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AUTHENTICITY AND MULTIPLICITY: UNDERSTANDINGS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

There are many ways authenticity is understood, and in the context of social media, often a dichotomy between a virtual copy and a real life original is suggested. This article pays attention to the complexity of the real life self, thus, it explores the relation between authenticity, multiplicity (one having multiple identities or aspects of self), and social media. For that, 20 semi-structured interviews with respondents living, working, or studying in Riga, Latvia, were conducted. The results offer a nuanced outline of different ways people reflect about their authenticity, and how these different definitions impact the way people perceive their own authenticity both in real life and in the context of social media. It suggests multiplicity is acknowledged as a dimension of authenticity in real life context, however, in the context of social media, the representation of the essence of one's self is questioned.

Keywords: authenticity ▪ interpretative phenomenological analysis ▪ multiplicity ▪ phenomenology ▪ qualitative research ▪ self ▪ self-presentation ▪ social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of social media, the concept of authenticity has often been seen as dealing with the dichotomy between the virtual copy of a (necessarily more authentic) real life original (Frankel & Krebs, 2022). Furthermore, the lack of authenticity has been perceived as people presenting only the positive aspects of themselves (Bailey & Iyengar, 2023) or, when speaking about social media influencers, as lacking transparency of sponsorship (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020).

The juxtaposition between the authenticity of the real self and the digital self can lead to overlooking the unclear and ambiguous definition of authenticity itself (Boyle, 2003; Balaban & Szabolcs, 2022). Furthermore, such approach can also impede being aware of the complexity of the real self. There have been debates whether one has one or multiple selves (Baumeister, 1998), nonetheless, there are

not as many questions about one having multiple domains – roles, self-aspects, or facets (i.e., McCall, 1982; Burke & Stets, 2009; McConnell, 2011), which can be conceptualized as multiplicity within oneself.

The interaction of the concepts of authenticity, multiplicity, and social media has mostly been interpreted in theoretical assumptions, analyzing how context-collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011) being one of the aspects that characterizes social media contributes to the interaction. As the audience or the recipient is one of the key elements in the enactment of the role identities one has, context-collapse contributes to the emergence of new settings and, thus, new aspects of authenticity become of importance. Some authors (i.e., Marinucci, 2010; Miller, 2011; Brekhus, 2020) have offered their perspectives of how the influence could be, but they rarely, if at all, include any empirical evidence. Having said that, it is crucial first to understand the interaction between the three main concepts – authenticity, multiplicity, and social media.

2. AUTHENTICITY AND MULTIPLICITY

As noted, the definition of authenticity, despite being a trendy research object, is fluid. It is very often understood intuitively and, in general, people are confident they could recognize it (Thurnell-Read, Skey, & Hermanova, 2022). The majority of attempts to explain authenticity include a reference to being real, genuine (Selby, 2022). That means, as a concept it aims to capture dimensions of truth or verification (Newman, 2019). Furthermore, it has a processual nature, meaning it can be seen as an objectification of the process of representation, where one's actions represent an ideal or an essence (Vannini & Williams, 2009). Authenticity is also frequently explained through the opposites – in relation to the ideas it is contrasted with, which requires defining how inauthenticity looks like (Thurnell-Read, Skey, & Hermanova, 2022), thus, authenticity can mean being not fake or copied (Selby, 2022).

Although authenticity is more often seen in the context of inner values and beliefs (i.e., Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017), the feelings of an individual, thus, her motivation and behavior as well, are influenced by the dimensions of authenticity that are linked to the roles she takes, as well as group memberships (Wessel et al., 2020). Therefore, one could say that the ambiguity of the concept of authenticity is furthered by the possible coexistence of two reference points – authenticity toward one's inner essence and authenticity toward being a part of a group, which can result in a clash if one tries to simultaneously fulfill both authenticity dimensions that include contradictory goals (Brekhus, 2020).

The sense of authenticity as a concept helps to solve and reconcile the juxtaposition of unity and multiplicity. The term of role differentiation, widely used in psychology, includes an idea that even if behaviors required by various roles are different, it is not to be seen as contrary to integrity, because the indicator of personality fragmentation is not how different the roles are, but how skewed they are from the sense of authenticity (Sheldon et al., 1997). That makes it worth exploring

authenticity through the context of one's multiplicity, which becomes even more interesting on social media, as the context-collapse makes multiple of one's identities equally salient.

3. SELF ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF IN REAL LIFE

Before paying attention to how authenticity functions in the context of social media, understanding the self on social media and its' distinction from real life self is important. In the beginning of internet era, the potential of the cyberspace was seen as a possibility to construct multiple selves (or multiple windows if defining the selves as a part of computer interface) in contrast to the one self that the real life offers (Turkle 1997; Bolter and Grusin 2000). Later a concept of a detached self was also offered (Zarghooni, 2007) to emphasize the two distinct environments between which a person constantly commutes, while the idea of blended identity (Baker, 2009) stressed it is not just a real life self that is presented online, but also the impressions given off online contribute to the construction of an identity that has consequences in real life, thus, the aspects perceived online and offline add equally important meaning to the self.

