



Self-perception and self-representation in Twitter biographies

1. Introduction

This analysis studies how young people portray themselves online, using 160-character Twitter biographies as an example. Using discourse analysis, it investigates whether students’ online self-representations differ from their own self-perceptions, and how students ‘act’ (Goffman 1959) in public online environments..

2. Research Aims

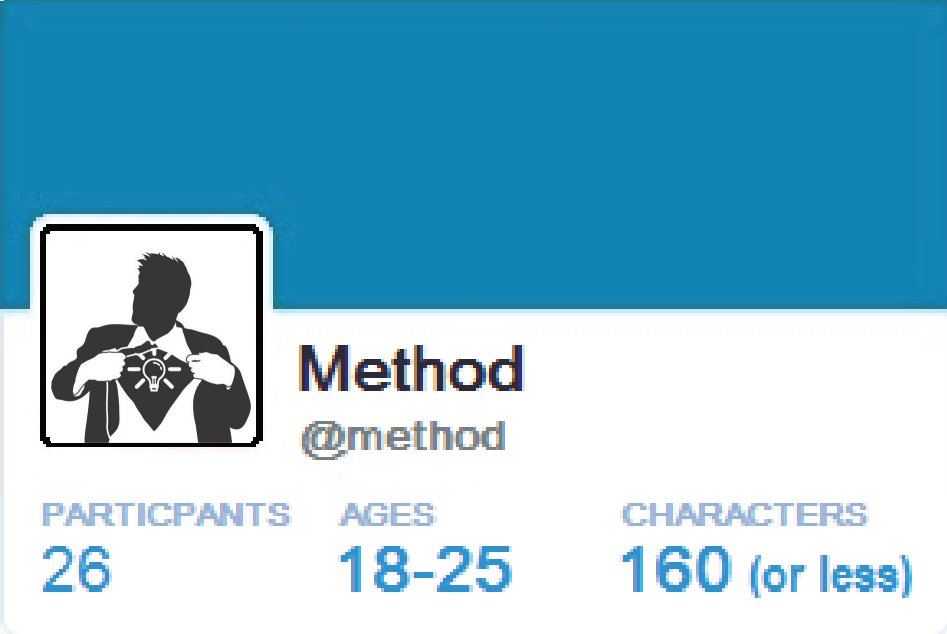
To investigate how students:

- see themselves (self-perception) and
- portray themselves in their Twitter biographies (self-representations)

