

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN THE INDIA RIM

CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP IN AUSTRALIA AND INDIA

HART COHEN

UJJWAL JANA

MYRA GURNEY



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12. Narratives of the self: Comments and confessions on Facebook

Rimi Nandy

Abstract

Narratives are structured around events, which are used to tell a story. The self is perpetually being constructed through narratives of experience. This chapter focuses on the phenomenon of Facebook confession pages and how they contribute to the construction of digital identity. Drawing on insights from my project on the role of Facebook College Confession pages, the chapter examines how these platforms have transformed the way users express and shape their identities. The anonymity provided by these pages allows users to post confessions without revealing their identities, encouraging a form of virtual self-exploration. These confessions, often written by nameless authors, generate a complex and ongoing narrative of identity, shaped by the interaction of multiple voices and viewpoints. The chapter also explores the motivations behind sharing personal confessions, even when the responses may be negative, and how this contributes to the perpetual construction of the digital self. By examining the intersection of public and private spheres in these online spaces, this chapter highlights how the breaking of the public-private divide enables users to create and negotiate their identities in a digital, networked world. The narrative constructed is endless, and the post is not an end in itself. It paves the way for the generation of an endless narrative by multiple authors with

multiple viewpoints. This chapter explores the reasons behind sharing such posts on Facebook, even if the comments are negative in tone. It will refer to Anthony Giddens' concept of time-space "distanciation" (Keefer et al., 2019) to show how multiple tellers through their narratives help to build the complex networked identity of a user. The study will also analyse the role played by the breaking of the public-private divide in creating such spaces for the construction of a private self through public voices.

Keywords

Facebook; anonymous; messages; private; public; time-space; identity.

Introduction

We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity (Barlow, 2016).

Cyberspace has changed the very structure of society. Within the binary expanse of cyberspace, identity has become enormously fluid. The notion of 'identity' refers to the basic characteristics and features that help to identify a person and distinguish them from others. When a real-life identity enters cyberspace, it transforms into a digital identity. In cyberspace, one can create a new identity that might not reflect even the tiniest feature of the 'actual' identity. The introduction of a culture provided by the Internet and social media platforms transformed how we interpret and interact with time and space which, have become fluid and unstructured. The lure of cyberspace lies in this enormous power of creating an identity that need not be the true reflection of the actual person. The digital identity helps to self-select the desired characteristics to remake one's visible identity to be performed before the digital audience. Cyberspace also provides the option of choosing the audience before whom one can act as digitally disguised.

Methodology

This chapter is an outcome of a minor research project titled “Confessions in the Digital Age”. This was a part of a larger project, “Mapping Digital Humanities in India”, sponsored by the Centre for Studies in Culture and Society in Bangalore. The data collected during this project functions as a primary source. The methodology utilised in this chapter incorporates a qualitative approach focused on the exploration of Facebook College Confession Pages in India. This qualitative method is pivotal for understanding the nuanced ways in which digital platforms, specifically Facebook, mediate and transform the traditional concept of confession into a public, interactive, and anonymous format. The methodological framework involves the collection of data through the analysis of various Facebook Confession Pages, supplemented by online questionnaires and interviews with users of these pages. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the changing attitudes towards confession, the role of anonymity, and the social dynamics within these digital spaces.

In the context of Digital Humanities, qualitative methods used in tandem with quantitative data are essential to capture the complex interactions between technology and human behaviour. This often involves the interpretation of digital texts, online communities, and the use of digital platforms, requiring researchers to engage deeply with both the content and the context of digital interactions. Such methodologies are significant for our understanding of digital cultures that have become all-pervasive in the contemporary age. This approach is crucial in the context of this project, where the aim is to understand not just the content of digital confessions but also the broader social and cultural implications of these practices. It emphasises the importance of qualitative research in uncovering the ways digital technologies shape social practices, identities, and communities (O’Sullivan, 2023). By employing a qualitative methodology, this project aligns with contemporary Digital Humanities research that seeks to map the cultural and social impacts of digital media on traditional practices like confession.

The following confession pages from Facebook Confession Pages in India were critically studied. Data collection was difficult as Facebook policies do not allow scraping data. The other major issue faced while writing this chapter was the unavailability of data collected during 2013.

A few of the confession pages from this year have been removed from the Facebook platform. As a result, the data collected from these pages could not be used as they could not be cited. The dynamic nature of social media platforms also makes it difficult to study a particular trend over a long period.