Yet, since the rise of social media and mobile technologies, people adapt to 'always on' relationship, which can be conceptualized as the source of a tethered self (Turkle 2008), which leads to the thought that the online and offline self are inextricably intertwined (Davis 2014) and connected by 'iterative feedback loops', allowing to assume that it is either impossible or unnecessary to essentially distinct online and offline components of the self (Granic, Morita, and Sholten, 2020).

At the same time, presenting oneself online still includes construction of messages and, as a semiotic practice, it permits falsification and an intentional reveal or concealment of facts (Moreno Berreneche, 2019), meaning that the online presence of the audience that one knows in real life can be a motivation to be congruent and 'true', but it does not ensure that. Despite that, it does not imply that one is definitely more authentic in real life - in some cases, lack of an immediate feedback can encourage one to show more of one's 'real essence' (Hu, Kumar, Huang, & Ratnavelu, 2017).

Moreover, the dichotomy between authenticity on social media and in real life becomes even more interesting when seen in the context of one's multiplicity.

4. AUTHENTICITY, MULTIPLICITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The interaction between the three concepts has mostly been interpreted through theoretical speculations. The co-presence of people linked to one's multiple identities on social media can result in reveal of even those aspects that one finds uncomfortable, and by promoting such potentially uncomfortable situations social media might foster more authentic ways of expressions (Marinucci, 2010) and promote a creation of a merged collage of interests, connections, and thoughts (Hodkinson,

2011). Although self-censorship is possible and often used (Hogan 2010), social media hinder adaptation to just one role that is more comfortable. Furthermore, although social media allow creation of idealized presentation, they also enable using such identity strategies that integrate the multidimensional aspects of self instead of “commuting between them.” (Brekhus, 2020)

The real-time communication challenges the perspective of postmodernism that praises fragmentation, offering a new way for one to understand herself – the constant presence of others offers one a new perspective about one’s self as a whole, instead of the fragmented self that one sometimes chooses to present in other circumstances (Wandel & Beavers, 2010). These assumptions pertain to the discussion of the way technologies reveal a new perspective on self and, thus, create a space for empirical data in order to understand how authenticity, multiplicity, and social media are seen and experienced together.

The statements presented in the previous paragraphs form the research gap, within which this article aims to explore the way people understand authenticity and its relation to multiplicity, and how they reflect about their own authenticity in the era of social media. With social media being part of people’s lives for almost two decades, it is possible to say that their effect is to be observed not merely in the digital environment (Bartura, 2010; also implied by the concept of (deep) mediatization – Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hepp, 2020). Therefore, social media in the context of the article are seen not (only) as a variable (i.e., comparing the perspectives on authenticity in real life versus authenticity on social media), but also as a definition of the current era that shapes the social interaction and the understandings of people, including the way they see the connection between the essence of the self, aspects of the self and communicating them (perspective on authenticity and multiplicity), the way they see themselves managing this interaction (perception on one’s own authenticity) and how they interpret it in the context of communication on social media.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do people define authenticity in the era of social media, and how is it linked to multiplicity?

RQ2: How do people perceive their own authenticity and what are the points of reference for measuring it?

RQ3: How do people see the difference between (their) authenticity in real life and on social media, and what is the role of multiplicity in this context?

According to phenomenological approach (Tracy, 2020), the research questions and the manner of conversation focuses on lived experiences and one’s interpretation of it.

5. METHODOLOGY

To provide answers to the research questions, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The age range of the interviewees was 23 – 45; there was an equal number

of both male and female respondents. A purposive sampling approach (maximum variation approach) was chosen to represent broader variations of the phenomena (Tracy, 2020), the categories being a wide spectrum of the activity of social media use, active versus passive use (Chen et. al. 2014), use of anonymous or pseudonymous profile, influencer status (seeing them as users that have gathered a following on social media – Campbell & Farrell, 2020) or usage of social media for personal business, as well as a variety of occupations held by the participants (i.e., a journalist, a lawyer, a teacher, a biology student, etc.), family status, and religious beliefs. In some cases, the interviewees were asked to suggest other possible participants that fit one or other criteria, i.e., if they know anyone who maintains an anonymous account. A criterion that was common to all participants was that they were living, working, or studying in Riga, the capital city of Latvia. Table 1 offers an overview of the main parameters of the respondents (gender, age, and occupation), which will also be used for reference later.

