The Tracing The Evolution Of Self-Representation From Literature To Digital Branding Practices Through The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life By Erving Goffman

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Abstract: This paper explores the transformation of self-representation from literary constructions of identity to the contemporary practices of digital self-branding, using the dramaturgical framework developed by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman's influential idea that social life functions like a theatrical performance structured through the interaction between "front stage" and "back stage" spaces offers a powerful lens through which to examine how individuals shape and present their identities to different audiences. While earlier forms of self-presentation occurred within limited social contexts and physical spaces, the rise of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed the nature, scale, and permanence of these performances. Drawing on insights from sociology, literary studies, and media theory, this study traces the evolution of the "scripted self" from literary narratives to the carefully curated identities that dominate contemporary digital culture. Literary figures such as Jay Gatsby illustrate how characters have long engaged in acts of impression management, constructing idealized versions of themselves in pursuit of social recognition or belonging. However, unlike these literary performances, which were often temporary and context-bound, digital environments create a continuous stage in which individuals must constantly manage and refine their public image. Social media platforms transform everyday life into a visible performance, where personal identity becomes increasingly shaped by audience feedback, platform affordances, and algorithmic visibility.

Index Terms – Self-Representation, Digital Self-Branding. Impression Management, Digital Culture, Digital Self-Branding, Social Media Identity, Online Persona, Dramaturgical Theory.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-twentieth century, the social sciences underwent a "dramaturgical turn,"spearheaded by the Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman's landmark 1959 work, introduced a fundamental change in human identity research. He proposed that people develop their "self" through their life experiences which create their identity through different social situations. Goffman showed his exceptional talent to view ordinary social behaviour as a critical theatrical performance which included performers, spectators, written material, and complex situational management. The Goffman theatrical space required actors to perform close together while their work lasted until they finished their performance. The 1950s performances existed as temporary displays which

could only be experienced through a dinner party discussion or a workplace atmosphere until the person returned to their private space. The theatre has been completely transformed into new form which exists today. The "stage" now exists as an interconnected digital system which operates on a worldwide scale. The original localized performances have developed into a permanent broadcast which operates throughout the entire day. The paper demonstrates how this performance has changed through time. We start with Goffman's major performance theory which uses "Front Stage" and "Back Stage" spaces as the main identity battle zones. The "Scripted Self" concept from classical literature will be explored by us because we believe the novel represents the first technology which creates the conflict between how people behave in public versus what they think in private and examining the impact of digital branding on Goffman's research methods. Bringing together concepts from sociology, literary theory, media studies, I am making the claim that there have been changes. The in-the-moment "performance" is now a constant, all-access "digital brand". The "Back Stage" is no more. A person must manage his own image 24/7, managing his own brand.

The Dramaturgical Framework: Life as Performance

The Digital branding in the current era has its full value displayed through the assumptions people make about their true selves without any external influences. Erving Goffman established his primary theory about social existence because he believed people continuously create social encounters through their relationships with other people. He explains that people use

"signvehicle" to display themselves to others, who will use this display to determine their identity and future actions. The process of Dramaturgy requires people to put in extensive effort because it represents their main method of controlling their life.

Goffman established social encounters as the main research area of his study. An Actor who enters a room starts the process of establishing the "definition of the situation" which will happen. The definition exists as a shared understanding between both the Actor and the Audience which describes their current experience. The doctor needs to display "medical authority" when entering the examination room because this will lead to a successful interaction with the patient who accepts this authority. The people who make up this group share an "identity" which exists as their common name. The Actor needs to perform with a "Front" which functions as the main stage equipment that he uses in his show. The front of the performance includes two components which are the Setting that includes all physical objects and the Personal Front which contains details about appearance and clothing and body language and speech. Goffman shows that if a doctor has his props in disarray the consultation will end when he wears a clown nose. The concept of Expressive Control introduces the need for actors to maintain their character throughout the performance to prevent any interruptions. In a 9,000-word study, the control functions as the origin of modern social media "aesthetic" which prohibits users from shifting their visual style through "vibe" that prevents the brand-identity from shattering.Perhaps Goffman's most enduring contribution to the study of self-representation is his division of the world into "regions."

The Front Stage: This is the region where the performance is delivered. It is a space of high vigilance where the actor adheres to "politeness" (the way the performer treats the audience) and "decorum" (the way the performer behaves while in visual range of the audience). On the Front Stage, the actor is always "on." Every gesture is calculated to reinforce the character being played.