Srl No.	Name	URLs
1.	IIT KGP Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/iitkgpconfession1
2.	Unofficial IIT K Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/iitkconfessions
3.	IIT Delhi Confessions V2.0	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063743602772
4.	IIT B Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/iitbConfessions
5.	IIT Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/IITConfess
6.	IIT Crush Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/iit.crush
7.	Presidency College Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068683026177
8.	IIMA Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067731219912
9.	JU Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/Jadavpur.32
10.	BESU Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/BesuConfessions
11.	UOH Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/HcuConfessions
12.	Hindu College Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069835615326
13.	JNU Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/JnuConfessions
14.	Jammu Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064825685367
15.	Indian Armed Forces Confessions	https://www.facebook.com/IndianArmedForcesConfessions

16.	Delhi Metro Confessions/ Compliments	https://www.facebook.com/ DelhiMetroConfession
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Fig. 12.1 List of Facebook confessions pages used in this study.

Digital confessions in the Information Age

The digital citizens of today's world socialise on virtual platforms using various social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Among these social networking sites, Facebook is the leading platform. Across the world, Facebook has touched the lives of millions of people. India has the second largest number of Facebook users in the world. Facebook is a place that does not have any boundaries, be it gender, age, race or country, and the advancement in networking technology has reduced the time and space gap. Physical boundaries no longer determine social interaction and friendship is no longer restricted by geographical boundaries. The very idea of sharing posts and pictures is a way of acknowledging existence. Existence of the self, of ideas, dreams, desires and fears, everything is recognised once it enters cyberspace. Facebook helps in community building, and the criteria for building a community can be varied and not restricted by the usual codes of conduct. The communities on Facebook are created around shared interests, ideologies, likes and dislikes. One such community formation is aided by the numerous confession pages flooding Facebook.

The idea of 'confession' originated among the Greeks (Hymer, 1995). According to the great Greek philosophers such as Seneca, confession was a medium for self-improvement. This act consisted of revisiting one's actions at the end of the day, to give a better understanding of a person's character. This could involve an analysis of one's behaviour and actions on one's own, or writing about it for the perusal of another person who can provide an unbiased opinion and judgement. The method and meaning of confession have undergone various degrees of change from its point of origin when confession was mainly a process of purging one's soul of any impurities. The Christian notion of confession is a mix of the Celtic rituals of penance, and the Hindu beliefs followed

by the ascetics. The religious practice of confession is a tool for purifying the soul and getting rid of the stains of the various sins performed by a confessor. But the role of 'confession' was not restricted to relieving the confessor of the burden of guilt; instead, it was also used as an agent to instil fear and enforce power mechanisms. In the words of Michel Foucault:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; It is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation (Foucault, 1978, pp. 61–62).

In the 19th century, confession took a different form. It was no longer a religious act; instead it became a scientific discourse in the hands of psychoanalysts (Taylor, 2009). In this form of confession, the process could only be completed after the interpretation of the confession given by the psychoanalyst. This was based on very different power dynamics; the entire control was in the hands of the psychoanalyst and the confessor was just an instrument.

The power dynamics reflected in the use of confession as a tool against perceived repression are furthered in the context of confession under police interrogation. In earlier ages, methods of physical torture were used to get false confessions from the accused. In the present day and age, physical torture has been substituted by psychological tactics. At times, certain people make false confessions even without any coercion. This may be due to the innate need to gain fame, acceptance and acknowledgement (Taylor, 2009).

Closely related to the coerced confessions of criminals is the culture of confession practised in China during the Cultural Revolution. In China, a form of confession called *suku* (speaking bitterness) was performed before the public. The government reached out to people from different walks of life, to narrate the hardships they faced in bygone days before

they were rescued by the Communist Party. According to Ann Anagnost, this kind of public confession was used to drive into the minds of the people the importance of a “disciplinary state” (Yu, 2009, p. 69).

The desire to confess on Facebook Confession Pages can be analysed through the lens of Michel Foucault’s ideas about the desire to confess, as outlined in his seminal work, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*. Foucault argues that the act of confession has transformed over centuries from a religious ritual into a pivotal mechanism of power within society (Foucault, 1978). This transformation is particularly evident in the context of Facebook Confession Pages, where individuals voluntarily share personal, often intimate, details about their lives in a public or semi-public digital space.