Table 1. Main parameters of respondents.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Male	23	Student
2	Female	23	Biologist
3	Male	24	Teacher
4	Male	25	Social media influencer
5	Female	25	Social media influencer
6	Male	25	Occupational safety specialist
7	Male	26	IT specialist
8	Male	26	Social media influencer
9	Female	29	Working in a Christian NGO
10	Male	30	Leading a digital marketing agency
11	Female	30	Lawyer
12	Female	31	Working in state administration
13	Female	32	Hairdresser
14	Male	33	Journalist, lecturer
15	Female	33	Working in state administration
16	Male	36	Software development engineer
17	Female	37	Librarian, musician
18	Male	40	Tech influencer
19	Female	43	Working in state administration
20	Female	45	Teacher

As the interviews also covered other concepts related to multiplicity and social media, their length varied from 33 to 71 minutes. To make the interviews more structured both for the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as to add more concreteness to the idea of multiplicity, the participants were asked to draw an identity map

(similar approach has been used by Flenbaugh, 2016; Bentley et al., 2019) marking the role identities or facets of the self they find important to themselves. Although only role identities were given as examples, the respondents were not specifically discouraged from drawing any other facets (i.e., traits or abstract perspectives about themselves, i.e., “a materialistic person”). Throughout the conversation, the map was used as a point of reference when talking about contradictions or conflicts between various facets or characteristics they consider present in all the facets.

For analyzing the interviews, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used, which allows to discover the uniqueness of individuals’ lived experiences (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). For this article, mostly the answers (or questions) that included the keywords “authentic” or “authenticity” were used, but, in some cases, answers to other questions were also considered to broaden the context and to better understand the interviewee’s perspective. A conceptual overview of interview analysis is shown in Fig 1, explaining how the further analyzed variables are interconnected.

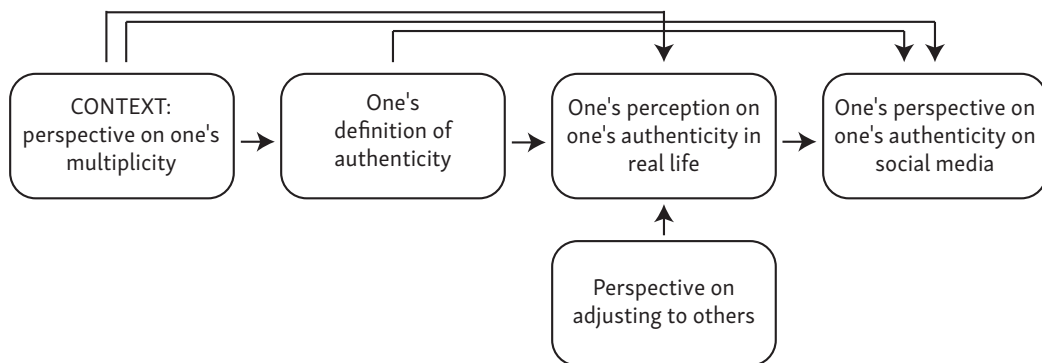


Fig 1. Conceptual scheme of interview analysis.

When describing the results, the number of interviewees that support an opinion is rarely mentioned since the paper does not aim to offer a generalizable categorization of different perspectives. Instead, it ponders on the ideas, which would otherwise appear fragmented.

6. DEFINING THE AUTHENTICITY

When describing the course of the interviews, it must be said that, many times, the definition of authenticity was changed by the participant when further questions were asked (i.e., in the context of their various facets). Hence, the multiple definitions offered by a participant were, in some cases, contradictory to each other and the statements about whether or not one considers herself authentic depended on which of the perspectives that had been discussed was used as a point of reference. That leads to think that, even if “authenticity” has become a buzzword (Thurnell-Read,

Skey, & Hermanova, 2022) and “everyone would like to think they are authentic” (male respondent, 30 years old, leading a digital marketing agency), there is not only no common definition between the research participants and, moreover, in the academia or society in general (Pöyry et al., 2019, Lehman et al., 2019), but the understanding of it is also often constructed within a conversational context and can be changed during the course of a conversation.

Among the explanations and definitions of authenticity that were offered by participants, there was a variety of different formulations that, during the analysis, were structured in three main directions. There were some common keywords that were often stated in different interviews, such as being *who you are, true, natural, real*, that goes well together with the usual attempts to conceptualize authenticity (Wood et al., 2008; Selby, 2022). Even so, when asked to further develop the thought and explain what being oneself or being true means, different perspectives emerged.

The various definitions drawn from the interviews were categorized in three main categories, which suggested different understandings about the ontology of authenticity. Two of the categories see authenticity as a specific trait – either being original or being direct. The third category shows authenticity as what could be called a *metaindentity* – communicating all facets (i.e., role identities) one has. Additionally, the categories reveal different perspectives on what is one’s essence to be communicated truly in order to be seen as authentic, leading also to divergent perspectives on the connection between the self and its’ adjustment to external influences that will be explored further.

