our survey of college student Facebook users shows that they consider Facebook as a personal archive where they are likely to revisit old posts but are unlikely to repost them. Further, users are likely to hide old posts but are unlikely to edit them. In addition, while previous literature point out gender differences in social media activity, our study found no significant differences in personal archiving practices on Facebook between users who self-identify as female and those who self-identify as male, except for females being more likely to hide old posts than males. We postulate that these personal archiving practices are related to impression management and that hiding posts, in particular, is both an act of defense and defiance.

Keywords: social media, gender, personal archiving

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of social network sites (SNS) leads them to function as de facto personal archives for their users where digital traces of activities and thoughts are created, kept, resurfaced, accessed, and managed over time. While previous qualitative studies

have looked at personal functions (Good, 2013; Zhao et al., 2013), valuations (Lindley et al., 2013), and activities (Schoenebeck et al., 2016) of Facebook users concerning the management of their digital traces on the platform, the extent that these are treated as dynamic archiving practices and the

difference of such practices between genders is worth examining in detail.

This study examines gender differences in engagement with technology and online behavioral patterns manifesting in personal archiving practices on social media. Findings in numerous studies point out gender differences in online activities (Salaway et al., 2008; Haferkamp et al., 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012; Schoenebeck et al., 2016; Sümbak, 2009) with Bimber (2000) fittingly stating that “around one-half of the ‘digital divide’ ... on the Internet is fundamentally gender-related” (p. 868). Further, the relationship between gender and technology continues to drive both discourses on identity and calls for inclusive spaces online. There is a need to examine the complex intersections of digital and social media with gender as they relate to shaping design of and understanding behavior in online platforms as personal archives.

In light of trends like "Throwback Thursday" and Facebook's "On This Day" function, this study aims to look at the extent of gender differences in personal archiving practices on Facebook, particularly in revisiting reposting, editing, hiding, and deleting old posts. The results of this study relate to the emerging literature on personal digital archiving as it intersects with gender providing input in improving SNS design, especially when it comes to thinking about functional and safer online archival spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Archiving Practices on Facebook

The usage of SNS has expanded from maintaining existing relationships and building new connections into creating avenues for self-presentation and self-identity. Sinn and Syn's study (2014) showed that the majority are likely to update their Facebook profiles as soon as their information changes, with almost half of the study's participants agreeing that their accounts are good representations of who they are—or whom they

want to be seen as—in real life. The respondents' actions heavily suggested that they utilized Facebook as a means of personal documentation and as a medium of identity.

Zhao et al. (2013) studied Facebook as a theatre, exhibit, and archive where users manage their collections of digital content and traces over time. They frame and posit Facebook as an identity platform for the self where user behavior is both outward-facing and self-reflective. Their study illustrated that this public and private tension, together with the temporal nature of such SNS, influence how users personally and deliberately negotiate the creation, management, and curation of their digital content.

These behaviors manifest in various ways, including what Schoenebeck et al. (2016) call retrospective impression management practices, which are practices situated in the tensions between meeting “current self-presentational goals and maintaining authenticity of historical content” (p. 1475). Their findings show that users, in varying degrees, retrieve, edit, hide, and delete old posts to reminisce the past and align to the present.

Because self-presentation on Facebook relies on what users feel is relevant to themselves currently, information aging and life changes play a heavy role in determining what people choose to post and repost. Ayalon and Toch (2016) found that older posts are less likely to be reposted because of a lack of relevance or desire to share old posts with new social circles. As users, especially young adults, experience life changes over time, old posts may potentially clash with the current self-image and self-presentation one wants to assert.

Several studies (Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Dominguez, 2020; Lincoln & Robards, 2016) hypothesize that transitional stages in life trigger specific patterns of behavior regarding archival practices on social media.

Young adults reveal that the need to “clean up” their accounts is triggered by three aspects of life: employment, domestic influence, and romantic relationships. This act of cleaning up was seen as a sign of transitioning and growing up, a finding that numerous studies have richly explored (Good, 2013; Lindley et al., 2013; Schoenebeck et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2013).

Results from Duffy and Chan's study (2019) show that college students are primarily concerned with surveillance done by their social circle (e.g., family, friends, potential employers) rather than with surveillance from strangers. Participants adjusted each post's privacy settings based on content to manage each audience group's perception of them. The implication is that archiving practices are related to audience and impression management.

These studies point out that personal archiving on social media is shaped by source and context and is influenced by different factors with motivations that are reactive, proactive, and reflective in nature (Sinn et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2020). When it comes to young adults, which is the focus of this current study, literature show that personal archiving practices on different SNS are utilized as a mechanism for impression management. They observe certain practices to tailor the image they present to specific audiences. This current study aims to evaluate these previous findings by examining closely these practices, comparatively with each other and between gender lines, particularly as expressed in their personal archiving practices on Facebook.

Gender Differences on Social Media

Females are more likely to use SNS as reflected by user demographics on Facebook being predominantly female at 54% compared to males at 46% (Haferkamp et al., 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Online behavior and orientation between genders differ, as previous studies

(Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012; Salaway et al., 2008; Schoenebeck et al., 2016) show that female behavior online tends to be interpersonally oriented as compared to males' being task-and-information inclined. Muscanell and Guadagno (2012) reported that males use Facebook intending to build new connections, whereas females utilize the platform more to maintain existing relationships. In addition, females are seen to more likely use SNS to compare themselves to others (Haferkamp et al., 2012) as they value the emotional and self-reflecting aspects of posts more than their male counterparts (Siibak, 2009).

