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Partitioning Virtual Spaces as a Strategy for Privacy Protection and the Reproduction of Digital Social Boundaries

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the digital conduct of Facebook users about their privacy perceptions and the strategies employed to redefine their digital social borders within the platform. The study is grounded in Erving Goffman's theoretical framework, particularly through the utilization of his concepts of spatial segmentation into front and rear phases, as well as regional behavior. We employed a survey-based methodology, combining quantitative electronic instruments (questionnaires) with qualitative methods (interviews and observations). The study was conducted with a purposive sample of 150 individuals. The results demonstrate that Facebook users deploy specific behavioral strategies to preserve their intimacy, ranging from the rigorous selection of friend lists and privacy setting adjustments to interactions under the guise of anonymity in public digital spaces. Furthermore, statistical tests reveal the existence of significant gender disparities regarding the nature of these behaviors. Finally, the Goffmanian analysis helped elucidate the deep-seated motivations behind these practices, confirming that virtual space constitutes an extension and a reflection of real-world social interaction dynamics.

Keywords: Spatial segmentation; Privacy; Facebook; Dramaturgical approach.



Introduction

In a world saturated by digital communication technologies, privacy is no longer limited to a simple legal definition; it has become a daily practice crystallized through user behavior within interaction spaces, particularly on social networks. From the submission of personal data during registration to the digital behavioral patterns manifested during use—such as adding friends, interacting, commenting, posting, or the continuous sharing of content—these activities reflect the user's intellectual and psychological orientations, and even their commercial preferences, thereby necessitating a voluntary disclosure of personal information.

However, this exposure does not occur in a uniform manner. It remains intrinsically linked to the user's level of knowledge regarding the nature of these platforms, as well as their perception of the audience boundaries capable of accessing and redistributing their data. It is here that the concept of privacy awareness emerges as a cognitive and behavioral paradigm allowing for the mitigation of risks associated with data sharing. Preserving one's intimacy does not imply a total withdrawal from the digital sphere; rather, it lies in the individual's ability to manage and regulate the limits of their presence within a space characterized by the collapse of physical presence contexts. In this environment, heterogeneous social groups—family, friends, and work colleagues—now intersect within unified communicational spaces.

Consequently, a user's awareness of digital privacy is not limited to mastering technical settings; it extends to the way they define their own social boundaries and construct a private space within a communicational structure with a tendency toward publicity and widespread diffusion. Observing Facebook spaces and the interaction modalities employed reveals that users' digital behavior is diverse and fragmented over various virtual zones, which they delineate with accuracy.

For instance, interaction within groups and pages—viewed as public spaces—differs radically from that practiced on a personal profile or via instant messaging. This distinction is explained by the variation in audience (those with whom or in front of whom one interacts) from one space to another, thereby reproducing real-life interaction dynamics.

It is from this perspective that we deemed it appropriate to mobilize and project the typology of Goffman of the segmentation of social interaction spaces (front stage and back stage), as well as his analysis of the contrasting behaviors associated with them. This theoretical framework allows us to capture and analyze the methods of digital behavior management among facebook users, as well as the processes of virtual dissociation between public and private spaces through their interactional practices. It also enables us to understand how these actors control the presentation of different self-images before heterogeneous audiences and to identify the purposes behind them.

We will thus attempt to measure to what extent the hypothesis of regions and "regional behavior" applies to digital behavior related to the perception of interaction spaces and the protection of privacy on Facebook. To this end, we will address the following research question:

How do Facebook users negotiate with the technical structure of the network to reproduce their social boundaries within the digital environment?

To address this central problem, we have articulated it around two main research questions:

- **What are the predominant modalities** of digital behavior management adopted by Facebook users to segment their virtual spaces?
- **Are there statistically significant gender differences** in the management of digital behavior relative to the segmentation of virtual spaces on Facebook?

1. Study Methodology

This research falls within the framework of descriptive and analytical studies. As such, we employed a survey method supported by both quantitative tools (electronic questionnaire) and qualitative techniques (qualitative observation and electronic interviews). To test for gender differences, we utilized the **Chi-squared test (X^2 test)**.

Our study targets Facebook users of both sexes. To reach the most active category on the network, we chose to conduct the survey within specific Facebook groups¹. We opted for purposive sampling (or judgmental sampling) in two stages:

- **Group Selection:** Several active groups were chosen based on the diversity of topics discussed and the volume of daily posts.
- **Sample Constitution:** The electronic questionnaire was distributed within these groups, gathering responses from 150 participants via an accidental (or convenience) sampling method. Concurrently, a sub-sample of 20 individuals (10 males and 10 females) was selected for semi-structured interviews.

The study took place over a six-month period, from September 2025 to February 2026. Following the distribution of the questionnaire, we collected relevant observations (posts, comments, interactions) to support and interpret the gathered statistical data. Qualitative online interviews were also conducted during this same period. The distribution of the sample according to the "gender" variable is presented in the following table:

¹ The study focuses on the following: group: **Youth of Algeria**, Group: **Université DZ**, Group **Freelancers Community**, Group: **The Algerian Scientific Researcher**, Group: **Peer-Reviewed Algerian Scientific Journals**, and Group: the **Algerian Youth Gathering**.

Table N (01) : Distribution of sample members by variable of gender

Gender \ Values	Number	Percentage
Male	68	45%
Female	82	55%
Total	150	100%

Source: Elaborated by the researchers

We limited our analysis to the gender variable after observing, during the initial data processing, that it constituted the predominant influencing factor on the distribution of respondents' answers; we will endeavor to support this observation by integrating it into the core of our analysis. A slight disparity in gender representation appears within our sample, with a surplus of 14 individuals in favor of female. This distribution testifies to an increasing parity in Facebook usage compared to previous years, when male predominance was explained by easier access to information technologies.