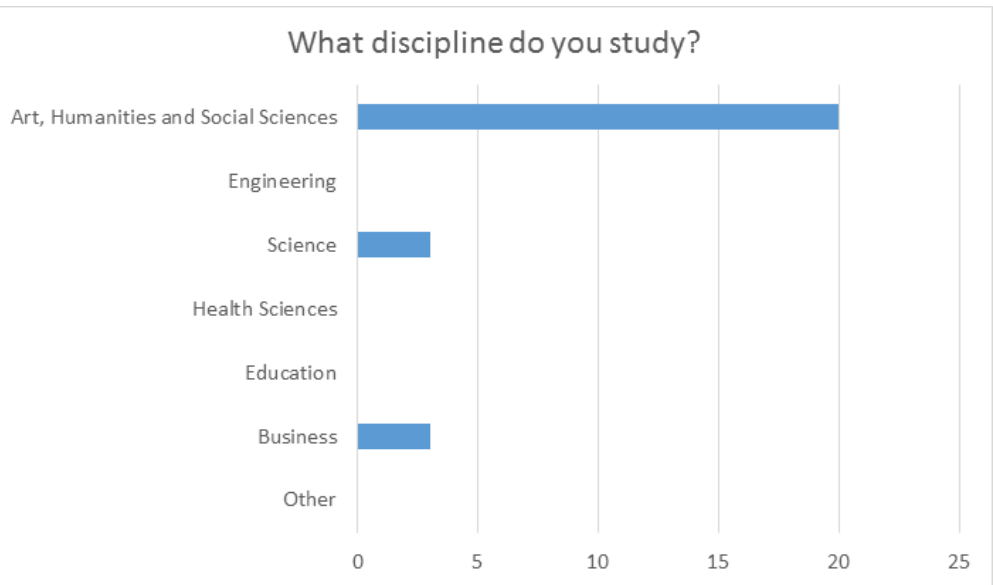
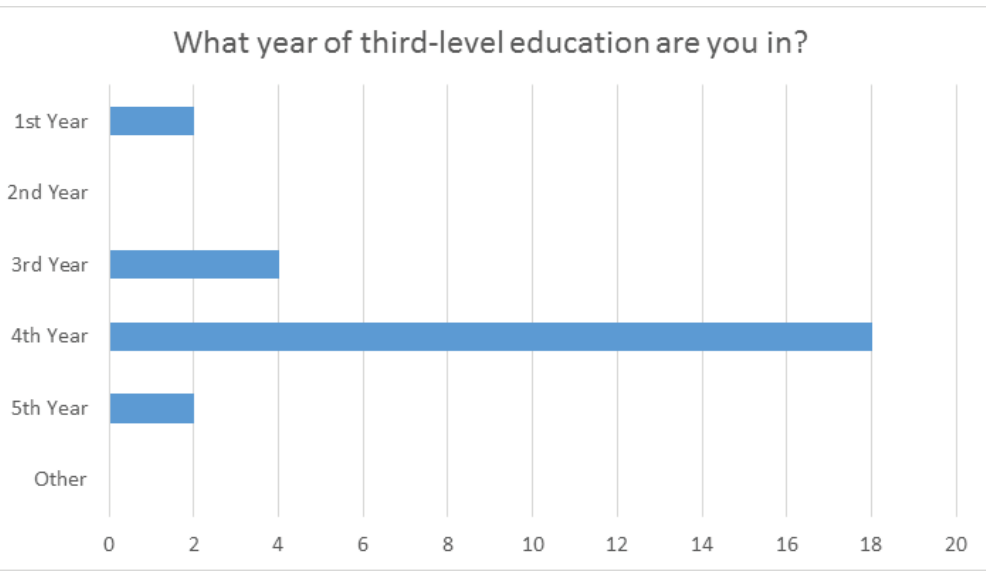
and to compare both, exploring whether there are differences in their online and offline identities.