These gender differences in behavior and orientation influence differences in SNS use. Females use SNS more as a platform for self-expression by blogging and interacting with other users; males are more likely to use SNS to play games than to communicate. Studies (Krasnova et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2017) on the continuance of Facebook use state that females' continuance intentions are influenced positively by community identification. They are more likely to continue using SNS because they are motivated by maintaining close relationships. On the other hand, males base their continuance on their ability to gain general information and on the perceived usefulness of the site.

Females also tend to be more cognizant of their privacy, linking it to concerns regarding cyberstalking and security issues (Haferkamp et al., 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Consequently, perceived reputation and privacy risks negatively influence females' motivation to continue SNS use (Lin et al., 2017). Because females are more likely to self-present and self-disclose online (Salaway et al., 2008), it is hypothesized that they attract more feedback, thus making them more privacy-conscious (Gray, 2018).

These reviewed literature point out that gender differences in SNS use is shaped by concerns

regarding self-image, relationships, and privacy. Guadagno and Cialdini (2007) argue that males and females in organizational settings use different impression management tactics consistent with gender role expectations, which tend to disadvantage females. We wonder if these differences manifest as well in personal archiving practices online. That is to explore to what extent personal archiving becomes an act of impression management and through what practices this is attained. To be clear, our study looks at personal archiving on social media and not personal archiving of social media. We envision our study to point to such dynamics while drawing implications for the design of SNS platforms as de facto personal archives that may have embedded design disadvantages between genders.

METHODOLOGY

Population, Sample, and Participants

A survey was given to 254 Facebook users, all college students from a university in Manila, Philippines. They were recruited in a general education class that closely reflected the university's demographic composition in terms of school affiliation, age distribution, and years in college. While these demographic points are not part of the analysis, it provides a semblance of structure to this convenient sampling method.

These participants were requested to complete the survey online from May 6 to 24, 2019. Of the 254 participants, 200 respondents were able to complete the survey correctly before it closed. Responses from those who were unable to do so were not included in the final analysis.

The final sample of 200 respondents was composed of 90 who self-identified as female (45%), 90 who self-identified as male (45%), and 20 who identified as gender variant/non-conforming (10%).

Data Collection Instruments, Variables, and Materials

The online survey opened with a series of basic demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, years in college), alongside some measures of Facebook use (e.g., frequency of checking Facebook, frequency of posting on Facebook).

Participants were then asked to respond to questions relating to their archiving practices on Facebook (likelihood and frequency to revisit, repost, edit, hide, and delete old posts) and on the factors that influence them (privacy, self-image, emotions, relationships). Finally, they were also asked what they thought of Facebook as an archive (e.g., usefulness, stability). While various data were gathered, not all of them were used in this exploratory paper. Some of them are being used in developing future studies.

Participants were asked to accomplish the survey online, designed for both desktop and mobile interfaces, duly hosted on Qualtrics.

Data Analysis Procedures

Various descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed to draw and compare the findings of the study. Particular focus was given to analyzing the relationship between archiving practices and gender. Given the exploratory nature of the study, which aims to be descriptive and comparative rather than correlative, standard central tendency was deemed sufficient with the sample size and the spread of data within the dataset. While a chi-square test for independence or Spearman's rank-order correlation could have also been utilized, the results from the survey showed little difference between gender to warrant additional statistical testing and would likely yield very little additional information at this point. Future studies aiming to measure statistical correlation using a larger sample size may opt to utilize additional statistical methods.

Further, while the responses were categorized along three gender identity classifications, most of the

Table 1
Years on Facebook

Central tendency and variability	Female	Male	Gender variant / Non-conforming
Mean	9.26	9.24	9.33
SD	1.46	1.46	1.01
Min	5	4	8
Max	11	11	11
Median	10	10	10

comparative analyses were only done between (self-identified) males and females. We acknowledge the limitations of this binary analysis that may be read as using "implicit gender essentialism as a theory-in-use" (Trauth, 2013, p. 277). From this initial study, we work towards a more broad and nuanced future work involving a diversity of gender identities, expressions, and intersectionalities.

FINDINGS

Facebook Use

The participants have been on Facebook for an average of 9.27 years (Range = 4-11 years, Median = 10, SD = 1.43). There is no statistical difference across genders

in terms of years on Facebook, as seen in Table 1.

Most of the participants are heavy Facebook users (68%) in terms of frequency of visiting the platform, doing so more than five times a day. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the participants are average users visiting once up to five times a day. Only 5% of the participants go online to check Facebook a few times a week, considered as light users. Again, there is no statistical difference between genders, with the curves similar to each other, though we can note that no male respondent is classified as a light Facebook user. These are summarized in Table 2.