Foucault posits that confession is a technique of power that compels individuals to articulate their innermost thoughts and desires. In the digital age, this compulsion finds a new outlet on platforms like Facebook, where the act of confessing is not mediated by a priest or therapist but is broadcast to an anonymous or semi-anonymous audience. The desire to confess, in this context, is intertwined with the construction of identity and the negotiation of social relationships in digital spaces. The practice of confession in the present day and age has evolved to suit the changing times. The confession pages on Facebook typically cater to educational institutes, companies, or various other organisations with shared beliefs and ideas. Each of the confession pages on Facebook has an administrator who selects which confessions to post and which to reject. Anybody can become a member of any number of confession pages by sending a request that is either approved or denied by the administrator. The confessions are usually made using Google Forms, and then scrutinised and published for the readers’ perusal. The meaning of confession associated with Facebook has undergone an enormous change from the religious ideas that used to be related to it. Though it is still used to unburden one’s soul, it has become much more than that. On the virtual platform, the present-day confession has become the mode of creation of the self. The note of regret and repentance in confession has been replaced with a boastful and challenging tone. The digital confessors, in most cases, use the instrument of anonymity to defy and deny the rules set by the society at large.

The trend of Facebook confession pages started in Western countries and slowly found its way into the Indian subcontinent. In the modern age, according to Anthony Giddens (1995), social relations are stretched across time and space with the availability of modern technologies such as the internet. In traditional societies, interactions happened only in direct proximity. However the Internet enables interactions which transcend temporal boundaries and spaces. Social practices are no longer restricted to local society alone. With the introduction of the internet and mobile technologies, vast spaces are being brought closer together, while also being connected to the expanse of time; the distance between time and space has increased to a greater extent than in pre-modern society. Social practices are no longer restricted to local society alone. With the introduction of the internet and mobile technologies, vast spaces are being brought closer together, while also being connected to the expanse of time. The effect of this transformation can be seen in the establishment of the trend of Facebook confession pages, later followed by other anonymous messaging services. The first confession page is believed to have been started by Stanford University (Kadvany, 2020). This idea then spread like wildfire across the various schools and colleges in the United States of America. In India, the first Facebook confession page was reportedly started by Bombay IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), followed by other Institute of Information Technologies, and various colleges and universities across India. Now it is no longer restricted to educational institutions. It has taken root in various IT companies like TCS and Infosys. There are also confession pages for the Delhi Metro and Mumbai local trains, Indian Armed Forces Confessions, Jammu Confessions, 18+ Confessions and countless other such pages catering to young people.

The confession page has become an instrument to bring together like-minded people. According to one of the users, it “[b]uilds a sense of community for the students, lets us know that we aren’t alone in certain things” (see Appendix 1). In support of this idea, Dr B. R. Madhukar, a leading Bangalore psychiatrist, says:

Initially, people would write letters or make phone calls, but social media allows you to reach a much larger audience, and a lot of these young people need to tell the world that ‘they are there’. While the tendency to sensationalize is inevitable, there is also the hope that someone, somewhere, can understand, can empathise (Krishnaswami, 2013).

The topics discussed on these pages include various issues beginning from love problems, teenage problems, life problems to politics and social issues. The reasons behind the popularity of these pages is based on its ability to provide entertainment. Most users of the confession pages read it to enjoy the 'funny' content and to feel a sense of community and belonging. In the words of one of the frequent readers of the confession, he reads them,

To think deeper on certain matters, and enhance my views. To get a laugh, to learn more about the people in my community, to help them out with their problems if I can. I'm a frequent commenter and my responses range from humorous and sarcastic to longer, thoughtful responses. I also use the opportunity to spread wisdom, positivity, and empathy, whenever I can.

A bit of the notoriety I've gained IRL from being a prominent commenter never hurt either." (See Appendix 1).

The role of the administrator of the confession pages is that of a guardian as well as a keeper of this virtual social space. It is the task of the administrator to read through all the confessions submitted using Google Forms and then select the ones that go up on the page. The role of the administrator, according to the administrator of the Delhi Metro Confessions/Compliments page is: "Well as an admin. We have to make sure that we post entertaining stuff! People liked this page for some fun and here we are to provide them with entertainment." The criteria for selection, as per the administrator, are: "It should be humorous, realistic, and should touch the reader's heart!" (Anonymous, 2015b).

