Click Here to Look Clever:
Self-Presentation via Selective Sharing of Music and Film on Social Media

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Highlights

- Entertainment content (e.g., music and film) is shared via social network sites
- Different impression motives may lead to selective sharing
- Ought-self motive led to shared popular titles; ideal-self to shared prestige titles
- Need for uniqueness and Facebook intensity moderated effects

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Abstract

Sharing mass media content through social network sites has become a prevalent practice that provides individuals with social utility and cultural capital. This behavior is examined here by testing how different self-presentational motivations may produce selective patterns of sharing media content in social networks. An other-ideal motive was expected to drive sharing of popular media, an own-ideal motive was expected to drive sharing of prestigious media, and an actual-self motive was expected to drive sharing of guilty pleasures. An online experiment ($N = 168$) invoked motivational situations, then asked participants to list songs and films they would share on Facebook. These media were then rated for perceptions. Predictions regarding unique and prestigious media, but not guilty pleasures, were supported. People with the other-ideal motive to fit with group tastes shared less unique music and film, and people with the own-ideal motive to present their best possible selves shared more prestigious music and film. Individual differences in need for uniqueness moderated effects of own-ideal and actual-self motives, and the intensity of Facebook use moderated the effect of other-ideal on media sharing.

Keywords: self-presentation, impression motivation, media sharing, self-discrepancy, entertainment, social network sites
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Mass media have long served as a source of cultural, entertainment, and informational messages that people readily share with each other (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This interpersonal sharing of media content produces valuable social utility and cultural capital for individuals and social groups (Atkin, 1972; Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Rubin, 2009). Displaying one’s tastes in entertainment can earn social rewards by connecting to others with shared affinities (J. Lee & Choi, 2017) and by cultivating a self-image (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012). More recently, the redistribution and curation of media content through computer-mediated channels such as the social network site (SNS) has become a prevalent and influential practice within those services (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Thorson & Wells, 2016) and a key part of media brands’ strategies for reaching target audiences with their content (Batinic & Appel, 2013; Bobkowski, 2015; Kudeshia, Sikdar, & Mittal, 2016; Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015; Oh, Bellur, & Sundar, in press). This intersection of mass media and interpersonal media (Walther, 2017; Walther et al., 2010) is the focus of the present study.

Sharing mass media content via interpersonal media channels is one instance of masspersonal communication, in which individuals “can use traditionally defined mass communication channels for interpersonal communication […] and traditional interpersonal channels for mass communication” (O’Sullivan & Carr, in press, p. 4). In particular, media sharing involves using mass media content such as film, television, music, news, or web pages to engage in interpersonal interactions, retransmitting (by embedding or discussing) this content among audiences of personal networks, smaller interpersonal groups, or specific individuals in order to facilitate shared experiences and engage in individual self-presentation. This media sharing may also entail the simultaneous use of mass and interpersonal media (O’Sullivan & Carr, in press).
Specifically, in the present study we consider how different motivations might lead to selective patterns of sharing media content in an online social network site (e.g., Facebook). Three psychological motives for the presenting the self-concept—portraying the actual self, the own-ideal self, or the other-ideal self—were tested as antecedent factors in sharing music and film characterized as guilty pleasures, prestigious titles, and popular titles. Additionally, we examined theoretically relevant moderating traits such as a need for uniqueness. In the following, we review the presentation of different selves on social media, the utility of media sharing in impression management, and the role of personality. Then, we present the results of an experiment that tested our predictions by soliciting music and film to be shared in assigned situations, along with perceptions of those entertainment media.

**Social Media and The Presentation of Possible Selves**

One of the most studied aspects of computer-mediated communication, and social media in particular, is its ability to provide affordances for self-presentation, including the ability to selectively edit and cultivate one’s online persona and identity (Krämer & Winter, 2008; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Walther, 2007). According to Whitty (2008), this process of online identity curation might also be seen as the result of an effort to present different possible selves: an actual self, inclusive of what is typically expressed to others; an ideal self, representing how the user—or others—would like for them to be seen; as well as an “ought-to” or simply ought self, embodying the qualities they believe one should possess (Whitty, 2008). An earlier articulation of this self-discrepancy theory, as introduced by Higgins (1987), distinguished between “own” selves and “other” selves, suggesting that for ideal and ought self-concepts both the individual’s beliefs as well as their peers’ beliefs about the ideal possible self play an important role. The question as to whether online media might be more suitable for the presentation of actual, rather than ideal selves, has been at the center of communication research for a few years (Michikyan, Subrahmanym, & Dennis, 2014;
Seidman, 2013), yet relatively little attention has been paid to the difference between own-ideal and other-ideal.

Earlier research has identified online media as a particularly suitable platform for the expression of actual selves (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; boyd, 2008; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002), highlighting how individual characteristics of users, such as personality traits (Michikyan et al., 2014) or specific social media usage motives (Tosun, 2012), can predict actual-self presentation. Dating sites and, more recently, dating apps have further enriched the body of research on self-presentation online, exploring more in depth the role of ideal selves (Ellison, Hancock, & Toma, 2012) and taking more explicitly into account the role of others’ expectations on the type of information individual users share about themselves. While the possibility of a future encounter, in fact, represents an important drive towards presentation of the actual self (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006), the pressure to find a significant other might also push users towards depicting an ideal self which responds to their own idea of how they wish to be seen (own-ideal, cf. Ellison et al., 2012), or an ideal self that shows characteristics that respond to expectations from an audience they wish to attract (other-ideal, cf. Birnholtz, Fitzpatrick, Handel, & Brubacker, 2014). In the words of Ellison and colleagues, “presenting one’s ideal self is one strategy for resolving pressures to be both honest and attractive” (Ellison et al., 2012, p. 48).