Being authentic = being unique, original. This branch of answers included the notion that one is authentic if she is different from everyone else and/or possesses a characteristic or trait that makes her special. It was seen as (1) being a part of a subculture (i.e., being a skater), (2) going against mainstream (i.e., being homosexual or listening to a completely different music) to contrast what can be seen as a homogeneous, standardized and, thus, inauthentic (Thurnell-Read, 2019), (3) having ambitions and courage to do great things, as well as (4) having a distinct and unique way of doing things. Furthermore, within this perspective, there was an interviewee who said she is not used to using the term in relation to people, but rather when speaking about places or things, which connects to the perspective on authenticity as a quality of human experience with art, products, tourism, etc. (Wang, 1999, Lindholm, 2008)

I understand what authentic means, but I find it super weird to say it about a person. Anyway, in my past, I thought that I needed to go against the system in every possible way and listen to the music that no one listens to. [...] I didn’t want to become the sheep that follows the crowd, but, then again, it is comfortable and profitable to live in the system. So, am I as authentic as David Bowie? Nope.

(Female respondent, 33, working in state administration)

This marks a paradoxical understanding of authenticity that has become relevant especially in the era of social media, as such kind of originality is expected in self-representations, where one must fit in and stand out at the same time, even more so for influencers. What makes it paradoxical is that, as Reckwitz (2020) has well stated it, in the society where authenticity is a central social expectation, people are forced to present themselves as singular, and social recognition depends on being perceived as uniquely authentic.

Being authentic = saying everything you think. Another perspective on what being authentic means stems from its relation to being true, thus, being direct and honest, which many interviewees associated with “having no filters” and stating one’s opinion in an unapologetic way even if the views on whether it is desirable differed.

I am authentic in private relationships – with my girlfriend and in my family, but not in the public context. [...] For example, in university, I can’t show off my discontent with some of the students. I think being authentic would be if I said what I think, like, “You can’t pass this course, go away, because you annoy me.”

(Male respondent, 33, journalist, lecturer)

I would like to think that without filters, but it is not that simple. [...] But all in all – the more honest and direct, the better. If not better, then, at least, more authentic.

(Male respondent, 40, tech influencer)

Being authentic = showing all sides of you. In this context, it was mentioned that the difference between being authentic and being true is that if the latter implies not lying, then being authentic means also not hiding something and, thus, showing the multifacetedness of oneself, regardless of whether it is understood as characteristics, roles, or personal facts (i.e., illness). Similarly, in some theoretical positions, the quest for authenticity implies a search for meaning in the multiplicity by making sense of one’s own various aspects (Lifton, 1993), and the multidimensionality – having a unique combination of facets one possesses – is what makes one “interesting and authentic” (Brekhus, 2020).

I think that being authentic means that some of your characteristics pass through all your positions. [...] It means not hiding something. You don’t pretend to be someone else.

(Male respondent, 24, teacher)

I guess, truthfulness means when you are being true. But authenticity is a “meatier” concept. You are not only true, but you let your various features

to manifest and bring them to life. Then you are an authentic person. You live your life with no cognitive dissonance.

(Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

The last sentence from the quote connects the thought to another aspect that emerges in the interviewees' perspectives – a state of no conflict, where the aspects of oneself and their expressions are aligned to the values one has. Furthermore, in some of the interviews, it was stated not only regarding expressions and performance, but also as congruence between the possessed identities and the values one has.

It means not being ashamed of your values. Not trying to please other people but being yourself and not coming into conflict with your consciousness and yourself. With your beliefs. Living in coherence with yourself.

(Female, 29, works in a Christian NGO)

Maybe it is a banal answer, but I think it is about the values that do not change in different environments. Your values, interests, characteristics. If I see my self as an empathic person, then I see myself as such in every environment, because it is something that is important to me.

(Male respondent, 30, leading a digital marketing agency)

Likewise, in the literature one being authentic is often connected to one behaving in ways that represent their true motives, values, and idea, thus, allowing to call the person's behavior autonomous, congruent, and genuine (Harter, 2002; Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017; Selby, 2022).

7. TO ADJUST OR NOT TO ADJUST

A perspective that cannot be completely distinguished, as it partly overlaps with all three aforementioned perspectives, is **being authentic = not adjusting to others**, which became a discussion topic in many of the conversations, as there are some ambiguous aspects in the idea. While some of the respondents stated that adjusting to others is the opposite of the authenticity, others stressed it is the ability to adjust to the other partner of communication that promotes social interaction and is a "natural" thing for people.

I know that it is something very natural that we don't communicate completely freely, but, instead, we think about how we want to be seen. [...] I would like to say that we are never fully authentic, but I think it is a good thing that enables us to socialize.