When it comes to the frequency of posting on

Table 2
Frequency of Visiting Facebook

Usage	Female		Male		Gender variant / Non-conforming		TOTAL	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Light Facebook User	8	8.89%	0	0.00%	2	10%	10	5%
Average Facebook User	26	28.89%	20	22.22%	8	40%	54	27%
Heavy Facebook User	56	62.22%	70	77.78%	10	50%	136	68%
TOTAL	90	100%	90	100%	20	100%	200	100%

Table 3
Frequency of Posting on Facebook

Posting	Female		Male		Gender variant / Non-conforming		TOTAL	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Light Facebook Poster	46	51.11%	42	46.67%	8	40%	96	48%
Average Facebook Poster	32	35.56%	30	33.33%	10	50%	72	36%
Heavy Facebook Poster	12	13.33%	18	20.00%	2	10%	32	16%
TOTAL	90	100%	90	100%	20	100%	200	100%

Facebook, only 16% of the respondents can be considered as heavy posters, posting something at least once a day. The majority at 48% are light Facebook posters, posting at least once a month to just a few times per year. The rest are average posters (36%), posting at least once every week. Again, there is no significant statistical difference between genders, with the curves similar to each other, as seen in Table 3.

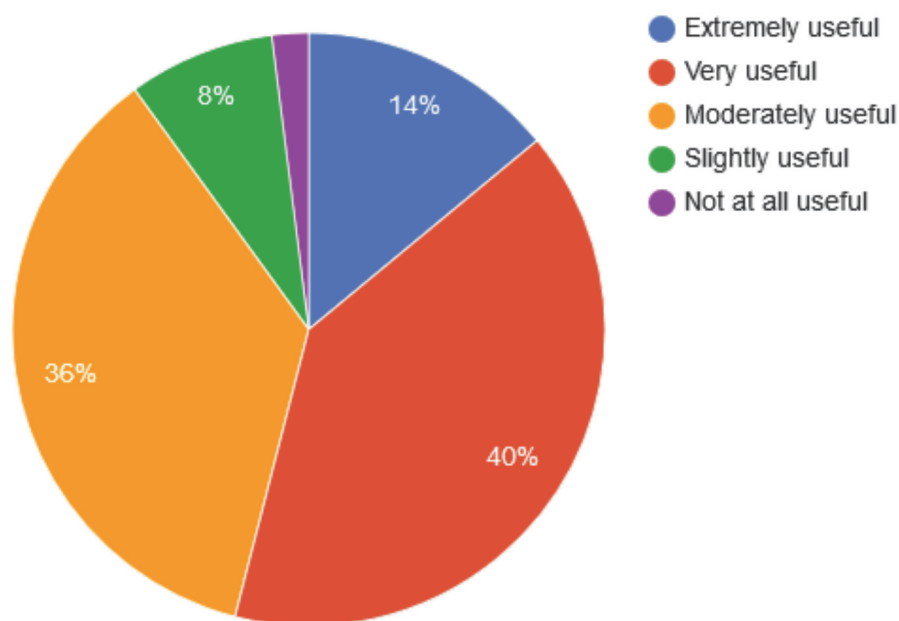
Overall, there is no gender difference with regards to years spent on Facebook or on the frequency of visiting and posting on the platform.

Facebook as a Personal Archive

When asked if they consider Facebook a personal archive, an overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that they do. When sorted between genders, the findings remain consistent. We neither prompted the question with a definition of what an archive is, nor did we ask respondents how they define an archive. We did not want to impose our conceptions of what an archive is. Instead, in line with

notions of the "personal," we were interested to see how they will respond to this question given their individual understanding or conceptualization of archives. Moreover, while there might be a multiplicity if not conflicting conceptualizations of what a personal archive is between respondents, 81% of them ultimately considers Facebook as one.

Figure 1
Usefulness of Facebook as a Personal Archive



As a follow-up, we asked, "how useful is Facebook as a personal archive?" A little over half of the respondents stated that they consider Facebook as either extremely or very useful as a personal archive (see Figure 1). In relation to this, when asked, "how stable do you think Facebook is as a platform to use as a personal archive?" 55% of the respondents think it is only moderately stable, with only 21% pointing that it is either extremely or very stable (see Figure 2). Responses to both questions across genders were near identical.

These findings point out that the studied group considers Facebook a personal archive despite its perceived moderate usefulness or stability. These exploratory data hint towards a different conceptualization of what personal archiving is or perhaps even asserting a particular type of personal archiving that operates on social networking platforms like Facebook. While beyond the scope of this current paper, identifying articulations of what personal archiving is and what social media as personal archives are, is something that future studies might want to pursue. While the archiving profession often laments that the general public has a stereotypical image of archives as dusty basements holding analog objects, if for nothing, we found that this might not be the case as these college students may conceive of archives – particularly personal archives – differently. These respondents temporally frame personal archiving in a way that might be perceived to be against or to be extending in a different way the logics of long-term posterity purported by archivists and archival scholars. If personal digital archives are indeed "first and foremost personal," (Redwine, 2015, p. 7) then we have to acknowledge the "idiosyncrasies of personal interests and desires"

(Redwine, 2015, p. 7) that shape the creation of digital records on social media and the archiving practices that the same creators employ on those very platforms.