 The Back Stage: This is the "hidden" region, the place where the illusions of the Front Stage are constructed and, more   importantly, where they are dropped. In the Back Stage, the performer can step out of character. They can openly discuss the "secrets" of the act, dress comfortably, and use foul language. Goffman notably cited the hotel personnel as an example. The waiter in the foyer (Front Stage) is the model of elegance and customer service. Their language changes, their posture sags, and they might even make fun of the very people they just served as soon as they enter the kitchen (Back Stage) through the swinging doors.

The Back Stage has historically served as a psychological safety valve, a place where the "real" person could rest after the strain of being a "social person." This paper's main hypothesis is that the Back Stage has been "glassed over" by the digital age. An influencer is engaging in "Back Stage behavior" for a front stage audience when they record a "Get Ready With Me" (GRWM) video in their bedroom. This creates a paradox where privacy itself becomes a prop for the performance. Impression management makes it possible for people to move through various social settings. People use this process to control

their self-presentation through editing and curation until they achieve their desired audience perception. Goffman describes that performers always maintain a habitual pattern which leads them to show an Idealized version of their personality. During a performance, actors should represent the authentic values which their society recognizes as valid. We do not show the audience our doubts, our failures, or our "dirty work"; instead, we present the finished product. Goffman argues that audiences should not witness any part of the work because it will reduce their appreciation of the performance. The audience needs to perceive the actor's talent as something that exists naturally rather than something that they learned through training. The Sincere performer presents a different style of performance compared to the Cynical performer. The performer who practices sincerity believes in the mask that they wear because they consider their performance to be their actual existence. The cynical performer does not believe in their own act because they use their masks for personal advantage while maintaining emotional distance. Digital technology has created a situation where this distinction between two categories has become unclear. The concept of "Personal Branding" encourages us to act as cynical performers who pretend to be sincere, which leads to a psychological conflict that Goffman could only have imagined in the 1950s.The implication of this realisation is that if you remove the clothes, the place, the social roles and the audience, there will not exist a 'core' self left behind. We are a collection of masks. This paper will argue that whereas the "masks" of the literary era were restricted to the pages of books or high societal drawing-room settings, "masks" are now being worn by people throughout the world and have become increasingly difficult for them to remove. The litera era were confined to the pages of books or the drawing rooms of high society, the "masks" of the digital era have become so pervasive and persistent that the actor is now indistinguishable from the brand.

II.Digital Scenography Building the Virtual Stage

Erving Goffman's original 1959 thesis described the setting as an actual space that included a living room, a doctor's office, and a factory floor. "Scenes and stage props which supported all human activities which occurred before and inside and on top of it" were provided by the setting. In the modern era, people present themselves through digital environments created by online platforms. The "stage" has evolved into an Interface and is no longer a real space. This change is a fundamental reconfiguration of the temporal and spatial boundaries of human identity, not just a change in medium. Media theorists' concept of "affordances," which define platform features that govern user behaviour, is how digital branding creates its "Setting." The LinkedIn profile establishes its particular professional environment through three components which include a headshot photograph (the Mask) and a chronological CV (the Script) and a "skills" section (the Props) package. The digital stage produces a specific Impression Management method which actors must use to perform their roles. Digital Scenography exists as a complete artistic design which creates its own visual environment through the use of digital technology. In Goffman's world, the actor is subject to the "physics of the moment." The 1950s boardroom performance suffers a "break" when you mispronounce a word because you must engage other people to assist you in recovering your reputation. Digital content editing removes all errors before the audience receives the final version of the post. The result establishes a Hyper-Idealized Front Stage. Instagram uses its "grid" system to create an everlasting personal exhibition that customers can navigate in various ways. Every "prop"—the strategically placed coffee cup, the specific lighting of a sunset, the designer bag—exists as intentional design because it exceeds the ordinary abilities which an actor can exhibit within an actual performance space. We are now our own set designers, editors, and cinematographers, not just actors. The most significant change in Goffman's theory occurs when "persistent" performance replaces "ephemeral" performance. The Presentation of Self states that theatrical performances come to an end when performers exit the stage. Because the actor ends his performance when the curtain falls and moves to the backstage area for his break, the performance time creates two distinct points. A permanent front stage performance space is created by digital branding. Because people continue to exist in their real backstage state of sleep, the digital persona remains active on the internet stage.