Social network sites like Facebook are not so much about finding new (romantic) relationships as they are about maintaining recent and older ones (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014). In this sense, SNS users hold incentives to balance—or cycle between—presenting actual, own-ideal, and other-ideal selves. More authentic (i.e., actual) self-presentation on Facebook is linked to more social connections and less stress (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016). Yet because the networks of users typically depict the different contexts they might encounter in their everyday lives, the strategies employed to manage their
impressions will also be mindful of different audiences, whether real or perceived as such (Hogan, 2010). Multiple audiences and contexts can collapse into a univocal network of references, where self-presentations converge into a single online identity encompassing elements of each self (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Selective presentation of cues allows for motivated, situational impression management online (Walther, 2007) across social contexts (Beam, Child, Hutchens, & Hmielowski, in press; Marder, Joinson, & Shankar, 2012).

In addition to a motivation to be authentic and present a true self (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Tosun, 2012), other psychological motives can be relevant for self-presentation (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992), such as the presence of discrepancies between the actual self and desired selves, which produce motivations to regulate behavior. Higgins (1987) emphasized how individuals are “motivated to reach a condition where [their] self-concept matches [their] personally relevant style-guides” (p. 321). As such, any discrepancy between actual self and represented self might give rise to discomfort, and to a sense of inauthenticity. According to Higgins, a discrepancy between actual and own-ideal selves might manifest itself into an “absence of positive outcomes” (p. 322), i.e., the perception that the performed ideal characteristics might not be realistically met. A discrepancy between actual and other-ideal selves can instead give rise to feelings of shame, anxiety, or embarrassment, stemming from the distance between individuals’ actual identity and what they feel others would like them to be (Higgins, 1987; Moretti, Rein, & Wiebe, 1998). Overall, individuals perceive self-discrepancies as shortcomings, which can act as motives for behavior. The psychological accessibility, or mental salience, of these discrepancies depends on situational relevance and the frequency and recency of previous activation (Higgins, 1987). Thus, changes in personal performance or social situations can yield different motivational states, shaping self-presentation and conspicuous consumption (Litt, 2012; Peloza, White, & Shang, 2013). And, these self-concepts—the actual self, own-ideal self, and other-ideal self—can produce
positive attitudes towards targets that are congruent with these conceptualizations (e.g., organizations; Nolan & Harold, 2010).

Recent evidence shows these self-discrepancy motives at work in SNS self-presentation. If engagement with a brand was visible to others (i.e., on Facebook) and the brand’s image was congruent with the other-ideal self, university students were more likely to engage than if the brand was ideal-incongruent or online engagement was not visible to others (Jeong & Lee, 2013). Facebook users report making decisions about liking brands and celebrities based on similar discrepancies of actual and other-ideal selves (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). Interview data illustrated that it was more common to share content that was consistent with an ideal self rather than the actual self, and that Facebook users distinguished between their own ideal (“who I could be”) and a social ideal (“how I want to be perceived”) when making decisions about online engagement with brands (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012, p. 400). T. Kim and Kim (2016) found that both actual-self congruence and own-ideal self congruence positively predicted brand interaction on Facebook, but found minimal support for influence from other-ideal self motives. So, given their demonstrated relevance for online self-presentation, we focus on these three motivations: presenting an actual self, presenting an own-ideal self, or presenting an other-ideal self.

Furthermore, the fact that users must summarize their identity into “reduced cues” infuses each of their messages with a self-disclosing power (Ellison et al., 2012). In this sense, any type of content shared online, from personal information to news, from political affiliations to user-generated media, can be employed to steer someone’s impression towards a specific self-presentation (Doster, 2013; Marder, Slade, Houghton, & Archer-Brown, 2016). Especially after the emergence of platforms like Tumblr, the display, discussion, and sharing of mass media content (Good, 2013; Hogan, 2010) such as music and movies has increasingly become one of the tools users employ to present their different selves online.
Selective Media Sharing as Impression Management

As users increasingly switched to digital media content as a main source of information, knowledge, and entertainment, they also found new ways to publicly or privately interact with the content they consume (Leguina, Arancibia-Carvajal, & Widdop, 2017). The public display of such interaction with content takes place for example by building lists of, linking to and endorsing, embedding, and discussing, much of the varied web content they consume, or commenting upon the music they listen to, the books they read, the film and television they watch, the video games they play, and so on. Content analysis of early SNSs such as MySpace and their constructed lists of favorites revealed that users appear to be selective and strategic in how they self-present their mass media consumption (H. Liu, 2007), suggesting that the media consumed might indeed play a role in individual identities, as well as how they wish others to perceive them.

A framework that could be particularly useful to explain this is the perspective of an extended self, wherein individuals encompass possessions as part of their self-concept as much as other characteristics, such as group belonging or personality traits (Belk, 1988). Past research has confirmed that ownership of a physical object has been shown to generate activity in the brain region connected with self-referential processing (K. Kim & Johnson, 2012) and reported how, in Chinese culture, giving an object as a present might be as identity-relevant as owning it (Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2012). Transitioning from physical to digital goods raised a fundamental question: can extended self still take place when possessions, like digital media content, are ephemeral and by hence difficult to own?

Paradoxically, it would appear that specifically the dematerialization of digital goods might have brought to a new level of attachment for users (Lehdonvirta, 2012). Sheth and Solomon (2014) argued that the blurring of different boundaries, for example between content production and consumption, between being online and offline, and between body
and technology, reinforces the attachment users perceive. In his 2013 revision of the extended self-concept, Belk further highlights how the online sharing of digital (beloved) content “and the sense of joint possession enhance the sense of imagined community and aggregate extended self in a digital age” (Belk, 2013, p. 486).