Archiving Practices on Facebook

The following results show the likelihood that participants engage in various archiving practices on Facebook (revisiting, reposting, editing, hiding, and deleting old posts). Note that we frame personal archiving practices not directly as traditional archival functions, but instead, we draw parallelisms between such functions to affordances that Facebook enables. We argue that the archiving practices we have identified follow and extend the logics and operations of appraisal, acquisition, arrangement, description, storage, and access in overlapping ways. For example, revisiting and hiding posts is an issue of access, deleting is driven by appraisal, and editing functions as a mechanism of description. Each archiving practices speaks of the continuity between

Figure 2
Stability of Facebook as a Personal Archive

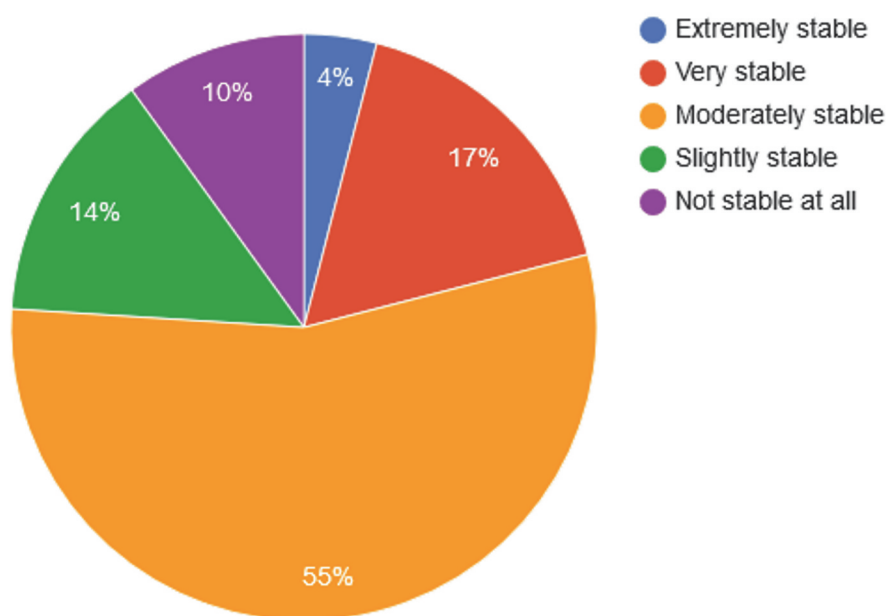
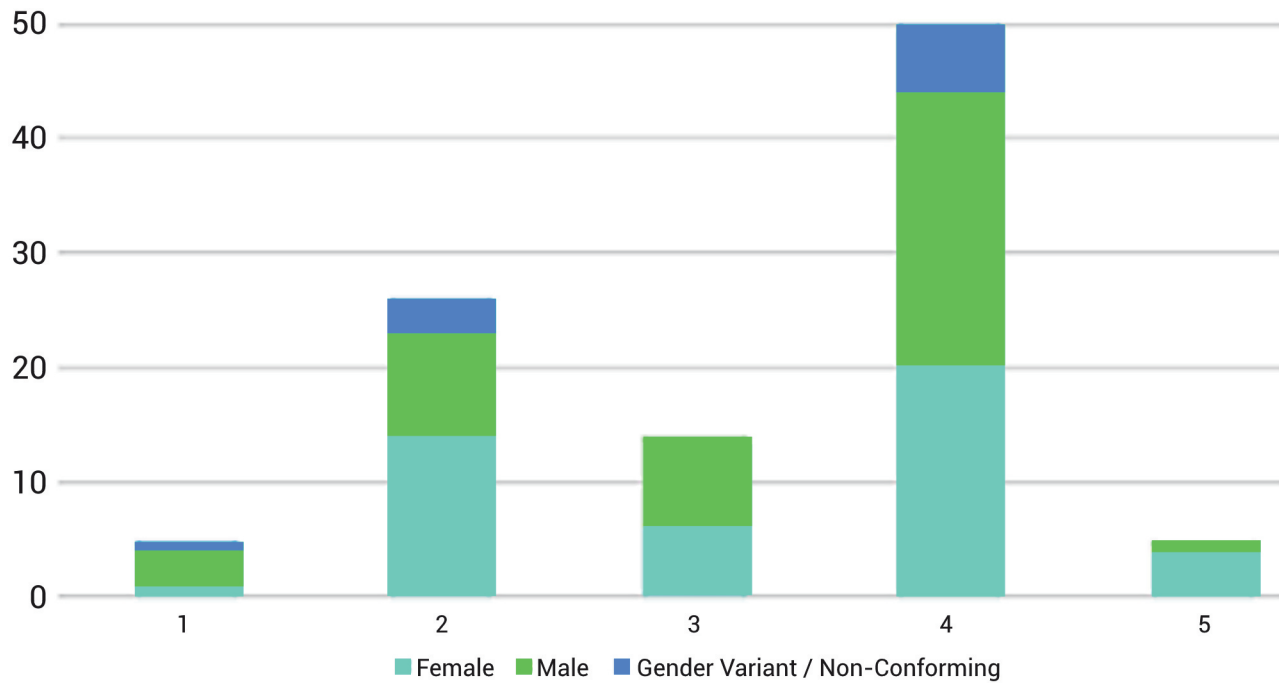
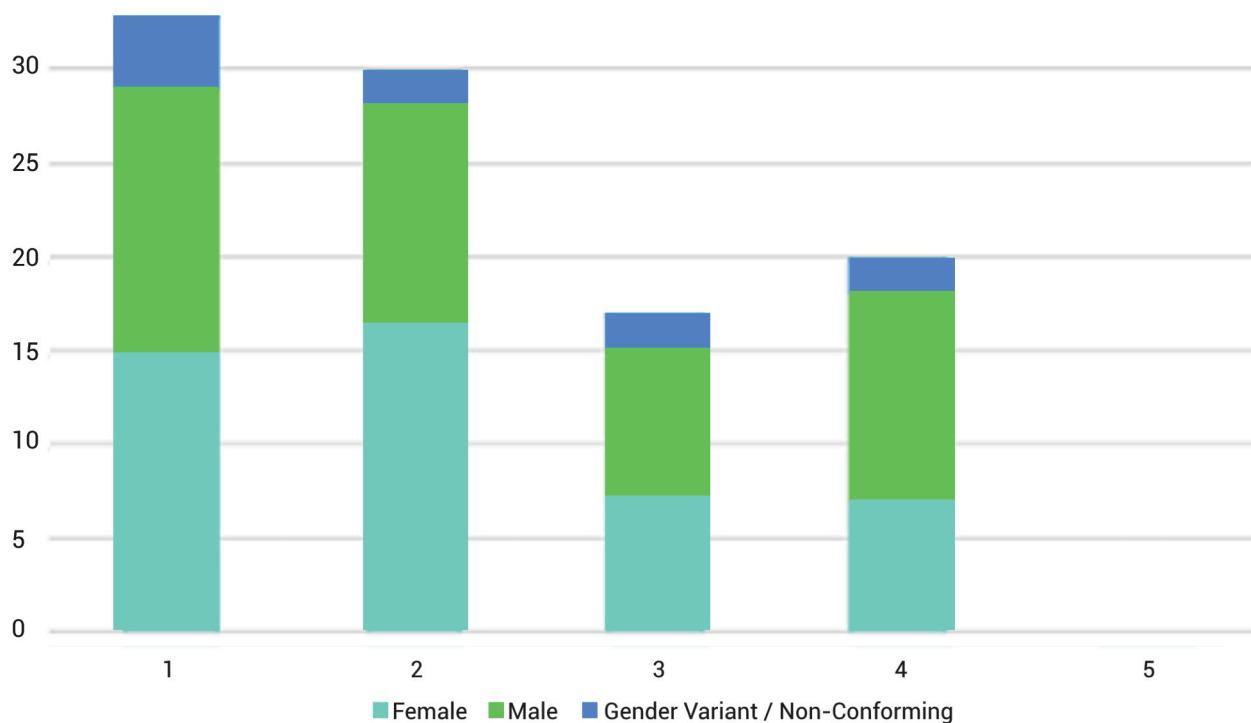