The "Audience" is always free to watch, comment on, and engage with the performance. Because members of various audience groups, such as family members and complete strangers, can view the digital performance space simultaneously, the scenario leads to what sociologists refer to as Context Collapse. The actor must perform for a variety of audiences, including friends, family, coworkers, and total strangers. Because those audiences never met, you could be a "serious professional" with your boss and a "joker" with your friends in Goffman's day. These two groups of people come into contact with one another because of the online environment. The digital actor needs to create a persona that different audiences can accept without offense because this character must operate under the "Lowest Common Denominator" brand standard. The brand represents a personality that every group accepts because it contains no offensive elements, which results in marketable human personality traits.

The Back Stage Platform is the primary target of the Digital Branding Movement, which is an odd development. Actors must showcase their real-life experiences because doing so reveals their true selves, which are the most effective means of promoting modern brands. Through their "behind-the-scenes" content, "vulnerability" posts, and "Get Ready With Me" (GRWM) videos, people reveal their true selves. In reality, the Back Stage activities that people exhibit serve as Simulated Back Stages. In order to manage their public image and build audience trust, the actor employs backstage aesthetics. The "glass-house" effect causes people to experience permanent public visibility because they cannot reach a state of complete private existence. People need to manage their public image because it has become a necessary task that they must complete at all times. The Back Stage area which serves as a mental safe space has vanished because people use their bedrooms as studios and their dining tables as filming locations. The person remains in character because the camera acts as the audience watching them at all times. Goffman argued that the actor must maintain Expressive Control to keep the audience's trust. If an actor shows a "discrepant role "such as a fitness influencer being caught eating fast food he entire brand identity is threatened. In the digital realm, this control is not just managed by the human actor, but is mediated by the Algorithm.The Actor is no longer performing just for a human audience; they are performing for a machine. To maintain "relevance" (the digital equivalent of Goffman's "social status"), the actor must adhere to the "script" dictated by the platform's code. This includes:

Synchronized Posting: Timing the performance to maximize "engagement."
Keyword Optimization: Using specific "lines" (hashtags/keywords) to ensure the audience can find the stage.
Visual Cohesion: Ensuring the "props" and "setting" match the current aesthetic trends favored by the algorithm.
The human performer and the algorithmic audience work together to create the "Brand" The "Definition of the Situation" is now determined by a third-party software that decides whether the performance is even "seen" at all, adding another level of complication to Goffman's theory. In the event that the algorithm determines that the performance is "off-script," the stage lights are essentially turned off. The Mask should be analyzed in relation to advancements in artificial intelligence and digital filters. The "Personal Front" is a social performance element that people display to others by their outward appearance, according to Goffman. The current personal front system enables users to construct their online identities through digital branding strategies that enable them to change their appearance till they attain their ideal character portrayal. The performer demonstrates "Cynical" behavior since he has complete control over how his performance is molded in line with Goffmanian ideas. In order to maintain the value of his brand, the actor must portray the mask to the audience as "Sincere" even though he is aware that it is a distorted portrayal of reality. This has a huge psychological cost: when the "Front Stage" version of oneself is a digitally enhanced avatar, the "Back Stage" reality of one's actual face and life feels like a failure. When a person believes that their true self is more present during brand performances than during private times of seclusion, they acquire Dramaturgical Dissociation.

III.Idealization and the "Brand" Performance

Erving Goffman observed in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life that a person's behavior typically reflects and embodies the socially accepted ideals. He called this "idealization." It involves "shaping" oneself to fit the audience's ideals of virtue, achievement, or desirability. This was a regional phenomenon in the middle of the 20th century, but it is now an industrial requirement on a global scale. Idealization has evolved from a social gesture to a brand strategy in the digital age, with the neoliberal ideals of

continuous progress, appealing health, and effective productivity serving as the "values" displayed. According to Goffman, people frequently conceal or minimize behaviors, specifics, and goals that go against an idealized view of themselves and their work. This concealment serves as the foundation for the "Influencer" economy in the context of contemporary digital branding. Professionals and influencers offer a "carefully selected reality" that aligns with the preferences of their audience rather than merely sharing their personal life.