(Male respondent, 23, student)

Authentic means real. Not performing? I think so. I think I am for 95% like that, because you can't 100% forget that you are not just talking, but you are talking with a specific person. [...] We are always mirroring each other, looking at each other. And it is not even performing, it is just something...
(Female respondent, 45, teacher)

It must also be mentioned that the respondents stated that it is only possible or right to adjust to the other person or situation if one does not find it contradictory to herself. For instance, for one person it means trying to avoid longer conversations with people who hold completely different world views, because mirroring them would feel inauthentic.

At the same time, there was also a view held by a few interviewees that not adjusting to others is possible if one possesses specific characteristics – self-confidence or natural tendency toward leadership. In that situation, “others adapt to you, instead of you adapting to them” (female respondent, 23, biologist).

If you have a “big” personality that is charismatic and extraverted enough, that can attract other people, if you have knowledge and intelligence, and other important characteristics, then the group will adjust to you. And you won't need to adjust to the group to be liked by them.
(Male respondent, 25, occupational safety specialist)

However, it must be mentioned that, in the three cases when authenticity was linked to a natural position of leadership, it was also emphasized that it requires humility and a position of equality with the others, otherwise it would be interpreted as a bad quality, i.e., as being bossy instead of being authentic.

8. DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTHENTICITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND “IN REAL LIFE”

The conversations turned to the topic of social media in the interview's second part, however, the topic was not purposefully excluded from the first part either. In some cases, respondents talked about digital communication in the first part of conversation (when asked about authenticity in general); it was done so more often by those participants that identified with the social media influencer status or social media was significantly liked to their job. Nonetheless, every participant was asked how authentic they think they are on social media. Thus, this section explores the differences in the perspectives about authenticity in real life and on social media within a participant's opinion.

There were participants for whom there is **no difference between both kinds of authenticity**. Mostly, it was like that for those interviewees for whom authenticity means being direct and saying everything you mean, therefore, authenticity on

social media equals posting your opinion and having “no filters.” Interestingly, such expression of authenticity was mostly linked to Twitter (the different “affordances of authenticity” offered by various social media will be explored in a further section).

Furthermore, there were respondents who explained the similarity between both kinds of authenticity by stating that, in real life, one has both a public face shown to everyone and a more private version of herself (a more authentic one) that is only revealed to the closest people. In such perspective, it was claimed that the same applies to social media – the public profile represents the public face, but private messaging or use of privacy tools (“close friends” function or use of a private profile on Instagram, for instance) gives space for the authentic personality to be expressed.

However, a majority of interviewees held an opinion that the **authenticity is less likely when it comes to social media**, which can be illustrated by a statement that “social networking sites are simply not constructed for us to be authentic.” (Male respondent, 36, software development engineer) The argumentation behind why the participants see themselves as less authentic in social media communication differed and, again, some directions can be drawn.

For some of the participants (three female respondents), it was the felt requirement to only share positive aspects of their lives that was an obstacle to feel authentic on social media. Paradoxically, although sharing everything (including the sad and hard moments of life) was called “having no borders,” at the same time, not doing that was linked to being less authentic. On the other hand, some other articles claim that sharing mostly positive aspects of users’ lives may “facilitate rather than exacerbate subjective authenticity” (Kreling et al., 2022), as they are still grounded in reality (Toma, 2017).

Another view on authenticity on social media was offered by two participants who use social networking sites very rarely and passively (very little self-presentation). Both used a metaphor of paintings in a gallery (similar to approach of Hogan, 2010) to describe how little meaning and information about one’s authentic essences the posts on social media reveal.

My social media profile is not connected to my personality at all. Even when I post pictures of myself, I don’t really think that’s me. [...] I think you can see equally much emotion in some painting. Maybe you see the idea of the artist, but you don’t understand the person that is portrayed. Like Mona Lisa. You just see a random person in a dress, and it says nothing about her.

(Male respondent, 26, IT specialist)

In general, the profiles of normal people are about nothing. [...] Of course, the content that is posted gives you something to associate the person with, but it’s nothing special. It is like “an average of a person” that is controlling what is posted.

(Female respondent, 43, working in state administration)

When it comes to the social media influencer context, two more aspects of authenticity are added to the discussion. First, the ability to portray oneself as a unique personality, which is connected to the first definition of authenticity in the first section of research results; it is the ability to post the content through the lens of one's individual style that makes one worth following to. Second, it is the question about sponsorship and collaboration, as the interviewees see the need to balance the requirements of the sponsors and their own personality and approach to social media content, thus, that is seen as a potential endangerment to authenticity (similar results can be seen in Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020).