Figure 3*Likelihood to Revisit Old Posts***Figure 4***Likelihood to Repost Old Posts*

archival functions while still making the questions familiar enough for the respondents to answer even without an understanding of archival theory and praxis professionally defined. This framing acknowledges that such practices on Facebook are personal archiving activities as thought of by the users themselves.

Using a five-point Likert scale (1=extremely unlikely to 5=extremely likely), the survey asked the likelihood a user performs a particular archiving practice. Analysis was further done to see if gender has an impact on these practices. To do this, the null hypothesis is set as "there being no difference between female and male with regards to the likelihood of [archiving practice]." These descriptive

statistics and the results of the independent-samples t-tests are presented per archiving practice.

Revisiting Old Posts

Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents are likely to revisit old posts.

There is no significant difference, however, in the scores for female ($M=3.27$, $SD=1.07$) and male ($M=3.24$, $SD=1.03$); $t(44)=0.1003$, $p=0.9203$, $\alpha=0.05$, 95% confidence interval of this difference: from -0.41 and 0.47.

The null hypothesis is not rejected. These results suggest that gender does not have an effect on the likelihood of revisiting old posts

Figure 5
Likelihood to Edit Old Posts

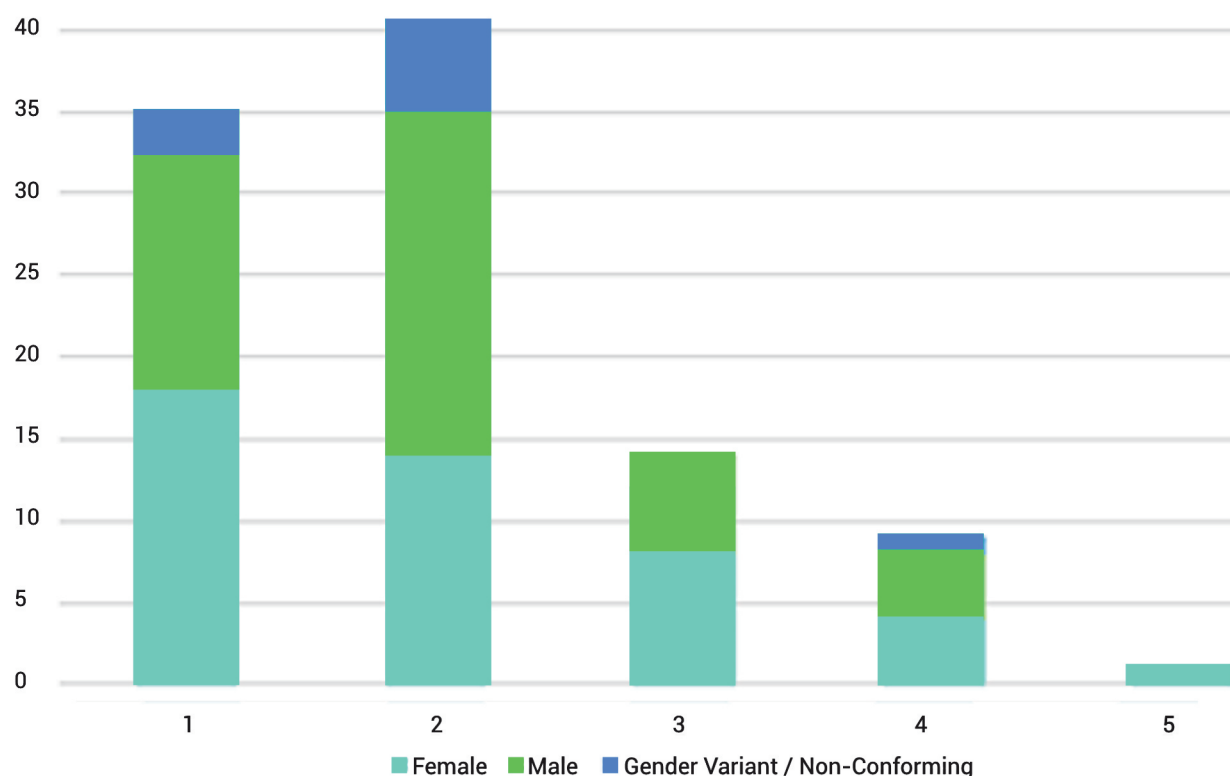
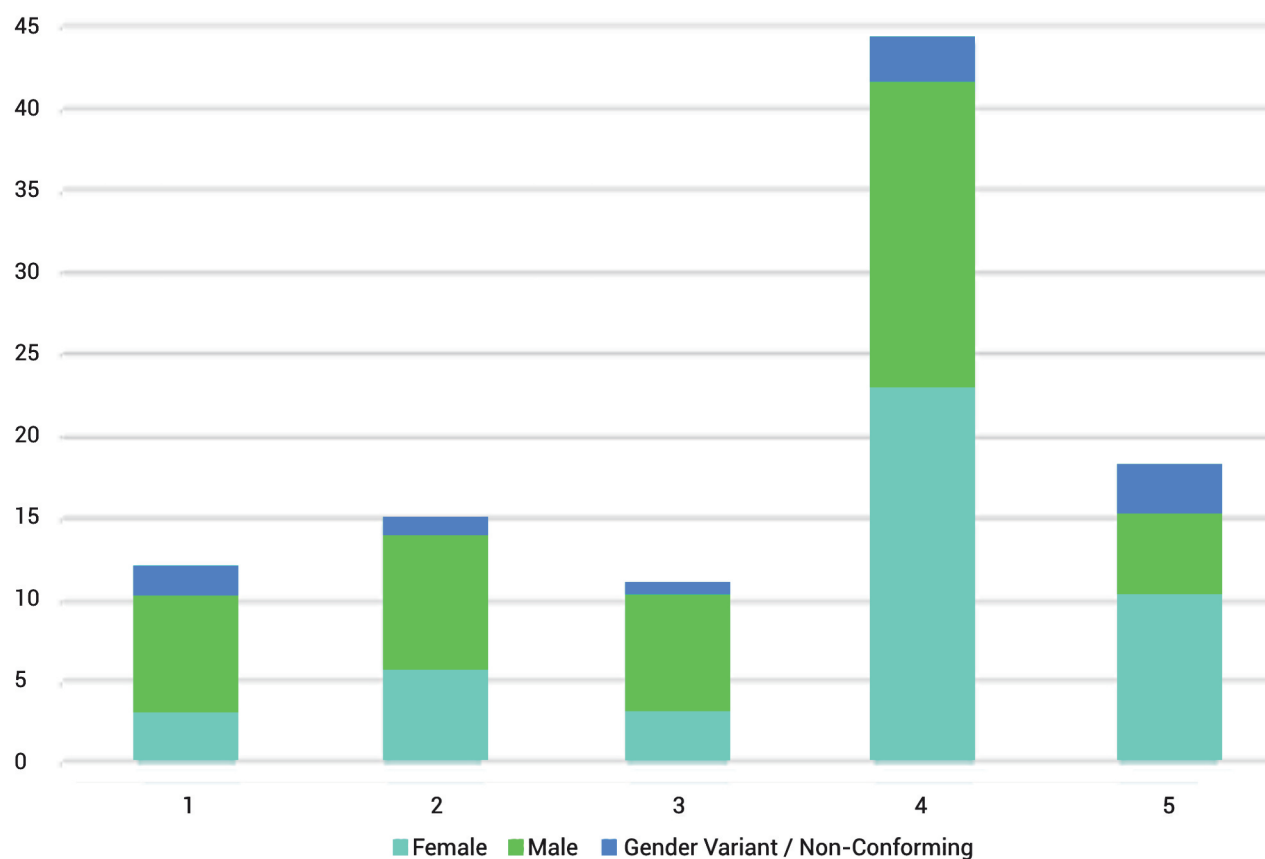


Figure 6*Likelihood to Hide Old Posts**Reposting Old Posts*

The majority of the respondents (63%) are unlikely or extremely unlikely to repost old posts.

