

Individuals create a persona for themselves through a myriad of social media platforms, including blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. A persona is the mask or façade presented by an individual; a person's anticipated or evident personality. We perceive individuals on social media based on ones' followers, likes, and number of friends. We form impressions of people based on their social media traffic and popularity. However, upon examining, does this popularity and traffic last, or is short-lived and artificial? New media has changed the way we view an individual's persona due to observations we make based on their online presence.

Emily Schuman exemplifies the epitome of a successful online presence. In 2008, she created the blog, *cupcakesandcashmere.com*, which focuses on food and fashion. She has built an online persona through her website, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. As an avid reader of over four years, I have a glimpse into the world of Emily Schuman. I know about her husband, her cats, and her extended family. Emily posts pictures of herself and many other blog topics. Because of this, I have seen pictures of her home, her closet, and her favorite foods. I feel like I know Emily. By following Emily on myriad social media, I observe her every day activities and believe that I understand her personality.

New media enables individuals to get to know other people through their online presence. The way Emily Schuman presents herself on social media is put-together, smart, and elegant. Her blog incorporates her personal life. There is no separation

between her work and her normal day- to- day activities. For example, the blog will highlight a lunch outing for Emily and her friend. Readers are able to learn about the great meal she has just consumed, while also acquiring information about her friend. Through her posts, avid readers like myself, are able to see that Emily is a fun, spontaneous, and ambitious person. Every Friday Emily posts a blog listing five things that have made her happy from the week. After reading these posts every week I have a clear sense of Emily's likes and dislikes. For example, from last week's post I know that Emily is a huge fan of the Beatles and that she went to the Grammy Tribute concert. Her blog's popularity and success is due to the fact that Emily blends her personal life and her blog life. She makes sure that her blog is an extension of her day-to-day activities and her true personality. Through Emily's blog and other social media outlets, readers make judgments about her. Emily's social media exposure led to interviews on national talk shows, features in fashion magazines, and even writing her own book. She is now seen as an "expert" on food and fashion, leading to an even larger group of followers.

Emily Schuman entered the blogging world in the early years of social media, and as such gained success and national exposure. Although she started her posts for her personal enjoyment, Emily eventually made the conscious decision to pursue it as a business endeavor. Blogging is now an accepted form of sharing ideas. I admire Emily's hard work and view her as a media role-model. She inspired me to create my own blog a few years ago, and today I use blogging to communicate and stay involved at Michigan. Because Emily's blog serves as her source of income, she must maintain her social media persona.

Alternatively, the social media persona of a 15-year -old boy differs greatly from Emily Schuman’s persona. Over winter break, my friend’s brother, Nick, took a picture of Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez together and posted it to his Twitter. This picture was the first photograph in many months of the two young celebrities together, and within minutes the image and Nick’s tweet went viral. His tweet said “Gotta admit, I was kinda starstruck by @selenagomez but @justinbieber ruined the moment.” Nick received thousands of follower requests on his Twitter as well as thousands of favorites on the actual tweet. In a matter of minutes, Nick’s online personality transformed from an unknown high school freshman to a celebrity news information source. His social media persona changed in less than an hour, and he became the center of Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez lovers’ and haters’ worlds. Crazy Justin Bieber female fans tweeted Nick and threatened him because he had insulted Justin. Others who disliked Bieber commended Nick’s statement. *TMZ*, *E!*, and *People Magazine* all used the photo, which only increased Nick’s social media presence. However, the popularity of his online persona only lasted a couple days, and eventually Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez fans moved on to the next exciting post. This type of social media fame is temporary and artificial. Nick’s motives for posting the picture on twitter were not to achieve instant “fame.” He posted the picture because he wanted to show off to his friends. He had no intentions of becoming famous for the picture. Social media’s ability to broadcast the picture to the world in a matter of minutes reveals the Internet’s impact on how information is disseminated.

While Nick had no intention of creating a persona, one of my friends, Nicole, purposefully creates her persona. She is a sophomore in college, a sorority member, and

involved in many extracurricular activities. Most of her posts on social media receive over 100 “likes.” Unlike Emily Schuman or Nick, Nicole has no specific incident or experience that led her to have an inordinate number of followers and likes. It is difficult to pinpoint why or how Nicole gets all the “likes”, but because she does, Nicole tries extremely hard to maintain her online stature.

Nicole spends a lot of time preparing her posts before uploading them to social media. Sometimes we will decide on a place for dinner with the intent of taking a picture of our meal so Nicole can Instagram the photo later. Or, we will select an activity, such as taking a hike to the famous Hollywood sign in Los Angeles, and Nicole will make sure to take the “perfect” picture that will generate 100s of “likes”. Once the right picture has been taken, choosing the perfect caption, Geotag, and filter becomes the next objective. The caption has to be funny and clever, the Geotag has to reflect the cool place she was at, and the filter has to flatter the picture. Nicole does not post photos for fans. She posts for her friends and the people who constitute her followers. As a college girl, she strives to present herself as happy and having fun.

Although no one will admit it, Nicole, as well as myself and our other friends, all try to present ourselves as having an amazing time at our respective schools. Even though this is not always the case, social media enables us to post pictures that highlight our great smiles and give the impression that we are having fun, even if we are not. On my first official night at college I wanted to give the impression to my home friends that I was having the time of my life. I was one of the last of my friends to leave for school and I had already seen all of their pictures. By posting a picture of my “new” friends and me on Instagram I was creating a false persona for myself. Although the photo gave the

impression that I was happy, in fact, I was very homesick and nervous about being so far from my family. Similarly, Nicole posts pictures to subtly boast about her endeavors, outings, or sightings. She sculpts her social media persona, therefore enabling her to present whoever she wants to be. Through her photo choices on social media, Nicole creates a persona that is always happy, adventurous, and trendy.

These examples of social media personas have many things in common as well as some acute differences. Motives for each of these people differ greatly. Emily Schuman writes her blog because she loves what she writes about. As a result of doing what she loves, she has gained a large following, which has led to a strong social media presence. Emily has developed her social media status over time, and as a result, has created a stable foundation upon which she continues to grow. Conversely, Nick's social media impact was sparked when he posted the picture of Justin and Selena on twitter. Nick had no intention of becoming the center of celebrity news, but as a result of his twitter post, his social media persona exploded. After a few days, his popularity faded and his new followers moved on to the next celebrity gossip. Finally, Nicole's social media persona fits in the middle. Her followers consist of her friends and acquaintances. While strangers do not follow her, she still posts with the intention of garnering as many "likes" as possible from her followers. The motives and intentions of these three social media personas are different; however the result is the same, an abundance of followers and likes on their posts.

An individual's social media persona can influence the way we think, write, and argue. Our persona combines thought, writing, and arguments to create a portrayal of how others see us. The emergence of social media has provided the opportunity for

people to easily create a persona through Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and other sites. Through photographs and descriptions we provide evidence to support our persona of being trendy or active or adventurous people. Emily Schuman's continuous posts about fashion and food, demonstrate to her followers that she is who she portrays herself to be on her blog. Nicole's evidence of her persona is solidified through her consistent number of likes. On the other hand, Nick's argument for his online persona was artificial and short-lived. Although his online persona exploded for the week or so after he posted the picture of Selena and Justin, his presence eventually went back to what it was before he posted the picture. Just like Emily, Nick, and Nicole, we all have the ability to sculpt our online personas through social media platforms. However, for that persona to last and have an impact, it must be both engaging and genuine.