Many of these pages, were pulled down at different times only to resurface again. In general, administrators of the institutions played an important role in putting a stop to the confession pages. The image created in the digital space is boundless and uncontrollable. One's identity is no longer in one's hands. It is extremely fragile and can easily be broken. It is essential to "[...] project the right image, at the right time to the right audience" (Cerra & James, 2012, p. 11). In such a scenario, the fear of an institution's administration is understandable, as they do not want the name of their institution to be associated with the kind of confessions made on the confession pages. In my opinion, the institutions are worried about tarnishing their image in front of potential students. This hypothesis is supported by the experience of an alumni of IIT Kharagpur:

Yesterday I received a forwarded email from Dean, SA, cc-ed to the Director, harshly discarding the content of this page, and asking me to take immediate actions for bringing this page down. Attached to the email was a letter sent by a media person [from outside the institution] expressing her shock as how could “students malign their esteemed college’s reputation on public portals.

Considering the gravity of the issue right now, I seriously request you to take this page down immediately, to avoid any kind of disciplinary issues. Please do the needful, and let me know” (Sethi, 2017).

A few alumni of IIT Kharagpur also felt that the confession page was destroying the image of the institution:

Disappointing to say the least. I was disappointed by the admin who started such a ridiculous page knowing nothing good can come of it. Hasn’t he seen the state that the other pages—IITK Confessions, IITK Proposals—reached, the people who provided their so-called “rage” and the people who merrily liked the page and the statuses in which their fellow students were being ridiculed.

I believe that the posts were never about rage. I don’t think people had so much anger stored in them, as it showed in the posts. It was always about ridiculing the person they don’t like in a public forum. “The other person may not have affected my life, but I simply don’t like him and he/she should suffer.” This kind of attitude was not expected from IITK students and I was disappointed. But what hurt me most was that even 5th-yearites and female residents of our campus were not excluded from this madness.

I was also apprehensive about this event getting media attention. The IITK Confessions incident got published in the *Times of India* and we all know what all confessions featured in that article. And this incident would have provided just the right “masala news” to them.

And finally I was happy that the campus community reacted in a very strong way to such a lowly and derogatory act which ultimately led to the closure of the page. FAITH IN HUMANITY RESTORED¹ (Anonymous, 2013a).

A few people were of the opinion that the power provided to the students by their anonymity was excessive:

1 The quotations have been transcribed exactly as they were posted in the Facebook Confession Pages. The idiosyncratic spellings and grammar appears in the original posts and therefore have not been changed or edited in any manner.

The page was downright Freudian and in the beginning, it was an amusing microcosmic social experiment, but then it just showed what happens when a mob goes Berserk

as in it was an aggressively pushed for initiative which if done under a proper social mannerism could be healthy, but quite obviously when you have a bunch of Lemur like admin/admins, playing to the gallery was more important than supporting an initiative

i am totally fine with the idea as long as it has some level of etiquette, but the fact that finally the posts were downright nauseous goes to say maybe we weren't prepared for so much freedom (Anonymous, 2013a).

The popularity of the confession pages rose very suddenly in 2013, and quite suddenly they went out of fashion. According to the administrator of Jai Hind College Confessions:

"The age is old... the trend is over... so I receive less confessions". He further comments, "Everything has its time... it's like product life cycle... it had a great craze... reached a maturity level and now the craze is gone" (Anonymous, 2015a).

The end of this trend is further evidenced by the fact that, on most of the confession pages, there has been no activity since December 2013 or January 2014.

There are a few confession pages that are still active. Some of them have even become a tool for citizen journalism. The phenomenon of ordinary citizens reporting about events or sharing their views on particular issues has become a trend on the social media platform. Facebook being the largest social media platform offers greater potential and reach to citizen journalism.

Various social and political issues are discussed across the confession pages. For example, the Delhi Metro Confessions/Compliments page has taken up the issue of net neutrality in India. Similarly, issues related to women's emancipation has also been discussed in a few pages. For example, the following post from UoH Confession Page comments on the generally held view that women are raped due to improper clothing:

I wanted to say just a few things, first of all no women wants to expose her body wantedly and if it is the reason for rape attempts, then you can find many women at railway stations, roads, and slums exposing their body due to lack of proper clothing, why doesn't any 1 attempt a rape on them,, dear brother it's not what women expose that matters its what a men's mind is exposed to,that matters. Instead of suggesting them to

properly dress up, why don't u ask ur brothers to stay in home, instead ... Even this will solve the problem. ... By Raghav Singh ..." (Singh, 2013)

The following post from Jammu Confessions page talks about another prevalent issue faced by society at large:

#7272

F

Jammu

.

plz don't mention my name

female

hlo frnds ...mene abi tk k almost sbi post read kiye hai ..comments bi kiye hai..