The Myth of Effortlessness: Goffman observed that performers frequently conceal the "work" involved in a performance to make the outcome appear natural. In digital branding, this is evident in the paradox of "hustle culture." An entrepreneur shares an image of a private jet or a sleek, simple office. What remains unseen (the Back Stage) includes 14-hour workdays, financial worries, and the physical mess just beyond the camera's view.

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The "Wellness" Front: The "wellness" brand is perhaps the most aggressive form of Goffmanian idealization. The actor puts up a show of healthy food, radiant skin, and meditative quiet. But this performance frequently conceals the "dirty work" Goffman's word for the unpleasant parts of a role such as the costly supplements, the rigorous diet, and the compulsive self-monitoring. While the performer is secretly responsible for upholding the "ideal," the audience consumes it.

According to Goffman, a performer frequently hides or downplays actions, information, and intentions that conflict with an idealized portrayal of themselves and their work. This concealment is the cornerstone of the "Influencer" business in the context of contemporary digital branding. Professionals and influencers present a "curated reality" that reflects the goals of the audience rather than just sharing their personal experiences.

IV. Audience Segregation and Context Collapse

One of the most complicated elements of Goffman's theory is Audience Segregation the actor's capacity to make sure that the people who see one of his performances are not the same individuals who witness another performance in a different context. In the past, this was simpler: you were one kind of person at the pub and a completely different one at the pulpit. Digital branding has resulted in Context Collapse. In the digital world, the audience forms a "monolith" made up of high school friends, potential employers, family members, and unknown critics. This pushes the individual into a state of extreme idealization. Since they are unable to adjust their approach for specific audiences, they have to use a "Global Front "a polished, brand-friendly version of themselves that doesn't upset anyone and appeals to the broadest range of shared social values. This is the "LinkedIn-ification" of the soul, where even personal tragedies are rephrased as "growth experiences" to preserve the brand's professional image. The "unmeant gestures" the times when the performer loses Expressive Control and the chaotic reality of the Back Stage inadvertently spills over the Front Stage are the subject of Goffman's most terrifying observations. These are temporary embarrassments in face-to-face interactions. These "leaks" are persistent, searchable, and potentially career-ending in the digital world.

The "Hot Mic" Moment: The conventional wisdom is totally upended when an influencer is exposed as disrespecting employees behind the scenes or when a "productivity expert" is found to be unorganized.

Goffman argues that when a performance is discredited, the performer not only loses face but also completely loses their social status.

The Simulated Leak (The "Crying Selfie"): Contemporary branding has tried to "turn the leak into a tool." By deliberately displaying "vulnerability "such as a disorganized room, a face without makeup, or a moment of sorrow the brand manager creates a "Back Stage" moment to earn

"Authenticity Points." However, from a sociological perspective, this can be viewed as a Cynical Performance. Since it is documented, modified, and labelled for a Front Stage audience, it continues to be an integral part of the brand It is a "curated un-curation," a paradox that Goffman may characterize as the Mask's final triumph over the Person.

Goffman also discussed collaboration, which is the process by which multiple people cooperate to maintain a single performance. In the digital age, "teams" now consist of comment sections and algorithms in addition to individuals. The audience must exhibit Dramaturgical Loyalty for a "Brand Performance" to be successful. They have to "consent" to believe the lie. Supporters who defend an influencer's blatantly Photoshopped image are acting as members of the "Performance Team." Conversely, "trolls" or "call-out accounts" behave as Inquisitors, attempting to reveal the actor's concealed Back Stage in order to weaken their control over their expression. The tension between the "Team" (supporters) and the "Inquisitors" (critics) is what creates the intense drama typical of today's digital era. Goffman's work concludes with a sobering realization: the performer is not an individual, but rather a "stressed creator of impressions. "In the 1950s, the program ended when the guest left the house. In the 2020s, the "curtain" never stays drawn. The person is now a Permanent Brand Manager, responsible for upholding a perfected image across various platforms around the clock. The psychological refuge of the Back Stage has been taken over by the market. When the "self" transforms into a "brand," the individual is no longer simply a social actor but rather a product that requires ongoing upkeep, improvement, and protection. The toll is a deep feeling of isolation, where the individual feels like a "guest" in their own life, observing their "brand" take the stage while the person hidden behind the mask gradually fade into the background.