Hence, the management of impressions and relationships is proposed as a primary motivational basis for holding attitudes about media content, attitudes which are predictive of selecting and retransmitting messages to others (Cappella, Kim, & Albarracín, 2015). The choice of a specific consumer or cultural good, including media, can be “performed” in order to manage impressions. For example, book reading, beyond its intrinsic gratifications, also allows the individual to express themselves, compensate for other self-presentation shortcomings, and connect to others with similar interests (Kaiser & Quandt, 2016). Moreover, distinct motives are likely linked to sharing different types of content which serves the self or social goal (P. Fu, Wu, & Cho, 2017).

Consumer goods that convey prestige (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) allow the individual to accumulate and display social status (cf. Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Online, news media sharing in the online environment has been linked to status-seeking gratifications (C. Lee & Ma, 2012). And, experimental results show that heightened awareness of social class (in the British context) encouraged a preference for highbrow music genres (Reeves, Gilbert, & Holman, 2015). Prestigious or high-brow content, which we define as media that have perceived associations with special knowledge, refinement, or expertise that is derived from one’s social status, might therefore be shared online to signal an own-ideal self. This is in contrast to “guilty pleasures” that may be enjoyable in their own right but lack social benefits (Milkman, Rogers, & Bazerman, 2009).

On the other hand, sharing of guilty pleasures might be more likely when the individual wishes to express their actual self. Highly accessible self-discrepancies should lead
to the avoidance of symbolic consumption with negative associations (Banister & Hogg, 2004), yet in contrast a desire to be authentic and present the actual self may facilitate guilty pleasure sharing. Guilty pleasure films, for example, are typically viewed alone, or with close friends, and may be used to convey irony, deviance, or eclectic taste (Sarkhosh & Menninghaus, 2016; van den Tol & Giner-Sorolla, 2017).

Media sharing can also signal social identity, both membership in particular social groups as well as one’s distinctiveness and status as an individual (Berger & Heath, 2007; Chan et al., 2012). In their longitudinal study of media tastes and online social networks, Lewis, Gonzalez, and Kaufman (2012) found greater evidence for preferences and sharing behavior leading to social relationships over time, rather than preferences following from social relationships. This suggests that self-presentation in media sharing is often paramount, and that social status and belonging ensue. Sharing entertainment media with others can enhance belonging and compensate for relational shortcomings (Gomillion, Gabriel, Kawakami, & Young, 2017). Activation of brain regions associated with both self-enhancement and social belonging is linked to sharing of viral news stories (Scholz et al., 2017). Music and film are especially relevant media for online sharing, because they are reliable markers of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) and as such are frequently used to manage impressions (H. Liu, 2007) or to form impressions of others (Hall, 2007). Social relationships appear to be salient when users of music streaming services make choices about sharing playlists and recommendations with peers (Hagen & Lüders, 2017).

In order to achieve or signal belonging to a group, users might attempt to represent their other-ideal self, which could be connected to the sharing of popular content and avoidance of unique content. For example, bandwagon effects are evident when media are paired with recommendations or other indicators of popularity (W. Fu, 2012; Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015; Yang, 2016). Recent findings show this effect is heightened in the presence
of a motivation to impress others (Winter, Metzger, & Flanagin, 2016). Yet, when given media choices that vary widely on popularity, individuals gravitate toward choices that are either highly popular or highly unique (Knobloch-Westerwick, Sharma, Hansen, & Alter, 2005). According to Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory, individuals vacillate between competing motivations to conform to their relevant social group(s) and to be a distinctive individual within the group. When adherence to group norms regarding media preferences is important, i.e., the individual has an other-ideal motive, they should be likely to display their consumption of media they perceive to be popular with others, and to avoid choices that are idiosyncratic or not well-known. To that end, we conceptualize popularity and uniqueness as polar ends of a single dimension in which the individual perceives how widely others hold a positive attitude toward the film, song, or other media title.

Given these dimensions of mass media content—popular or non-unique choices, prestigious fare, and guilty pleasures—that are relevant to motivations to present other-ideal, own-ideal, or actual selves, we propose that they are employed for strategic, selective sharing when individuals wish to make motivated self-presentations to online audiences. Qualitative data indicate that these self-motives are directly linked to sharing certain types of brands and celebrities on Facebook (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), and experimental evidence shows that engagement with a social media environment such as Facebook activates the awareness of desired self-presentations and subsequent impression management behaviors (Marder, Houghton, Joinson, Shankar, & Bull, 2016; Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Houghton, 2016). Likewise, the salience of particular self-presentational motivations should produce particular patterns of selective sharing behavior that facilitate a self-presentation that addresses the motivating discrepancy.

**H1**: A motivation to present the other-ideal self will produce sharing of less unique (i.e., more popular) music and film than will other motivations.
**H2:** A motivation to present the own-ideal self will produce sharing of more prestigious music and film than will other motivations.

**H3:** A motivation to present the actual self will produce sharing of more guilty pleasure music and film than other motivations.

**Individual Differences as Moderators**

Several personality traits and dispositional variables are especially relevant to the processes described above, and likely to strengthen the predicted effects. First of all, self-esteem, the personal evaluation of the self-concept, is closely linked to impression management behaviors and the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The individual’s self-esteem is also reliant on group membership and affinity with others, as well as individuality and status (Brewer, 1991). Accordingly, self-esteem may moderate the relationship between self-discrepancies (whether own-ideal, involving purely self-evaluation, of other-ideal, involving other’s evaluations as input into one’s self-esteem) and symbolic consumption (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Low levels of self-esteem may heighten the need to provide self-presentation that overcome perceived self-discrepancies.