aap sab se ek request hai .aaj hamare neighbor me ek or young boy ki death ho gyi due to overdose of heroine...mujhe injection smack in sab ki bahut zayda knowledge hai ..bahut tension hoti hai ...my real brother also doing this ..jb bi Ghar se late night call aati hai bas darr lg jata hai ki kahi kuch ho na gya ho...mene bahut socha ki kuch aisa kru jis se youth ko in sab cheezo se durr kru...kya kru kuch samaj ni aata mene apni life me bahut se logo ko overdose se marte dekha Hai...aap sab aisi koi ngo ya kuch bi open krne ka socho jisme hum sab involve ho ...jis se kuch to sudaar ho apni society me..plzz

Facebook translates this as:

#7272

F

Jammu

.

plz don't mention my name

female

Hello friends ... I have read almost all the posts till now. Commented as well.

I have a request to all of you. Today one more young boy died in our neighbor due to overdose of heroine... I have a lot of knowledge about injection smack. There is a lot of tension ... my real brother also doing this ... Whenever I get a late night call from home, I am afraid that something might have happened. I thought a lot to do something which can keep youth away from these things... I don't understand what to do. I have seen many people die of overdose in my life. You all think of opening a NGO or something in which we are all involved ... The one who improves our society. Please

In another comment from Delhi Metro Confessions/Compliments, a user shares their complicated relationship situation, akin to a taboo which has to be hidden or confessed anonymously:

F 18

DELHI..

its for the first time...I'm confessing something
so here it actually goes...

I'm in a relationship with a guy from past 3 years...I'm in a quiet serious relationship...so do he....but he is very much egoistic n even he is at times have a very much non caring... I dun care kind of attitude...if we aren't talking he will also wont take a charge to text or call...his stupid ego comes in between...

but he still says he loves me a lot.. and if I ever left him it will be the last one...he wont love anyone else again...I seriously don't just get this he do love me..or its just like he thinks he do but in reality its nowhere...

and even from past some months his paternal uncle (mamu) who's unmarried and not too elder to me...we started having some conversations n they increased with the time! we even talk late nights for hrs n hrs.

now I even think I'm falling for him (Anonymous, 2013c).

Foucault's exploration of confession as an interplay of power and knowledge and the inherent desire in the human psyche to confess can be traced in the above post. By articulating her feelings publicly, the confessor navigates her sense of identity and truth, engaging in a self-reflective process influenced by the anticipation of public acknowledgement or response. The act of confession, according to Foucault, also functions as a form of self-surveillance, where the individual judges herself against societal constructs. The confession highlights internal conflicts and societal expectations about loyalty, relationships, and emotional fidelity, showcasing the confessor's negotiation of personal desires against perceived norms. The Facebook Confession Page, in this case, acts as a contemporary confessional booth, where digital technologies facilitate new forms of self-expression and communal engagement with personal truths.

The following post from IITK Confessions page depicts how confession is used as a means of subverting and challenging acceptable behaviour regarding self-care and health issues. The mocking tone used in juxtaposing a global phenomenon like COVID-19 with a seemingly irresponsible act that could be damaging to one's health reiterates Foucault's concept of normalising and deviance (Taylor, 2009).

#744

Just got my first vaccine dose today. Apart from the normal symptoms of headache, fever, and body ache, I am experiencing a little tripiness. IDK if it is due to the vaccine, the paracetamol tablet or the Blenders Pride I used to swallow down MDMA.

In this post, the closing plea is most striking. It is an indirect acknowledgement of the fact that, very often, most of the confessions are made fun of and the confessor ridiculed. In a slightly humorous tone, the following post talks about the complexity arising on social media platforms due to 'friending' family members (i.e., connecting your profiles so that you can see what each other posts online), which becomes a form of surveillance.

Relationship status "Single" doesn't always mean that you are alone. Sometimes it means "family members are there in the friends list..." (Anonymous, 2014)

The Indian Armed Forces Confessions page is quite different from any other. It is informative and helps to spread respect for the army. The confessions on this page revolve around love for the army and aspirations to join the army.