There is no significant difference however in the scores for female ($M=2.13$, $SD=1.06$) and male ($M=2.36$, $SD=1.17$); $t(44)=0.9449$, $p=0.3499$, $\alpha=0.05$, 95% confidence interval of this difference: from -0.41 and 0.47.

The null hypothesis is not rejected. These results

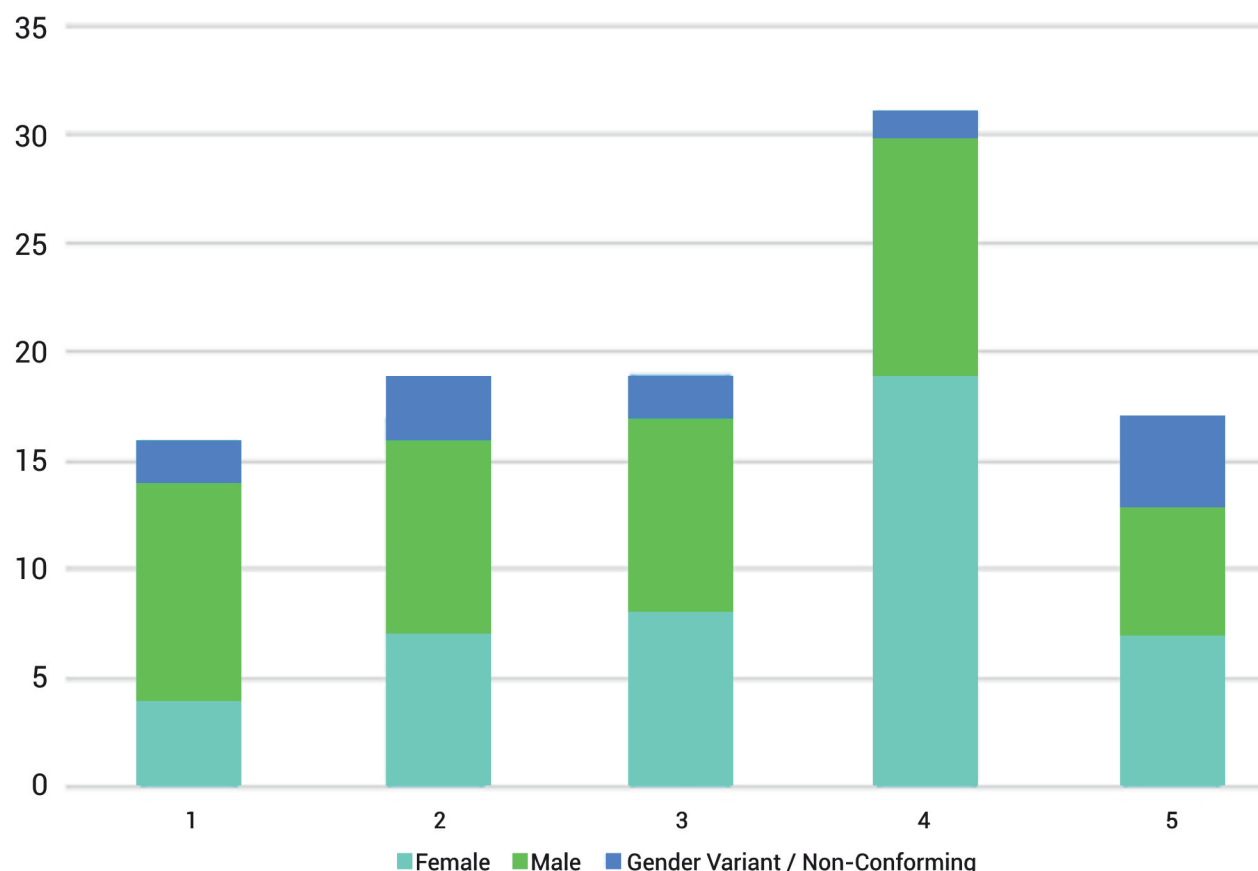
suggest that gender does not have an effect on the likelihood of revisiting old posts.

Editing Old Posts

The majority of the respondents (76%) are unlikely or extremely unlikely to edit old posts.

There is no significant difference however between the scores for female ($M=2.02$, $SD=1.08$) and male ($M=2.00$, $SD=.90$); $t(44)=0.1060$, $p=0.9158$, $\alpha=0.05$, 95% confidence interval of this difference: from -0.39 and 0.44.

Figure 7
Likelihood to Delete Old Posts



The null hypothesis is not rejected. These results suggest that gender does not have an effect on the likelihood of editing old posts.

Hiding Old Posts

The majority of the respondents (62%) are likely or extremely likely to hide old posts.

There is significant statistical difference in the scores for female ($M=3.69$, $SD=1.16$) and male ($M=3.13$, $SD=1.29$); $t(44)=2.1448$, $p=0.0347$, $x =$

0.05, 95% confidence interval of this difference: from 0.04 and 1.07.

The null hypothesis is rejected. These results suggest that gender does have an effect on the likelihood of hiding old posts, with females being more likely to do so.

Deleting Old Posts

Forty-eight percent (48%) of the respondents are likely or extremely likely to delete old posts,

compared to 33% who are unlikely or extremely unlikely to do it.