Next, the trait of self-monitoring refers to an awareness of, and regulation of, how one appears to others (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors experience more negative emotion in response to discrepancies with others’ expectations, while low self-monitors experience more negative emotion in response to discrepancies with their own-ideal self (Gonnerman, Parker, Lavine, Huff, 2000). Other-ideal motives should therefore produce stronger effects among those high on self-monitoring, as these individuals value obtaining social rewards, whereas own-ideal motives should produce stronger effects on selective sharing for low self-monitors, as these individuals are focused on enhancing their persona (J. Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Snyder, 1974). Low self-monitoring may also relate to authentic self-expression, moderating the desire to present guilty pleasures as a means of presenting the actual self.
Individual differences also exist in consumers’ need for uniqueness (NFU; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Some people will generally desire more distinction from others in their self-presentation and display of cultural capital, while others may consistently seek less uniqueness and more conformity. In contrast, the other-ideal self motive involves a situational and even momentary desire to fit more strongly into a group, at the expense of individual uniqueness (Brewer, 1991). Experiencing this need to belong will likely produce conformity-seeking behavior, even for those high on uniqueness; but other-ideal motivation is likely to produce an especially heightened response by those with a low need for uniqueness. The need for uniqueness trait could have consequences not only for the sharing of popular media, but also prestigious or guilty pleasure media, as those characteristics may also be indicative of individual distinctiveness (Berger & Heath, 2007; Chan et al., 2012). High NFU individuals may be especially responsive to ideal-self and actual-self motives.

Next, the presence of involvement, i.e., thoughtful and reflective engagement with an object or action, could enhance the link the between motivation and selective sharing. Involvement is a motivational factor that relates to the desires to protect values, make accurate decisions, and make positive impressions (Cho & Boster, 2005), all of which relate to the self-presentational motives outlined above. If individuals are especially involved with their entertainment choices, they may be more responsive to these self-presentation motives when sharing can convey desired values, outcomes, and impressions.

Lastly, individual differences exist in the extent of social media use. A person may be more or less familiar with, or in the habit of, engaging in sharing practices on social media such as Facebook. To that end, individual’s media sharing propensity (Authors, 2015), the frequency with which they share mass media content on social media, should boost their ability to strategically share when experiencing a particular self-presentation motive. Likewise, the intensity with which they use the platform (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007)
should heighten the effect of motivation, as intensive users may be more involved with the site and more sensitive to its self-presentational affordances.

**RQ:** Are effects of self-presentation motivations on selective sharing moderated by individual differences in self-esteem, self-monitoring, need for uniqueness, involvement, sharing propensity, or Facebook intensity?

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

An online experiment was conducted with a convenience sample of 168 adults with active Facebook accounts ($M_{age} = 23.11, SD = 4.88$), who were recruited from courses at a Dutch university and through snowball sampling of university students’ personal social networks. The experiment, conducted in April-May 2015, included three between-subjects conditions, which reflected three distinct psychological motivations: presenting the actual self, own-ideal self, or other-ideal self. Specifically, participants were instructed to imagine a situation (cf. Neubaum & Krämer, in press) in which they (a) wished to express themselves authentically ($n = 60$), (b) wished to make a highly positive impression on others ($n = 59$), or (c) wished to express their identification with a valued social group of their own choosing ($n = 49$). An active Facebook account was prerequisite for participation because the experimental script assumed that respondents used that platform. The prompts for each condition are presented in Table 1.
Experimental Manipulation of Motivational Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Self</td>
<td>Imagine you are in a situation where you want to express you truly are. It doesn’t matter what others think; it only matters that you are authentic to yourself. Most of all, you just want to honestly express your thoughts, feelings, and personality. What [kind of music] [movies] would you share on your Facebook page in this situation? By sharing, we mean posting yourself or sharing a post about the [song or artist] [movie]. Keep in mind that you want to be your true self and express yourself honestly without judgment. It is all about expressing yourself and your taste to the world. Please name three [songs and their artists] [movies] that you would share on your Facebook page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own-Ideal Self</td>
<td>Imagine you are in a situation where you want to look as good as possible. It matters that you make a good impression on the people around you. The opinion of others matter to you, because you want to show the best of yourself to the world. What [kind of music] [movies] would you share on your Facebook page in this situation? By sharing, we mean posting yourself or sharing a post about the [song or artist] [movie]. Keep in mind you want to share something to look good because people are evaluating you. It is all about impressing others and showing that you have good taste. Please name three [songs and their artists] [movies] that you would share on your Facebook page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Ideal Self</td>
<td>Imagine you are in a situation where you want to make it clear that you belong to a certain group. Think of a particular social group that you are part of (e.g., friends, co-workers, teammates). You want to show that you belong to this group. What [kind of music] [movies] would you share on your Facebook page in this situation? By sharing, we mean posting yourself or sharing a post about the [song or artist] [movie]. Keep in mind you want them to let the group know you are one of them, and let people outside the group know that you are a group member. It is all about showing off the group’s taste and the sense of belonging. Please name three [songs and their artists] [movies] that you would share on your Facebook page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participants were presented with the text both before listing music and before listing films. The order of these media was randomized. The texts were presented on a series of survey pages to increase readability and attention.

The experiment also featured a two-level within-subjects factor: music sharing and film sharing. Each participant was asked to list three songs (and corresponding performing artists) and three films they would be likely to post to, or discuss on, their Facebook page.
under the given scenario. The music and film list-generating tasks were presented separately, with a randomized order. The most commonly-listed artists and films are presented in Table 2. Some suggestive initial differences are evident, despite considerable overlap in titles. The own-ideal condition tended to produce more points of consensus in what titles to share (a higher number of repeated titles across participants) and was less likely to include mentions of films in fantasy or comic book genres or the *Fast and Furious* film series. The actual-self condition, in contrast, was notable for repeated mentions of *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* fantasy film series.

**Measures**

**Perceptions of shared titles.** After listing which media they would share given their assigned motivational situation, participants then reported their perceptions of those selections. A total of nine 11-point items (scaled from 0 = *Not at all* to 10 = *Extremely*) measured three specific perceptions for each medium: uniqueness, prestige, and guilty pleasure. Participants were asked “overall, how would you rate these three songs/movies on each of the following characteristics?”