Furthermore, there were participants who were dubious about their authenticity on social media because they only tend to share content published by others, instead of posting their own content that would present their personality. Although "what you share reveals how you see things and what is your goal" (male respondent, 25, occupational safety specialist), if one's profile consists only of shared content, it has less potential to reveal one's "full personality" or multifacetedness that will be explored in the next section.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA AND MULTIPLICITY

While showing all sides of one's self in some of the cases was seen as one of the definitions for authenticity, it seems not as important or challenging when it comes to social media.

Facets or identities that seem to be uncomfortable in real life tend to stay hidden on social media (except for private conversations) or expressed anonymously (not supporting the ideas that were described in literature review about the social media as fostering integration). One example for such aspects is one's insecurities, for instance, a fight against extra weight or a mental illness that could be a source for a successful content, but, as people do not want to be associated with it, it is safer to create a private profile that is open only for the closest people, or an anonymous profile, which is only dedicated to the specific topic. Another aspect is beliefs or reflections that go against an identity that one holds important; in this sample, two respondents, who were Christians, said they felt uncomfortable with publicly expressing their liberal perspective, thus, one of them chose to maintain an anonymous blog, while the other saw herself as very self-censoring.

When speaking about the choice to maintain an anonymous profile, what is interesting is that in other cases it was seen not as a mean to keep one facet separated from the rest of the personality as in the previously described situations, but the other way around - to keep the other aspects of personality separated in order not to impact the way the message communicated through the anonymous profile is perceived.

On these other accounts I can express myself in a different way. Like, on Twitter, I don't want it to be seen as Tom's opinion [name changed]. I want it to be seen as an opinion of a neutral, random person, because it changes the

way it is interpreted and how the intonation is imagined. If I post it from my real profile, it is seen as something sarcastic, so, when I want a discussion and a neutral context for that, I post it from a fake profile.

(Male respondent, 25, social media influencer)

There is nothing secret on my “anonymous” profile. My colleagues know it’s me. It’s not that I am hiding from the people I know in real life. [...] I just don’t want every random person to know who I am, where I work and then to write to my work, as it has happened to some other people I know. [...] I just don’t want the conversation on Twitter to reach my personality. But it always reaches one’s personality. [...] In the end, in case there is a public argument, they find some personal information about you and bring it up.

(Female respondent, 45, teacher)

Furthermore, some facets of the self are hidden out of the fear that they could be taken out of the context and, instead of representing the multifaceted self, the individual can get reduced to that specific post or facet, which can be seen as the result of durability and searchability – two of four main affordances of social networking sites (boyd, 2011).

I think that it is very hard to be authentic on social media, as people create an impression of you not from your personality, but from the specific things you decide to post. [...] I think that in real life I feel myself seen as a personality and as a whole. If I see any questions emerging or a confused face, I can explain what I mean and how it goes together with the other sides of me. But when I post something on social media, then it’s done - the post has a life of its own and I have no possibility to impact the impression of me it has created.

(Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

Moreover, when speaking about how important it is to present the multiple role identities on social media in order to say one is being authentic (in the context where being authentic = showing all facets of oneself), it was told that, in a way, it is not hard to present all the roles per se, however, it is harder to present the essence of the self. Such dimension could be interpreted as a core self that holds the deepest emotions and values (Turner, 2010).

I think that the authentic “me” is the one that gets censored the most [on social media]. It includes my sense of humor or my observations about the world. Even if I do have an opinion, I don’t express myself, I don’t intervene. It impacts more of “my essence,” not the roles I possess. I think I show those.

If you follow me, you know I am a volunteer, I am a daughter and a sister, and I am a lawyer for sure, because that's how I express myself.

(Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

At the same time, there were also opinions that go well together with a more senile statement of Turkle (1997), where she claimed that the internet and the anonymity it can possibly provide gives space for more authentic expressions of the essential self. The tools that social media offer (i.e., choice of one's logo or avatar, as well as a nickname on some of the sites) allows such self-expression that is not possible in real life, and it would take a lot of time to reach the topic. Thus, some of the respondents that have been maintaining a (semi) anonymous profile, see it as an authentic self-expression.

For my anonymous account, I wanted to keep my real name, but the surname represents what the content on the Twitter account is about [urban planning], I thought that the combination is witty. [...] I also created the picture (logo) myself with the help of an AI service that took my photograph and created a similar picture. Then, I chose one that could represent my essence if you look at it. So, it is not me in the photograph, but it might as well be me.

(Male respondent, 36, software development engineer)

On the street, I wouldn't go to the people and tell them that I wrote my master's thesis about a specific shroom. But I have it on my Twitter picture. [...] Also my nickname is the Latin version of an animal that is personally close to me. It is like in a masquerade – you choose a mask, and you go. Thus, I haven't been hiding, maybe I have shown myself even more.

(Female respondent, 45, teacher)

Moreover, in the context of a non-anonymous presentation of the self, it was said by an interviewee (male respondent, 23, student) that “social media give one a possibility to construct an internet personality, which might rather portray how one wants to be seen” (the ideal self) and it says something equally important about the person as it reveals his deepest desires and perspective on life, even if it differs from the “authentic side of her” or how one would be perceived in real life.

