

Author	Simoy, Lina Fe
Title	DRAMATURGICAL FRAMING OF 'VA HYPING' AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A FILIPINO 'VIRTUAL ASSISTANT' PRACTITIONER
Year	2022
Program	Master of Development Communication

ABSTRACT

Goffman (1956, 1959) defined “impression management” as maintaining or managing a targeted impression or effect, which is inclusive of both protective and defensive strategies. Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective of viewing social life was originally intended to view an aspect of life that is “organized within the physical confines... to any concrete social establishment (Goffman; 1956, 1959)”. Throughout the years, multiple IM studies have already used this analytical framework in a face-to-face, [offline] social contexts (Haas & Shaffir, 1982; Zurcher, 1982; Becker & Martin, 1995; Preves & Stephenson, 2009). The evolution of studies throughout the years with the emergence of the Internet and internet-based communities, utilizing the dramaturgical view of social life from offline to online social establishments, has become richer and more interesting. The literature review highlights the value of access to the back-, front- and off- stages to deliver a well-rounded inquiry in conducting dramaturgical analysis therefore warranting autoethnography as a method of this inquiry. This study attempts to answer the research question: How is “VA Hyping” as impression management (IM) performed in social media as viewed from three perspectives: from the VA’s, from the manager’s and from the potential client’s? This study pursues Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective (1956), his social theory that our reality is a one big performance on a stage that is called ‘life’. Dramaturgy (Goffman; 1956, 1959) is used as a theoretical lens, and as a guide to storytelling and analysis in this study. This qualitative study attempts to explore ‘VA hyping’ – a term coined to describe the phenomenon of virtual assistants’ attempt of curating online presence – using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis. Autoethnography, as a method of inquiry and analysis using Goffman’s dramaturgy (1956, 1959) as analytical framework, is used in the study and the research process is described as “transpersonal knowing through spirit – witnessing (Koppensteiner, 2018).” As part of autoethnography’s method, a holistic introduction of the “self” as the participant of the study is provided, whilst highlighting the researcher’s (my) theater experience and 12-year immersion in the VA industry as an actual VA (the actor), a manager (the director), and as a potential client (the audience member). In the data collection process, the narratives became the data, the analysis, and the product itself (Wall, 2006) including all [my] voices (Lengelle, 2021): 1) as the researcher with theater experience using Goffman’s dramaturgy and fully immersed in the industry as a participant and observant, and 2) the participant telling the narratives, with an understanding and interest in the research, experience in theater, and understanding of Goffman’s dramaturgy. The results provide the narratives as told in three

dramaturgical perspectives: 1) as an actual VA – the actor, 2) as a manager – the director, and 3) as a potential client – the audience member. Each dramaturgical perspective is followed by a discussion based on the vignette/s. The study concludes with a modest suggestion that exploring social performances in three dramaturgical phases in conducting ‘dramaturgical analysis’ offers a fresh way of viewing the “performance” of the presentation of self; a modest contribution to support that autoethnography is a valuable method of qualitative inquiry to “an insider” in their specific field; and a recognition that acknowledging the researchers’ voices as the researcher and the participant helped thicken the discussion of VAs’ social media impression management.