Uniqueness was measured with three items, “How unique,” “How popular” (reversed), and “How one-of-a-kind” “are the songs/movies you chose,” $\alpha = .62$, $M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.90$ for music, and $\alpha = .41$, $M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.71$ for film. Excluding the reversed item from the uniqueness measure improved reliability to $r = .65$ for music and $r = .60$ for film. However, doing so did not substantively alter the interpretation of the effects on uniqueness in hypothesis testing, so all items were retained to instead maximize content validity.

For prestige, songs and movies were rated on how “superb” and “highbrow” they were, and how much they “show social status,” $\alpha = .53$, $M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.72$ for music, and $\alpha = .70$, $M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.95$ for film.
The guilty pleasure measure asked “How much of a guilty pleasure are,” “How embarrassing are,” and “How ashamed are you of” the titles, $\alpha = .73, M = 2.28, SD = 1.92$ for music, and $\alpha = .71, M = 2.31, SD = 1.90$ for film.

**Moderators.** With regard to moderating traits, self-esteem was measured with the 10-item trait scale (M. Rosenberg, 1965), ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = .86, M = 3.76, SD = 0.62$. A 9-item short version of Snyder’s self-monitoring scale (1974) was used, ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = .77, M = 2.67, SD = 0.64$. Need for uniqueness was measured with a 15-item scale (Tian et al., 2001) customized to the music/film context (e.g., “I collect unusual movies or music as a way of telling people I’m different”), ranging 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = .91, M = 2.22, SD = 0.73$.

Involvement was measured with 12 items (Cho & Boster, 2005) customized to context (“My music or movie taste reflects who I am”), ranging 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = .78, M = 3.81, SD = 0.88$. Sharing propensity (Authors, 2015) was measured with two items, “How often do you share music or music videos on social media” “How often do you share movies, movie clips, or trailers on social media,” 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Every few weeks*, 3 = 1-2 Days a week, 4 = 3-5 Days a week, 5 = About once a day, 6 = *Several times a day*, $r = .58, M = 1.32, SD = 0.51$. Finally, Facebook intensity (Ellison et al., 2007) was measured with six items (e.g., “Facebook is part of my everyday activity”), 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = .83, M = 3.30, SD = 0.79$. 
Table 2

**Most Frequently Mentioned Musicians and Film Series, by Sharing Condition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Actual Self</th>
<th>Own-Ideal Self</th>
<th>Other-Ideal Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musicians</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyoncé (5)</td>
<td>Ed Sheeran (6)</td>
<td>Omi (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coldplay (5)</td>
<td>Coldplay (4)</td>
<td>Kygo (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kygo (4)</td>
<td>Hozier (4)</td>
<td>Rihanna (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adele (3)</td>
<td>Omi (4)</td>
<td>Beyoncé (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Lazer (3)</td>
<td>Arctic Monkeys (3)</td>
<td>Bruno Mars (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muse (3)</td>
<td>Beyoncé (3)</td>
<td>Dotan (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omi (3)</td>
<td>Dotan (3)</td>
<td>Ed Sheeran (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riana (3)</td>
<td>John Legend (3)</td>
<td>Kenny B (3)</td>
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<td>Rihanna (3)</td>
<td>Major Lazer (3)</td>
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<td>Sam Smith (3)</td>
<td>Paolo Nutini (3)</td>
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<td>Wiz Khalifa (3)</td>
<td>The Script (3)</td>
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<td><strong>Film Series</strong></td>
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<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em> (11)</td>
<td><em>The Intouchables</em> (7)</td>
<td><em>The Notebook</em> (6)</td>
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<td><em>Love Actually</em> (6)</td>
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<td><em>The Fast and the Furious</em> (5)</td>
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<td><em>Harry Potter</em> (5)</td>
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<td><em>Forrest Gump</em> (4)</td>
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<td><em>The Green Mile</em> (4)</td>
<td><em>Dear John</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>The Wolf of Wall Street</em> (4)</td>
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<td><strong>Frozen</strong> (3)</td>
<td><em>Pitch Perfect</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>Safe Haven</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>Still Alice</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>The Theory of Everything</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>Wall Street</em> (3)</td>
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<td><em>Whiplash</em> (3)</td>
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Note. Number of mentions in parentheses. Each participant was assigned to one condition, and nominated three songs (and performing artist) as well as three films that they would share in the described scenario. Actual self $n = 60$; own-ideal self $n = 59$; other-ideal self $n = 49$.

The correlations among individual differences, and with media perceptions, appear in Table 3. Notably, the same perceptual variables are moderately correlated across different media, $r_s > .40$ (e.g., the association between musical uniqueness and film uniqueness), as would be expected given that each individual shared their music and films with the same motivation. And, as expected, the correlations between different perceptions were small, $r_s < .40$ (e.g., the association between musical uniqueness and musical prestige). This provides evidence of convergent and discriminant validity of the measures of media perceptions.
Moreover, any associations between trait variables and media perceptions were small or non-existent. Involvement with media was linked to more unique titles, and need for uniqueness was positively associated with all three media perceptions: uniqueness, prestige, and guilt.

The study materials (questionnaire, dataset, and syntax) are available at https://osf.io/btr57/.

Results

To test predictions, mixed model ANOVAs (3 x 2, condition x medium) were conducted for each dependent variable (the perceptions of uniqueness, prestige, and guilt). The results are presented in Figure 1.