10. THE AFFORDANCES OF AUTHENTICITY BY VARIOUS PLATFORMS

Although discussing every platform with every participant would be inefficient, there were some nuances about various platforms that were brought up by the interviewees themselves. They were relevant in the specific context to reveal how the

technological tools, as well as the main premises of the platforms promote or, perhaps, hinder authentic expression of one's self.

Twitter. As it has been mentioned in some of the statements in the previous sections, Twitter is often used as an example to perform authenticity if it means saying things directly. What is more, authenticity on social media is associated with honest tweeting also by those for whom it was not the first definition of authenticity in general, while censoring one's thoughts is seen as lack of authenticity.

You won't post on Facebook that you just came back from your state's financed psychiatrist and that you just paid only quarter of the price for your medicine, because you have a mental diagnosis. There is no honesty there in that sense. So, on Twitter there is more honesty, but at the same time, it is sad and depressing.

(Female respondent, 32, hairdresser)

When commenting on expressing oneself on Twitter, some interviewees noted that they share their thoughts in a provocative way there and are often told in real life that they are not as mean as they seemed on the platform. That, in turn, is not seen as a fake performance, but as a self expression that is adjusted to the "rules of the platforms." As is seen by them, one must be provocative to raise awareness about certain issues, as well as there is more potential for heated discussions to take place and for one to become a part of them.

On Twitter, in any minute you can meet wide circles of people who get heated up. I think that, in real life, I could be as passionate about topics that are of interest to me, but I just don't meet those people. I think that is the main difference.

(Male respondent, 40, tech influencer)

In previous research, Twitter has indeed been associated with "authentic talk" or dialogue, which stands for an unscripted, spontaneous communication, which as such has a greater potential to reveal one's real thoughts (Margaretten & Gaber, 2014). Seeing spontaneity as a companion of authenticity allows seeing blunders or human errors in social media communication as a positive aspect (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2020), which, in broader context, could also imply that being too harsh or sharing what could otherwise be seen as a too personal information can be justified by being authentic.

Facebook & Instagram. Although there are differences between both platforms that are owned by Meta, in this context, they can both be analyzed together. A significant similarity between them that came up in the interviews was the fact that the respondents have a variety of social circles as friends / followers there, furthering a simultaneous activation of multiple identities, which is also of particular interest

in the book “Facebook & Philosophy” (ed. Wittkower, 2010), the chapters of which have been referred to in earlier sections of this article.

On the one hand, by some the platforms were seen as offering a sense of freedom to be one’s full self in her multifacetedness, as people there, in most cases, already know the person in the context of the role identities they possess. Therefore, there is less need to focus only on a specific niche or facet of the self as it can be on, i.e., Twitter if one has dedicated her account to a more specific topic or “mission.” For social media influencers and digital content creators, it felt almost like a pressure to present a very versatile version of self and to show off the various role identities they possess to be more interesting for the followers, even if they are considered niche content creators (i.e., focused on tech content or cake production).

On the other hand, the presence of the various circles was also seen as restricting and inducing more self-censorship by other interviewees, thus, they reported hiding some aspects because it could be seen contradictory to other facets or identities they possess. For instance, a woman working in state administration said she felt bad publishing her private travel content on these platforms, because there could be negative comments about how “the money of tax payers” is used.

The privacy settings of Facebook were never mentioned in the interviews, while the possible privacy strategies on Instagram were mentioned quite often – to create a private profile so that it cannot be accessed from Google or as an alternative to a more generic profile, as well as the usage of “Close friends” option so that the potential presence of various circles has less impact on one’s sense of freedom for her authentic expression.

TikTok. The platform was seen as putting less emphasis on the people one knows in real life, although it does not mean purposively hiding from everyone one knows, even if some of the interviewees said they do not use their real name on the platform. In the cases people were actively using the platform to create their own content, it was seen as a “chance to make a documentary of one’s life”, staged or unstaged, where one’s opinion and the small details of one’s life acquire meaning and can be potentially interesting to others, even in cases one is not a celebrity or an influencer.

I try to be a documentarist by offering as natural content as possible, because I think that TikTok has enough imitators and staged content. I offer glimpses that I have naturally recorded.

(Female respondent, 37, a librarian)

On TikTok, I can be perceived as just another adolescent that is getting ready for school tomorrow and simply creates some videos before going to sleep. I am your internet buddy.

(Male respondent, 25, social media influencer)

This could be linked to the idea of “calibrated amateurism”, which is a concept offered

in the context of microcelebrities to describe a meticulous use of tools offered by the platforms to craft a “contrived authenticity”, that is, a natural looking, yet purposeful performance (Abidin, 2017).