3. Method

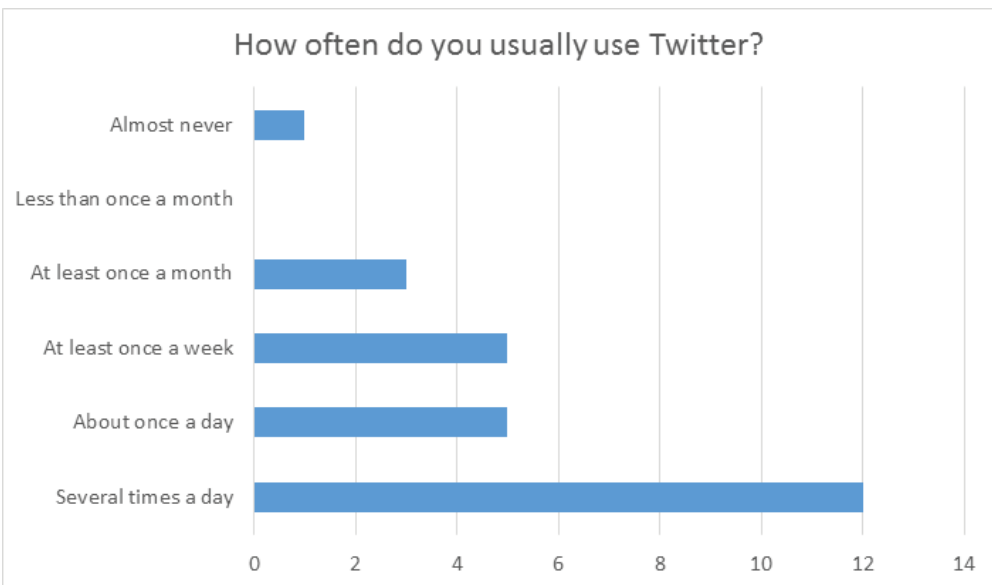
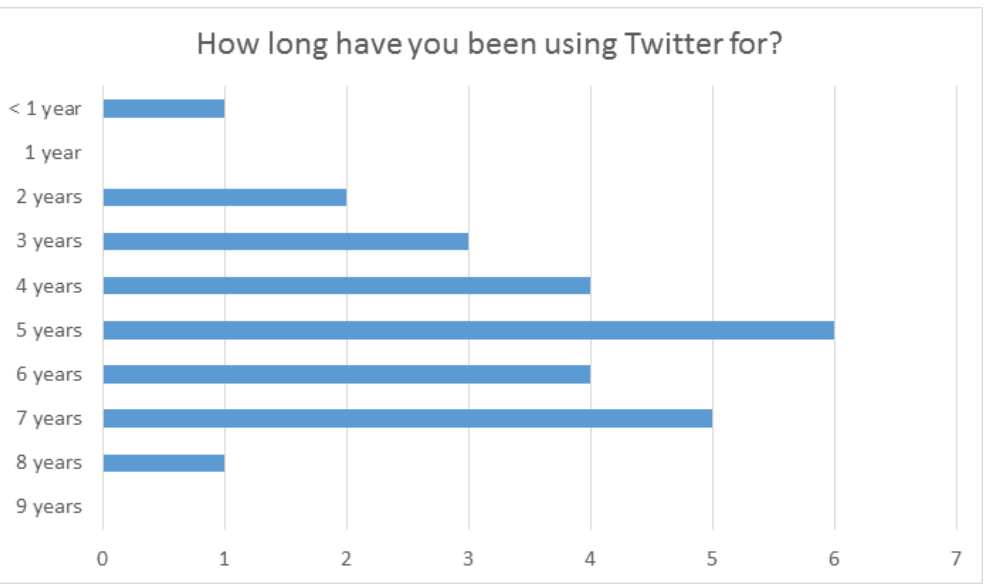
- Students
- Online survey
- Background information
- Self-descriptions (up to 25 words)
- Twitter biographies
- Reflection