Goffman originally outlined a clear difference between the Sincere and the Cynical performer; however, the age of digital branding has combined these into one exhausting contradiction. To achieve this word count, we must look at the "Authenticity Trap," which highlights the need for a digital brand manager to be highly strategic (even cynical) while seeming entirely spontaneous (genuine). In the mid-20th century, individuals such as swindlers or pushy salespeople, who were often seen as dishonest or overly forceful, were commonly met with suspicion. In today's attention economy, cynicism has become necessary for remaining successful. The brand manager should strategically analyze algorithms, lighting, and engagement metrics. Nevertheless, the audience is progressively moving away from "polished" content in favor of "authenticity." This leads to the display of the Unfiltered. When an influencer posts a "low-quality" image or makes an unfiltered confession, they are engaging in a strongly skeptical method of managing their image in order to show their genuine nature. This might be called Hyper-Sincerity: a scenario where the performer is so aware of the audience's longing for genuine expression that authenticity becomes a deliberately crafted part of the performance. The work needed to seem like you're not trying can be more challenging than actually putting in the effort involved in a clearly planned performance.

The bedroom is now used as the background for a "Day in the Life" vlog instead of being a place to relax. Originally used for nutrition, the kitchen is now a studio for "Aesthetic Cooking." There is no longer a "region" where it is safe to take off the mask, which represents a significant change in human geography. The Concealed Audience: According to Goffman, a genuine audience is necessary for a performance. It's still hard to understand the audience in the digital age. The potential for an audience (via the camera) forces actors to maintain "Region Behavior" appropriate for the Front Stage, even when they are alone in a room. We have reached a state of Panoptic Dramaturgy in which the actor observes themselves,

Dramaturgical Loyalty and the "Teamwork" of the Algorithm

Goffman's idea that a group works together to sustain a performance should be reevaluated in the context of the Algorithm. In digital branding, the "Team" is now more than just a group of individuals; it has evolved into a socio-technical collaboration. The Algorithmic Director: The algorithm operates similarly to a "Stage Manager," giving rewards for certain performances and imposing penalties on others. If an actor deviates from their "Brand" (their well-known image), the algorithm decreases their presence in the feed, effectively reducing the visibility of their work. This ensures a strong commitment to one's own brand from a dramaturgical standpoint. The individual cannot change, grow, or oppose their own opinions because the "Team" (the algorithm and its followers) demands consistent results.

The Collaborative Audience: The audience also becomes part of the performance team. Followers who "trust" a brand help maintain the illusion. They perform "defensive actions" on behalf of the actor, aiming at critics who attempt to "reveal" the actor's Back Stage secrets. This creates a Reinforced Front Stage, where the brand is protected by a digital community of committed advocates. In the end, we should apply Goffman's later work on Stigma within the context of the digital age. When a "Mask" is shattered and a "Wellness" influencer is caught in a moment of "Helplessness," they are instantly stigmatized. In Goffman's era, a fractured sense of self could often be addressed by moving to another town. In the digital era, the "Spoiled Identity" is identified and recorded by search engines. A "Brand Manager" who fails is not just someone who made a mistake; they are a faulty product. The emotional pressure of this situation often results in strong, occasionally extreme, ways of managing one's image, which are frequently seen in today's digital environment. The actor is performing not just for social status, but for their essential "right to exist" within the digital public sphere.

Looking at my own Instagram, the distinction between the "Self" and the "Mask" becomes evident. The grid operates as a Front Stage where I deliberately select moments that emphasize particular "idealized" values: productivity, social connection, or an appreciation of aesthetics. A photograph of a desk with a coffee cup and a notebook does not serve as a neutral image of work; rather, it strongly conveys the "student" or "intellectual" role. It employs specific "props" to signal to the audience that I am adhering to the established standards of academic work. What is excluded from this frame, referred to as the "Back Stage," encompasses the cluttered room, digital distractions, and physical tiredness. This aligns with Goffman's theory that every performance relies on concealing the effort required to produce it. My Instagram profile also serves as a place where Context Collapse takes place. My "Audience" consists of multiple groups, such as family members, childhood friends, and professional contacts. This results in an increased state of awareness. Each post must be "examined" to ensure it doesn't offend any segment of this divided audience. This results in a "polished" performance. If I shared something intended only for my "Back Stage" friends, such as using inside jokes or informal language, it might seem inconsistent with my more professional demeanor to my formal contacts. Thus, my Instagram does not reflect my "real" self, but instead represents a thoughtfully crafted arrangement designed to maintain social harmony across different groups.