Table 3

Zero-Order Correlations Between Continuous Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>1. Age</td>
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<td>2. RSE</td>
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<td>3. SM</td>
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<td>4. NFU</td>
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<td>5. Involvement</td>
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<td>6. Share Propensity</td>
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<td>7. FBI</td>
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<td>8. Unique Music</td>
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<td>9. Unique Films</td>
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<td>10. Prestige Music</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.29***</td>
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<td>.12</td>
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<td>12. Guilt Music</td>
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Note. RSE = Rosenberg self-esteem; SM = self-monitoring; NFU = need for uniqueness; FBI = Facebook intensity. #p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Motivation produced an effect on the uniqueness of media chosen for sharing, $F(2, 165) = 4.68, p = .011, \eta^2_p = .054$. Pairwise comparisons with Sidak correction revealed that an other-ideal motivation consistently produced less unique (i.e., more popular) choices for media sharing, supporting H1. A main effect of medium, $F(1, 165) = 6.61, p = .011, \eta^2_p = .039$, also revealed that musical choices were relatively more unique than film choices ($M_{music} = 4.85$ vs. $M_{film} = 4.46$). Furthermore, an interaction between condition and medium, $F(2, 165) = 4.24, p = .016, \eta^2_p = .049$, was attributable to the most unique music being shared in the actual-self condition but the most unique films being shared in the own-ideal condition.

For prestige, motivational condition produced the expected effect, $F(2, 165) = 3.87, p = .023, \eta^2_p = .045$. As expected, Sidak pairwise comparisons illustrated that media shared in the own-ideal condition was significantly more prestigious ($M = 6.23$) than media shared in the actual-self ($M = 5.40$) or other-ideal ($M = 5.75$) conditions. This supports H2. No within-subjects effect of medium was found for prestige ($p = .71, \eta^2_p = .001$), nor was an interaction between condition and medium evident ($p = .23, \eta^2_p = .018$).

Finally, for guilty pleasure perceptions, there were no significant effects of condition ($p = .83, \eta^2_p = .002$), medium ($p = .69, \eta^2_p = .001$), or their interaction ($p = .10, \eta^2_p = .027$). So, H3 was not supported. Generally, guilty pleasure perceptions were quite low across all media and conditions (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Perceptions of shared media, by condition. Means with standard error bars. Values of a dependent variable with different letter labels between conditions differ at $p < .05$ in pairwise comparisons with Sidak correction.

Further analyses used regression models to explore any moderating roles of individual differences—self-esteem, self-monitoring, need for uniqueness, involvement, sharing propensity, and Facebook intensity—on hypothesized effects. The three motivational effects of (a) the other-ideal motive predicting less unique media, (b) the own-ideal motive predicting more prestigious media, and (c) the actual-self motive predicting more guilty pleasure media were tested for how they might be moderated by individual differences. Six multiple regression models (two for each motive: one for music and one for film) with hierarchical entry were constructed, with dummy codes computed for the assigned conditions and with the relevant perception of shared music or film titles as the dependent variable. Dummy codes and the six individual differences were entered in the first block of each model. Then, the second model block was used to test the interaction terms of interest.
Several interactions emerged as significant; as a robustness check and to estimate effect sizes, each interaction was subsequently isolated in its own regression block.

The effect of the other-ideal motive (compared to other motives) on sharing unique music was moderated by Facebook intensity, $b^* = .670, p = .03, \Delta R^2 = .023$. The interaction was probed with the Neyman-Johnson technique, using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Individuals scoring below 4.02 on Facebook intensity (85.53% of the sample) showed a significant effect of other-ideal motive on sharing less unique (i.e., more popular) songs. Those who were very intensive Facebook users did not show this tendency to share popular titles when given an other-ideal motive.

The effect of the own-ideal motive on sharing prestigious media was moderated by need for uniqueness. This effect was significant for film, $b^* = -.582, p = .030, \Delta R^2 = .027$, and marginal for music, $b^* = -.470, p = .078, \Delta R^2 = .017$. Probing showed that people with an own-ideal motive were more likely to share prestigious films if they were low on need for uniqueness (< 2.28, 53.46% of the sample) and were also more likely to share prestigious music titles if low on need for uniqueness (< 2.78, 72.33% of the sample).

Finally, the effect of the actual-self motive on sharing musical guilty pleasures was moderated by need for uniqueness, $b^* = .691, p = .007, \Delta R^2 = .044$. Probing the interaction illustrated that those with a high need for uniqueness (> 2.56, 33.96% of the sample) were more likely to share guilty pleasures when assigned to an actual-self motive.

**Discussion**

The findings are supportive of effects of particular self-presentation motives on the online sharing of particular types of mass media content. Individuals randomly assigned to reflect on their other-ideal self—their social identity and how they expect others to want them to be—listed song and film titles that they later rated as less unique than did participants assigned to actual-self or own-ideal motives. An overall difference also existed between
SELECTIVE MUSIC AND FILM SHARING

Music and film, as songs were rated as more unique than movies (perhaps owing to more fragmented genres) and especially unique when produced by an actual-self motive (compared to more unique film choices under an own-ideal motive). With regard to seeking high individual status, an own-ideal self motive (focused on presenting the self positively) was linked to more prestigious music and film selections than were actual-self or other-ideal self motives. Finally, no main effect was observed for guilty pleasures. In general, songs and films selected for sharing were rated quite low on the guilty pleasure measure. Even given an actual-self motive, guilty pleasures are perhaps unlikely to be shared at all; rather, they remain private preferences (cf. Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008). Alternatively, participants may have a relatively low rate of consuming media perceived as guilty pleasures.

In addition, the findings highlight that the effects of the motivations on sharing popular, prestigious, and guilty-pleasure media were moderated by personality traits. First of all, Facebook intensity moderated the effect of other-ideal self motive, such individuals who were highly intensive users did not share more popular music to present the other-ideal self. Less intensive users did share increasingly popular (i.e., less unique) music titles when they were motivated to adhere to group standards in their self-presentation. This interaction might be attributable to intensive Facebook usage providing other-ideal self needs through routes other than media sharing, as these individuals may already access significant social capital via intensive bonding and bridging activities on Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007). Future research should assess the prevalence of mass media sharing as a self-presentation behavior on social media, how it compares in terms of ease and effectiveness to other behaviors, and how its use differs for intensive versus non-intensive users of these platforms. The intensive Facebook users in the present study may also feel more confident and certain in their online self-presentation, whereas those who are less involved with using the platform may have more overall need to pursue self-presentation strategies such as media sharing to enhance
their persona. But, it is also notable that the interaction between other-ideal self and Facebook intensity was non-significant for film. So, intensive Facebook users were just as likely as more casual users to share popular rather than unique films when they experienced an other-ideal self motive.