4. Background Information



Participants



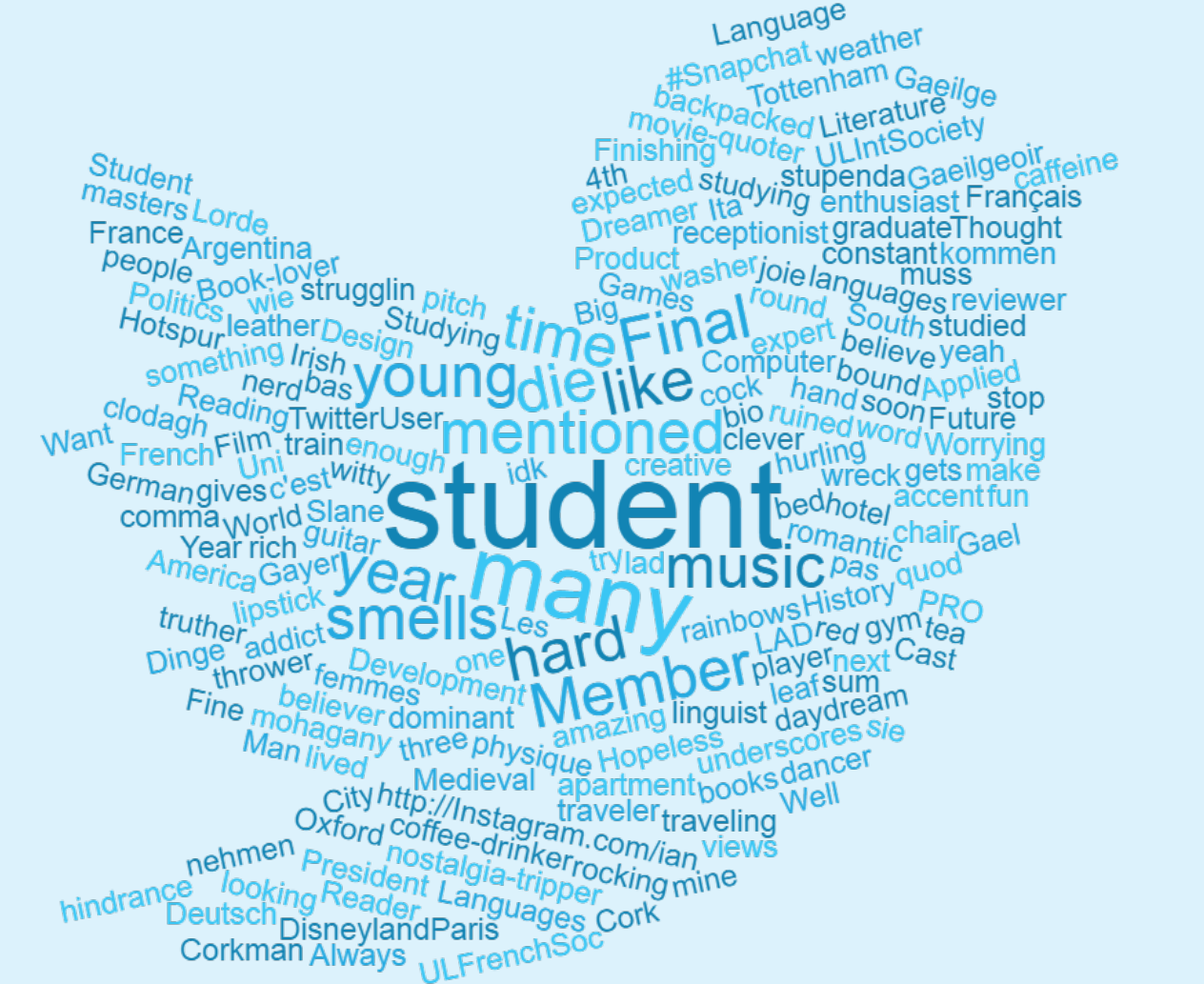
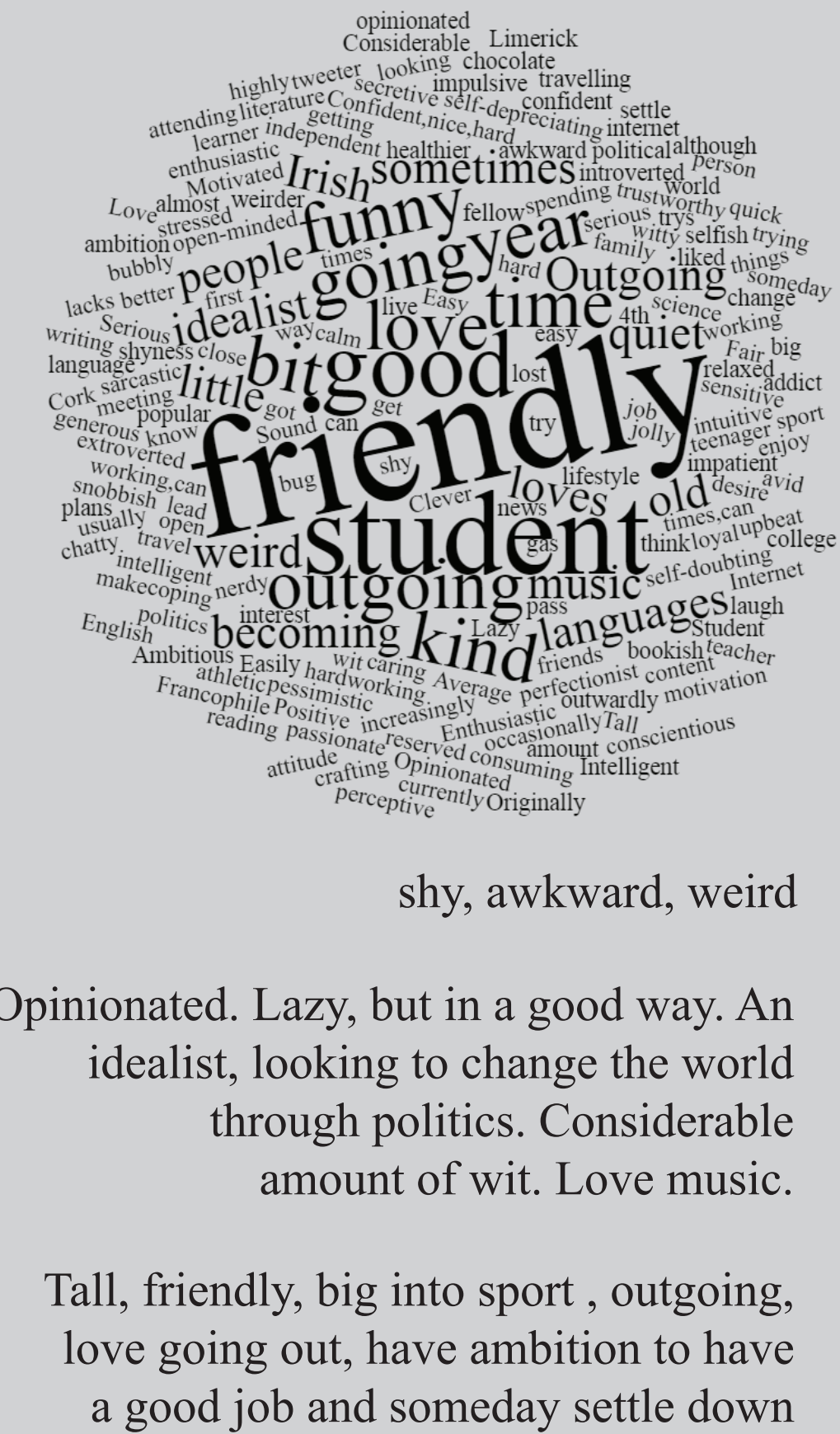
5. Findings