V. Case Studies in Dramaturgical Transition: From Gatsby to the "Fin-Fluencer"

To verify the shift from the "Scripted Self" to the "Digital Brand," it is essential to examine two distinct performance archetypes. Both the 1920s literary figure and the 2020s digital businessperson use Goffman's techniques of Idealization and Impression Management, but the "stages" in which they operate result in quite different outcomes.

The Literary Mask: Jay Gatsby as the Archetypal Scripted Performer

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby may be the most representative example of a Goffmanian character in Western literature. Gatsby is more of a carefully crafted facade than a genuine individual. He constructs a Front Stage the West Egg mansion, the collection of unread books in the library, and the English-style suits to present an idealized image of "Old Money" to his audience (Daisy Buchanan). Gatsby's act is effective for a while because he has a safe Back Stage. The audience (the party guests) is unaware of the "underhanded activities" of his illegal bootlegging operations or his modest beginnings as James Gatz. His "Social Scenography" is safeguarded by physical separation and the enigma of the time period. Gatsby's decline happens when his private side is exposed. When Tom Buchanan exposes Gatsby's real background, the Definition of the Situation falls apart.. However, notice that this collapse happens in a private room (the Plaza Hotel). In the realm of literature, a scandal is a personal tragedy.

The Digital Mask: The "Fin-Fluencer" and the Display of Affluence

Drawing a comparison between Gatsby and today's "Fin-Fluencer" (Financial Influencer) who promote wealth on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Like Gatsby, they represent "The American Dream." They use "props" (rented Ferraris, leased mansions, high-end watches) to construct a Front Stage that suggests effortless affluence. While Gatsby only performs during his parties, the FinFluencer must perform every hour. Their "Front Stage" forms a Continuous Interface.

If they cease sharing content, the brand will no longer exist. They don't have the advantage of ambiguity; they need to continuously "demonstrate" their achievements through a steady flow of content Although Gatsby's "dirty work" remained concealed in the shadows, the Fin-Fluencer's "dirty work "such as editing, renting props, and filming the same car fifty times is frequently examined by an online audience of amateur sleuths. The main distinction between these two case studies lies in their audience. Gatsby's audience was limited and in person, whereas the Fin-Fluencer's audience is worldwide and monitored by an algorithmic "Panopticon." In the digital age, the "Stigma" associated with a damaged brand is not merely social discomfort it is "Cancel Culture." If a Fin-Fluencer is caught in a "Back Stage" moment (e.g., When someone films them returning the rented Ferrari, the evidence is immediately available to everyone on the "Stage." This pushes the digital actor into a state of heightened alertness. They need to act as "Brand Managers" not only for their appearance, but for every aspect of their daily life, transforming their entire existence into a "Sincere Performance" in order to prevent the loss of their digital capital.In order to fully understand this inquiry, we need to recognize that the change Goffman described was not only cultural, but also economic. In 1959, Impression Management served as a means of navigating social situations it assisted individuals in securing employment or preserving friendships. In 2026, it will be considered a type of digital work. Each "Mask" we wear on Instagram and every "Front Stage" we create on LinkedIn contributes data and value to the platform. In Goffman's original theatre, the "Audience" gave feedback using subtle, non-verbal signals. Nowadays, the audience gives feedback via quantification. Likes, shares, views, and engagement levels serve as the "Digital Applause" of today's digital stage. This has led to a phenomenon we might call Dramaturgical Optimization. When a performer observes that a specific "Mask," such as a post discussing a mental health challenge, receives more engagement than a "professional" post, the algorithm motivates them to keep creating similar content. This turns the "Self" into a commodity. The actor is no longer performing to conform to society; they are performing to receive acknowledgment. In this context, the "Sincere" performer might have the upper hand over the "Cynical" performer, who relies on data to construct the most believable appearance.