Next, individuals with lower levels of need for uniqueness were significantly more likely to share prestigious film titles if they were motivated to present an own-ideal self. Prestigious music sharing showed a marginal interaction between need for uniqueness and own-ideal self motive, in the same direction. One possible interpretation of this result is that high need for uniqueness individuals may rely on their pursuit of uniqueness to signal the own-ideal self, and as such are not dependent on consensus opinions about highbrow or prestige media. In contrast, the individuals with low to moderate need for uniqueness scores, however, appear to seek prestigious titles to display their own-ideal self. They may pursue prestige as a route to self-enhancement, and may be more open to seeking social status through these prestige-seeking means than do individuals who prioritize uniqueness over status or belonging.

Additionally, high levels of need for uniqueness were associated with sharing more guilty-pleasure music when given an actual-self motivation. Guilty pleasures may be idiosyncratic, and therefore could convey not only authenticity but also a form of uniqueness (van den Tol & Giner-Sorolla, 2017). This is also consistent with the finding that actual-self motivation was linked to sharing more unique music. The actual-self motive is one in which the individual is driven to accept their current self and present an authentic persona. As such, this motivation may involve rejecting any social influence to consume popular media and avoid embarrassing self-presentation; a trait need for uniqueness appears to facilitate this disregard for social influence. Indeed, only among high NFU individuals was an effect seen for sharing guilty-pleasure media. Notably, there was no relationship between trait need for
uniqueness and the effect of other-ideal self on sharing non-unique media. Individual differences in uniqueness-seeking did not moderate the motivational factor that discouraged sharing unique media. This could be interpreted as a generally responsiveness to the other-ideal motivation to conform to popular taste, regardless of a more stable trait preference for uniqueness.

Also surprisingly, self-esteem, self-monitoring, involvement, and sharing propensity were not found to reliably moderate effects of motives. Although these some of these traits (involvement, sharing propensity) directly relate to what type of content was shared (Table 3), these dispositional factors did not shape how situational factors (self-presentation motives) impacted sharing.

The results illustrate that taste in mass media is indeed a component in online self-presentation. Given different impression motivations, individuals are selective in what media they do and do not share with their online networks. However, the main effects observed here were quite modest; media sharing is just one component in selective self-presentation, and the need for authenticity necessarily restricts how selective and strategic the choice of shared media can be. This study also adds to prior contributions (Jeong & Lee, 2013; T. Kim & Kim, 2016; Marder et al., 2012; Whitty, 2008) illustrating the utility of self-discrepancy theory for understanding (online) self-presentation. Future research into media sharing should consider the role of emotions in this motivational process (Higgins, 1987; Marder et al., 2012).

Our findings also support the idea that cultural goods and online experiences can intersect (Walther, 2017; Walther et al., 2010) to provide an important part of the extended digital self (Belk, 2013; Lehdonvirta, 2012; Sheth & Solomon, 2014). We did observe some differences between music and film: Unique music was associated with the actual-self and unique films associated with the own-ideal self. Future research should consider how different media inform the repertoire of media sharing. For example, how do users balance
their curation of entertainment versus news and information? Other critical questions about selective sharing include the extent to which media sharing shapes subsequent behaviors and perceptions such as such media consumption (Cappella et al., 2015; H. Kim, 2015), social influence (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015), and impression formation (Hall, 2007).

When individuals engage in motivated selective sharing, these patterns of bias will directly impact which content will circulate in online social networks and be selected by peers. The results show that self-presentational motivations produce patterns of sharing that encourage conformity in media consumption (especially among less intensive Facebook users) as well as the pursuit of social status via prestige (especially among those low on need for uniqueness). Therefore, accounting for motivated selective sharing is key to understanding opinion leadership and social influence (Batinic & Appel, 2013; Cappella et al., 2015; Neubaum & Krämer, 2017; Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). Individuals who aspire to present their own-ideal self, or to present a self that meets an other-ideal, influence the success of word-of-mouth and network-level engagement with mass media content. This can be used to target desired audiences in order to foster word-of-mouth campaigns. Content that satisfies these self-presentation needs is more likely to be shared. These processes also have important implications beyond entertainment, in advertising and marketing (J. Lee, Kim, & Ham, 2016), and the spread of inaccurate or polarizing messages in contexts such as politics (Y. Liu, Rui, & Cui, 2017; Marder, Slade et al., 2016; Pang et al., 2016) and health and science (Southwell, 2013).

With regard to effects on the individual, media sharing provides social gratifications which can boost personal feelings of relatedness and integration, and even the expansion of personal networks and perspectives (J. Lee & Choi, 2017; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). In other words, the display of cultural capital could facilitate the acquisition of social capital for users (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), enhancing their online experience and the gratifications they
obtain. Future work should investigate the potential that media sharing has for social capital and the formation and management of relationships (Lewis et al., 2012). And, to what extent does media sharing help individuals strive toward ideal selves and achieve positive self-presentation over time? Finally, selective sharing of media content is also likely to impact the individual’s own later media preferences and self-concept (Authors, 2015; Valkenburg, 2017). How and where mass media are shared within social media (cf. Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012) may moderate those effects of sharing: Cultivating preferences on a profile page may yield a different self-concept or sense of publicness than interacting with official or fan pages for media brands and personalities.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

A number of limitations should be noted. First of all, the experimental conditions used manipulations in which participants imagined the desired motivational states. This approach does not directly induce the motivations in the way that a real or anticipated social situation might (Walther, 2007; Winter et al., 2016). However, it allowed us to dispense with deception in the procedure, and also allowed us to target specific discrepancy states that might be difficult to produce with real or anticipated interactions. To the extent that the manipulation primed participants to think about these discrepancies and motivations, or allowed them to retrieve memory representations of these states that they have experienced in the past, the inductions should be valid manipulations of the independent variables (Neubaum & Krämer, in press).