Descriptions

Participants portrayed many positive and negative elements of their identities in their self-descriptions. These honest self-evaluations were perhaps due to many participants not personally knowing the researcher, thus giving a sense of anonymity. Anonymity plays an important role (Lange 2008); people feel more freedom to say whatever they like under the cover of anonymity.

Positive self-perception was portrayed not only in the use of positive adjectives, but also in the syntax and semantics of the descriptions.

- Positive
 - “friendly”, “outgoing”, “funny”, “kind”, “enthusiastic”, “intelligent”, “clever”, “love”
- Negative
 - “shy”, “weird”
- Extroversion and introversion
- Hedging, qualifiers, overwording (Fairclough 2001)



Biographies

Students’ online self-representations can be vastly different to how they perceive themselves to be. This can be caused by Twitter users trying to highlight just one aspect of themselves in their biographies, and by the very nature of these biographies allowing users to say whatever they like, sometimes leading users to simply include a quote they enjoy, or links to other sites or profiles. Knowing that their biographies are public, users often try to use them to impress other users, which may lead to people being less true to their real selves.

Humour, intertextuality, intended audience, the desire for attention, or indeed privacy, the level of perceived anonymity and freedom of expression, and alliance construction play a central role in self-representation in Twitter biographies, as they do in other studies on computer-mediated communication (Boyd 2008; Lange 2008; Georgakopoulou 2013, 1997). It was also found that users’ perceived audiences influenced their discourse strategies.

References

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