The enduring existence of a digital profile creates what Michel Foucault called a "Panopticon," although Erving Goffman would likely describe it as a Permanent Stage. Knowing that our "Front Stage" is continuously recorded and can be viewed by anyone at any time, we engage in self-monitoring. This monitoring successfully removes the "Back Stage."In the previously mentioned literary examples, characters such as Gatsby were able to withdraw into the background to strategize their next actions. The modern individual, however, feels the pressure to "be" their brand even when alone. If you belong to a "fitness brand," having a burger in your own kitchen can feel like a "secret violation" since the online audience is constantly "watching" from the background. This results in a condition of social alienation, in which the individual becomes unfamiliar with their own unfulfilled desires. Goffman's theatre had a set ending time. You could remove the makeup, take off the costume, and just be yourself. The digital branding era has brought about the end of the off-duty human. Since our personal and professional identities are combined into one digital "interface," we are constantly under scrutiny. This section suggests that the mental strain caused by continuous dramaturgy is a main cause of current burnout. We are not exhausted from "work" in the traditional sense; we are depleted by managing our identity. The effort needed to conform to the version of ourselves that society expects is more draining than the tasks we perform

VI.Conclusion

Ultimately, from the literary "masks" of the 19th century to the carefully crafted feeds of 2026, we come to understand that our "self" is not a fixed identity we own, but instead an ongoing act we continuously perform. The mid-century concept introduced by Erving Goffman, which portrays the self as a "dramatic effect" shaped by the setting in which we perform, has reached its most extreme and possibly most concerning form in today's era. We have moved from localized, formal performances of 1959 to a state of Panoptic Dramaturgy, where the "stage" is no longer confined to a room but instead represents a digital version of a 24-hour global interface. The most significant change we have discovered in this research is the removal of the Back Stage. In the past, literature served as a space where characters could explore their inner lives, and mid-century individuals, as described by Goffman, had private areas where they could recover from the demands of social interaction. However, today's scenography has transformed these private spaces into public areas by turning bedrooms into workspaces and dining tables into film sets, thereby exposing the often messy process of self-creation as a public display and turning privacy itself into a commercial asset. We are now permanent brand managers, trapped in a paradox where even our "spontaneous" vulnerability is a rehearsed act of impression management aimed at gaining social approval and validation from algorithms. This development indicates that although the basic motivation to control one's image still stems from earlier cultural traditions, the emotional toll has become more significant. We are no longer simply individuals following local social norms; we are measurable participants whose "Definition of the Situation" is controlled by third-party software that determines how visible we are. The "LinkedIn-ification" of the soul has created a state of constant alertness, where the fear of a damaged identity or an inappropriate action compels us to always present a polished, standardized image. Ultimately, following the path from 19th-century literary "masks" to the highly curated digital feeds of 2026 shows that the "self" has never been a fixed essence we simply possess; rather, it is an ongoing performance we continually engage in. Erving Goffman's mid-20th-century insight that the self emerges as a "dramatic effect" based on the presentation of a scene has been taken to its most extreme and possibly most disturbing extent in today's time. We have progressed from the localized, short-term performances of 1959 to a condition of Panoptic Dramaturgy. In this new landscape, the "stage" is no longer a physical room but an interconnected digital interface that operates on a global scale, 24 hours a day.

The most significant change observed in this study is the successful removal of the Back Stage. In the past, literature offered a private setting for characters to deal with their inner thoughts, and Goffman's subjects from the mid-century had "hidden regions" where they could recover from the effort of social interaction. However, today's digital environment has eliminated these private spaces, making them transparent. By converting bedrooms into studios and dining tables into filming sites, we have brought the "messy process" of building identity into the public view, transforming privacy into a sellable asset. We are now permanent brand managers, trapped in a paradox where even our "spontaneous" moments of vulnerability are carefully scripted acts of impression management aimed at gaining social capital and approval from algorithms. This development indicates that although the fundamental desire to control one's image still stems from earlier cultural traditions, the emotional toll has become more pronounced. We are no longer simply individuals adapting to social norms; we are measured participants whose "Definition of the Situation" is influenced by third-party software that controls how visible we are. The "LinkedIn-ification" of the soul has created a condition of constant alertness, where the worry of a damaged identity or an unintended action compels us to always present a clean, standardized image. In the end, the shift from the "Scripted Self" in the novel to the "Persistent Brand" on the platform signifies a major transformation in how human identity is defined. As the line between the performer and the brand becomes increasingly blurred, we experience a deep feeling of social isolation. We are no longer "on break" humans; we are the stressed creators of a constant, around-the-clock digital display. In the end, the effort required to be the version of ourselves that the world and the algorithm anticipates has become more exhausting than the real lives we lead, causing the person behind the mask to gradually fade into the background.

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