#638

Hello Everyone,

More than a confession, consider this a testimonial to my love. He is going to join Air Force Academy in January first week in Flying. And trust me, its not easy picturing him like that. We have been together for 4 years now and he has become a part of me. But because THIS life is what he has chosen for himself, I'll be a part of it happily. I'll spend my days, my weeks or even months waiting for that one call of his well being. I'll wish for these five months to get over as early as possible and those 1 month vacation to actually never end. Silly me, forcing him to take transport and stay away from combat as much as possible, now i want to see him as a fighter pilot, my fighter pilot. And no matter how much these things will weaken me, i'll be a strong would be Army wife, now and forever.

To you baby- come back soon, with those wings you had always wanted. I don't understand military things much, but i understand these wings will be above everything else on this earth for you. I was, i am and i will be always proud of you. And yes, i'll miss you badly but never let you fall apart.

Lastly, i am badly waiting to be a part of this military life, so come soon and marry me please 🥺😘😘

(To Admin: Please post this, this is for him and i want him to stay strong)



(admin: we have posted though late.) 😊

(Anonymous, 2013b).

The criteria for the confessions, according to the manager of the page, are that the posts should not be boring, false, or hateful and no racism or comment against religion is allowed. The page posts photographs of deceased army personnel, and female army personnel who have achieved a lot. It gives the readers a picture of the life, dreams and aspirations of the army personnel. This presentation of the idea of patriotism has the potential to attract Indian youth to join the Indian Armed Forces.

Most people believe that these confessions are true; some believe that they are not true, yet read them for the sake of entertainment; and a few do not care whether they are true or not. In certain cases, it becomes a matter of cyberbullying. The confessor is mostly anonymous, but the people about whom the confessions are made are unable to hide their identity and protect their image.

The confessions are mostly gendered, as the number of confessions made by males about females is much more than that of women making confessions about men.

The confession pages were extremely popular between 2013 and 2014. At the time of writing they are slowly falling into disuse. Most of the confession pages have been inactive since early 2015.² This craze for confessing online anonymously seems to have run its course. An analysis of the confession pages shows that a few pages are still active or have been restarted as different versions of the existing pages. By observing the posting patterns it can be deduced that the COVID-19 period saw a resurgence of the Facebook confession pages.

Although the trend of the Facebook confession pages has slowly dissipated, it has been reframed on anonymous messaging platforms such as Stulish and Sarahah, to name a few. Sarahah was initially formed to provide positive feedback for posters. However, very often, insulting comments or body shaming appear on such messaging platforms. This platform became popular during 2017–18 when many Facebook users

2 Refer to Appendix 1.

followed the trend of sharing the Sarahah link to collect comments, both positive and negative. The right to share the comments rests in the hands of the users alone.

This trend can be explained with the help of Judith Butler's (2009) *On Performativity*. The actions of Facebook users are directly connected to their sense of themselves. Their identity is founded to a significant extent on social acceptance. The act of following the trend of sharing posts received via platforms like Sarahah is intended to gain acceptance and confirmation. Butler posits that identity is not an inherent or static quality but a product of repeated social acts. In the digital context, especially on anonymous Facebook confession pages, users construct and negotiate their identities through confessional posts.

These online spaces allow individuals to perform aspects of their identity in front of an audience, where the anonymity of the platform encourages users to confess thoughts, desires, and actions that they might not express in real life. This echoes Butler's idea that identity is continuously shaped by repeated acts performed in a social space. The confessions on Facebook, therefore, serve as performative acts where users try out different versions of the self to see how they are received and to participate in collective narratives.

For example, a user confessing their feelings about taboo topics (such as relationships or personal failures) may be performing an identity that defies societal norms. This performance aligns with Butler's argument that such acts are not purely expressive of a pre-existing self but rather, they constitute the self through the act of performance. The feedback loop on social media—likes, comments, and shares—reinforces or reshapes this digital self, much like how social norms in the physical world shape identity through recognition or rejection.

Thus, Facebook confession pages, with their anonymous and performative nature, can be seen as digital stages where identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed, embodying Butler's notion that identity is not a stable essence but something created through ongoing social interaction.

Conclusion

Whether the confession pages will be revived is still to be seen. What the pages have left behind gives a picture of the attitude and expectations of young people to and from society. Anonymity will always be useful as it helps a person to dissociate from a nasty comment being made. With their true identity hidden from the public eye, no one can be held responsible for the words they use and their consequences. Confessions have been an integral part of human life in every age, and with Facebook confessions losing their importance, this practice might take a different form. Only time can tell how it might be revived. Further research should be conducted on the subject matter and meaning of the posts using textual analysis tools and sentiment analysis tools.

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Appendix 1



Appendix 1 is available online at <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/c6e9e696>