Explicitly asking participants to bring a self-presentation scenario to mind may be prone to demand characteristics, such that participants could have reported perceptions of music and film that they thought the researchers expected. However, this possibility was mitigated by first asking participants to list specific titles they would share, and then measuring perceptions after commitments to sharing particular media had been made.
places some distance between the induction and the dependent variables of interest, and
discourages reporting of perceptions of the induction rather than perceptions of the shared
media. Future research should attempt to take advantage of naturally occurring motivational
situations, or measure pre-existing discrepancies and motivations. Self-discrepancies may be
highly specific and momentary, or more broad and persistent (Strauman, 1996); both
situations and dispositions are likely related to self-presentation and selective sharing of
media. Future research could account for trait orientations toward ideal or ought selves
(Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994) or toward one’s own versus others’ standards.

Likewise, sharing behaviors can vary from short-lived (sharing or liking a single post)
to more persistent (liking a film or artist page, or repeatedly sharing related content). To cast
a broad net, the present study operationalized sharing as “sharing a post about the [song or
artist] [movie]” on Facebook. However, sharing on Facebook and other social media
platforms can take a wide variety of forms, which should be considered in future research.
When do people use different affordances available for sharing content? How social media
users talk about their mass media use may also matter. Guilty pleasures, for example, may
often be shared with qualifiers or self-deprecation. Sharers may also make appeals to
nostalgia or other ways in which their consumption could be framed. Also, the relatively
publicness of sharing should be considered as a key factor, from the private exchanges of
content in direct messages to group-level or truly public venues for sharing taste.

The dependent variables were limited by a small number of items for each measure.
The measure of uniqueness/popularity in particular suffered from low reliability, owing in
part to some tension between uniqueness and popularity. However, these two perceptions
have been conceptualized as two poles of the same dimension in the past (Berger & Heath,
2007; Chan et al., 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005); future research should consider
this relationship further and build improved measures of media perceptions relative to self-
presentation. Further dimensions of media may also be relevant to self-presentation through media sharing, and should be explored in future research.

Additionally, the dependent variables were limited in that they were applied to a set of three songs or three films identified by each participant. While reporting three titles per medium was used to identify consistent and reliable trends in sharing, participants (and social media users in general) may share heterogeneous sets of media, as a strategy for balancing different motivations. More fine-grained perceptions may provide a fuller picture of selective sharing. Future research could also use content analysis of shared titles to assess their relevant characteristics; however, perceptions such as popularity, prestige, and guilty can be highly idiosyncratic and bound in time, place, and social context. To that end, employing individual-level perceptions of media content (cf. Potter & Tomasello, 2003) by those individuals sharing it for self-presentational purposes provides the most valid and nuanced assessment of these media characteristics, and as such it is a strength of the present study.

Conclusion

This study illustrates that social media users are selective in their use of mass media as an important type of self-presentation strategy. There are many means by which social media users can attempt to selectively self-present, attempting to appear attractive, successful, or savvy to others. Displaying cultural capital in order to transform it into social dividends (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) is an aspect of self-presentation which has been given new facility in social media environments, as media brands and content creators seek to expand their influence through audience engagement and sharing behaviors on online platforms. The present findings show that individuals are strategic in which media they share online, and that this has the potential to help them present desired identities to their social network. The motive to present an own-ideal self was linked to sharing prestigious media, especially among those with a low need for uniqueness. Among all but the most intense Facebook users,
the desire to present an other-ideal self that meets the standards of others predicted sharing popular media that conforms to group tastes. Guilty pleasures were shared by those with a need for uniqueness and a desire to present the actual self. By clicking to share mass media content, social media users can efficiently convey their cleverness to their network connections and obtain social gratifications from interpersonal interactions.
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Notes

1 Due to an omission in the survey, participant sex was not recorded. No differences were expected by sex, and both men and women were anticipated to participate at similar rates given the recruitment strategy.

2 Ten individuals provided perceptions of shared media but did not type the names of all six requested titles. Results are robust against removing these cases from analysis, and most effects were slightly stronger if the cases were omitted. However, given that individuals may have been unwilling to disclose titles but able to think of examples and report perceptions, these cases were retained as conservative precaution.

3 When removing the reversed item from uniqueness, the effect of motivation in the ANOVA was similar in size, $F(2, 165) = 3.54, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .041$, with $M_{\text{other-ideal}} = 4.82$ versus $M_{\text{actual}} = 5.75$ versus $M_{\text{own-ideal}} = 5.77$, and the main effect of medium was smaller in size and now marginally significant, $F(1, 165) = 2.80, p = .096, \eta_p^2 = .017$, with $M_{\text{music}} = 5.65$ vs. $M_{\text{film}} = 5.32$). Finally, the ANOVA’s interaction between factors was no longer significant, $F(2, 165) = 2.04, p = .13, \eta_p^2 = .024$.

4 Removing items from the music prestige measure did not improve reliability. As a check, the effect of motivation on each of the three items was tested with a MANOVA. The multivariate effect of condition was significant, $\Lambda_{\text{LH}} = .119, F(6, 324) = 3.22, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .056$. The own-ideal condition produced the highest mean on each item, as expected, but the univariate effect was only significant for “highbrow,” $F(2, 165) = 3.28, p = .040, \eta_p^2 = .038$, and “show social status,” $F(2, 165) = 6.73, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .075$, with no significant effect on “superb,” $F(2, 165) = 1.51, p = .224, \eta_p^2 = .018$.

5 Items 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19 and 25 from Synder’s (1974) original scale were used.