BeReal. It is specifically interesting to explore the affordances of authenticity by BeReal, which is the newest among the analyzed platforms and has claimed to promote authenticity and spontaneity (BeReal 2023). It must be mentioned that from the interviewees, only four stated they use the platform. With the platform being that new, there is also a lack of academic research on it, even more so – regarding authenticity. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to nuances even in the little number of perspectives.

Although BeReal has no tools to visually enhance the photo taken, it could be seen as imposing portraying a raw (Reade, 2021) version of oneself and, thus, guaranteeing authentic self-representation, the interviewees did not see it as a necessarily the most authentic platform - three of the four were rather skeptical about the level of authenticity the platform can ensure or promote.

One of the respondents was doubting her authenticity on there or, rather, a correct usage of the platform because she still tried to look good in the pictures and, if needed, retook them due to the presence of specific people (for instance, her ex) on the app. Furthermore, it was said by another interviewee that even if it is a messy corner of the room that is shown in the photo, it is still a staged or specifically chosen corner of the room. Another reason the platform’s capacity to offer a possibility of self-expression was questioned was because the random moments of one’s life, even if they supposedly show a very private context (i.e., one’s room), provide very little information about the facets one has and little meaning.

For the one interviewee that was highly positive regarding the promotion of authenticity by the platform, it was the randomness of the events presented there and the narrow circle of friends connected that makes the social medium different from others.

Of course, you censor something and sometimes you post it late, but, in general, I post stuff I wouldn’t post on other social media there, of course, being aware that it is a very restrictive and selectively chosen network that I have there. On my timeline, I have a doctor posting a BeReal next to a friend eating lunch at a super luxury restaurant, and it all happens at the same moment. It is like a very human “inside” to reality.

(Male respondent, 30, leading a digital marketing agency)

Therefore, it can be said that every platform and the tools it provides provide a different possibility of authentic self-expression and, furthermore, the affordances can be linked to the different definitions of authenticity that are presented both in this and other articles.

11. CONCLUSION

The article aimed to discover the different perspectives people have regarding authenticity and its relation to multiplicity, as well as how they reflect about their own authenticity in the era of social media. It provided a rather detailed overview on how the perspectives are interconnected and how the people's perspectives represent a variety of views that have been presented in theoretical literature and other research.

First research question aimed to explore the ways in which people define authenticity, especially focusing on the context of one's multiplicity. Three main directions were suggested – one being unique or original, one saying everything one thinks, and one showing all facets of oneself. The latter perspective implies communicating one's multiplicity as a prerequisite of being authentic (opposed to disclosing just some selected aspects of the self), while the first two categories have no connection to one's multiplicity.

The second question focused on how people perceive their own authenticity. The answers led to think that the various definitions of authenticity impacted one's evaluation of his/her authenticity. Altogether, it can be said that people saw themselves as rather authentic (mostly implying that there is room for improvement), however, this question led to another question – whether adjusting to other people in communication does not make one inauthentic. Here, the results implied that adjustment to the communication partner is mostly seen as no opposite to authenticity.

The third research question resulted in the conclusion that often social media is seen as an obstacle to one's authenticity in communication. Authentic expression of one's multiplicity seemed to be one of the dimensions of authenticity identified by interviewees, however, it had less significance in the context of social media. Even though many authors have been positive about the potential of social media to integrate the separate parts of one's self (Wandel & Beavers, 2010; Miller, 2011, Hodkinson, 2017, Brekhus, 2020), the research showed that social media rather challenge one's capacity to present the "essence" of self. At the same time, social media may also offer more potential for authenticity in case it is understood as saying everything that one thinks.

Different attitudes towards authenticity in the context of various social media platforms formed additional interesting results, which have a potential to be researched and analyzed further.

12. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Although there is a lot of research pursued to analyze authenticity and there are many scales and inventories offered that test the theoretical concepts of authenticity that are linked to aspects of multiplicity, especially in the field of psychology, nevertheless, there is lack of empirical investigation regarding authenticity, multiplicity,

and social media. For this reason, this article provided a crucial insight into the topic, discovering the multitude of contradictions between the perspectives and its consequences.

The advantage of qualitative methods and phenomenological approach lies in the ability to represent the tiniest nuances in the understandings, as well as to see the process of interpretation and meaning assignment behind them. Thus, in this context, it allowed not only to explore the various definitions regarding authenticity in the era of social media, but also the way how the interpretation of authenticity further impacts the way in which people reflect about their own authenticity and multiplicity.

However, having that done, use of quantitative methods would be valuable. It is not to say that data gathered by qualitative methods always need a generalizable expansion by quantitative methods, but, in this case, it would allow testing how reliable all the perspectives are to a larger sample and make the perspectives comparable, which is less plausible at the moment due to the very diverse understandings.

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