There is no significant difference however between the scores for female ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.19$) and male ($M=2.87$, $SD=1.38$); $t(44)=1.9641$, $p=0.0527$, $x = 0.05$, 95% confidence interval of this difference: from -0.01 and 1.07. The null hypothesis is not rejected.

These results suggest that gender does not have an effect on the likelihood of deleting old posts.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Personal Archiving on Social Media

Sheffield (2018) argues that though Facebook is a record-making technology, it does not necessarily translate to it being a recordkeeping platform. In response, professional archivists are finding ways to cope with the deluge of content-record created through and on these platforms. In our study, we are not particularly focused on archiving social media records per se, but rather, we are interested in archiving practices on social media. What our study points to is that despite the constraints and instability of these platforms, users themselves still consider it as a personal archive. And while it is beyond the scope of this current study to articulate how these users conceptualize social media platforms as personal archives, our findings point to the existence of articulations that may not necessarily line up with typical notions of archiving conceived by the archival profession.

This paper hints to type/s of personal archiving that both specifies and extends how we think of and practice archiving in personal ways on social media platforms. We look forward to future studies that will account for such articulations that acknowledge that a new generation of users may possibly conceive of archiving differently

given the sociotechnical systems they engage with and the nature of recordmaking practices they employ.

Personal Archiving Practices as Impression Management

The findings show that respondents are likely to revisit old posts but resurfacing them for the public seems to be an unlikely practice. Respondents are also unlikely to edit old posts but would rather hide them instead. Though Bauer et al.'s study (2013) has previously shown that Facebook users either kept old posts for posterity or deleted them due to irrelevance, hiding posts is a compromise to the absolutes presented by these two sides.

These practices are possibly motivated by the desire to monitor and control one's self-presentation to maximize positive perception by others. Personal archiving on SNS can hypothetically serve not only as a way of preserving one's history but also as a form of impression management. These personal archiving practices as retrospective impression management focus on "cleaning up" one's image, framing one's past as generally dirty and problematic.

Personal Archiving Practices between Genders

There is seemingly no gender difference when it comes to the likelihood to revisit, repost, edit, and delete old posts, except for females being more likely to hide old posts than males. These gender differences in SNS use, as pointed by previous literature, are not necessarily seen in personal archiving practices on Facebook.

The difference regarding hiding posts is worth nothing, however. Previous qualitative studies echo such gender differences, particularly when it comes to posts or activities that users eventually deem as inappropriate (Wang et al., 2011), as females are more concerned about having

inappropriate content shown in their timelines compared to males (Peluchette & Karl, 2008). While the cisgender hetero-patriarchal society is more forgiving of the mistakes of straight males, females face more pressure to present themselves “properly.” Thus, she hides her posts while he gets away with his.

Personal Archiving Practices as Defense and Defiance

This act of hiding posts is likely tied to gendered concerns regarding privacy and security. Allen (2000) illustrates and argues that the privacy and security of females online are more at risk than that of males, given that “some of the worst features of the real world are replicated in cyberspace” (p. 1179). From stalking to harassment, these lead females to perceive more security risks and privacy concerns online than males. But the act of hiding posts by females may also be seen as akin to hiding records as a mechanism of preservation for posterity. For example, Antoinette Burton (2004) illustrates that women are difficult to find in archives, but their traces “however ghostly, testify to their capacity to stand subjects of History” (p. 290). To hide is both a measure of defense and an act of defiance.

The act of hiding posts may be seen as an assertion of the need to be left alone while also seeking intimacy and connection where and when wanted. Hiding posts in this regard can be empowering. She is not openly vulnerable as she controls her visibility. Neither is she forced to erase herself completely as she is allowed to create a space for herself and make herself visible when she wants to. Privacy and security should not stifle people from participating in the ways they need and want. Personal archiving practices, in this case hiding posts, can be an act of saying “no” to the rigidity of how the patriarchy has conceived of and imposed privacy and security for control. This is for her and her alone.

CONCLUSION

Results from this exploratory quantitative research show that users consider Facebook as a personal archive despite its perceived moderate usefulness or stability. In this personal archive, users are likely to revisit old posts but are unlikely to repost them. They are likely to hide old posts but are unlikely to edit them. There are no statistically significant differences found between users who self-identify as female and those who self-identify as male when it comes to revisiting, reposting, editing, or deleting old posts. Females, however, were more likely to hide posts than males. While our findings are limited to identifying the likelihood of these practices, future studies can substantiate and evaluate the intentions and motivations behind these behaviors, which we argue are driven by impression, privacy, and security management in response to the pressures, surveillance, and violence of a patriarchal society. Qualitative responses from users and additional theoretical lenses, however, may provide richer explanations behind these practices. Can we, for example, extend and question the handmaiden spectre that haunts the archival discipline (Lapp, 2019) given the everyday practices of individuals personally archiving on social media platforms.

We would be interested to see if these initial findings stand given a larger sample, a longer time frame, or a different community or demographic group. In addition, the gender analysis here has only focused on the female-male binary. We hope for future studies to broaden the conceptualization of gender in our research and use critical gender theory and archival history itself in examining archiving practices online. As one of our reviewers pointed out, it would be interesting to see how these differences change and what their impact would be when viewed in terms of long-term archiving discourse. In addition, we look forward to studies that will seek to articulate how users of social media platforms conceive these platforms as personal archives.

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