In this regard, Acquisti and Gross highlight a global openness concerning the use of social networks, where the penetration rate among female now exceeds that of male (specifically 78% compared to 65%, according to 2019 statistics (Taha 2023, 139). Furthermore, the female preponderance in our study could be explained by a higher propensity among female to respond to digitally distributed questionnaires within mixed virtual groups. Additionally, the study by **Noel Hamm and al.** indicates that "self-disclosure" (the online disclosure of self) is controlled by constructed socio-cultural norms, implying that male and female do not react to it in an identical manner (Noelle , et al. 2011). It is precisely this hypothesis that we shall seek to verify within the framework of our research.

2. Study Concepts :

- **Spatial Segmentation in Erving Goffman's Theory:** Goffman argues that the social frameworks of everyday life are subdivided into regions where the adopted behaviors differ significantly. These regions are as follows (Goffman 1956, 39-41):

The Front Region (Front Stage): Comparable to a theater stage, this is the place where the performance is presented to the audience.

The Back Region (Back Stage): Comparable to the wings or backstage, this is the place where the performance is deliberately contradicted.

The distinction between these two zones is established through the control of the setting (furniture, physical design, background props, etc.) and the personal front. The latter includes appearance

(insignia of office or rank, clothing, gender, age, ethnic characteristics, size) and manner (looks, posture, speech styles, facial expressions, gestures). Generally, public access to the back stage is restricted and reserved only for intimates, as they are familiar with the most authentic performance of the self. (Nizar Khadem 2020, 118)

Goffman posits that conduct in the front region is characterized by a staged presentation designed to reveal only positive attributes while obscuring any actions or symbols that could disturb the communicative context. This is observed, for example, during job interviews, official meetings, or social ceremonies where one interacts with strangers or formal acquaintances (influencing language, attire, table manners, etc.). Conversely, behavior in the back region is characterized by spontaneity and an absence of constraints, much like our daily conduct with close friends or family within the home, where casual dress and comfortable postures are adopted.

In the context of social media usage, and more specifically Facebook, the segmentation of social interaction spaces refers to the modalities of virtual behavior management and the control of privacy settings by young users. It includes their capacity to effectively separate public spaces from private ones and to manage the display and performance of various self-images within micro-environments consisting of diverse audiences.

Privacy: Privacy is defined as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others" (Trepte 2020, 79). It fundamentally rests on the protection of personal data and information against any public dissemination or exploitation without the explicit consent of the individual concerned. It is also defined as "the control exercised by individuals over the duration, timing, and conditions of sharing their lives with others; privacy thus constitutes a right exercised by the individual to limit third-party access to aspects of their life, whether ideas or personal data" (Center of Bioethics, University of Colombia 2004). Privacy encompasses personal data such as email addresses, telephone numbers, bank details, photographs, information relating to home or work, details of private life, messaging, and any information shared via digital media that may be accessed by the others.

Within the framework of our study, privacy can be defined as the set of behaviors adopted by young people in managing their Facebook accounts and their modes of interaction within its spaces. The objective is to protect their digital confidentiality by controlling access to the information and posts they share, in order to reproduce digital social boundaries.

- **Social Networks:** Social networks are defined as "a set of websites that emerged with Web 2.0, enabling communication between individuals within a virtual community environment.

These users are grouped according to interests or networks of affiliation (country, university, school, company, etc.). This interaction takes place via direct communication services, such as instant messaging, or by consulting the personal profiles of others to keep informed of their news and the data they choose to expose" (Al-Shamaylah 2015, 199)

Regarding Facebook, the object of our study, the eponymous company presents its platform as a social tool helping individuals comprehend the reality surrounding them. It provides technologies that facilitate the flow of information across the network, thereby enabling an exchange of data online analogous to interactions in the physical world. Each user can create a personal profile using an email address or a telephone number to share information with their "friends" (Ben Bouziane 2018, 48). In short, Facebook is a site allowing individuals to generate personal accounts including a name, photograph, and various detailed data. Through this account, they can add contacts, share content, and interact with others, as well as with posts distributed across various groups and pages, which serve as genuine virtual human communities.

- **Digital Behavior:** Digital behavior is defined as the set of actions and activities an individual performs within the digital world, such as the websites visited, connection times, or the types of devices used. It constitutes a fundamental element in the construction of digital identity "Information obtained from the website": (<http://sciencedirect.com>" s.d.). This term also refers to the norms governing communication mediated by electronic devices as well as online activities. (Salma 2021, 7)

In the context of our study, **digital behavior** refers to the methods of managing settings on Facebook and the various forms of interaction within its spaces (personal profiles, groups, or pages), such as posting, commenting, or contact selection. These actions aim to segment these environments into virtual social interaction spaces based on the user's perception of the concept of privacy.

3. Segmenting Virtual Spaces Through Friend Selection on Facebook

The method of selecting "friends" on Facebook reflects how the user perceives the platform's spaces and evaluates them as zones where specific patterns of digital behavior manifest. This selection depends on the nature of the groups joined, whether based on real-life acquaintances (making Facebook a virtual extension of the physical world) or the formation of new friendships based on shared interests. Consequently, what criteria do the members of our sample use to include individuals in their friend lists?

Table No. (2): Representation of the nature of friends added on Facebook according to the gender variable.

Gender Nature of friends	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Family	14	21	46	56	60	40
Acquaintances and friends	17	25	33	40	50	33
Shared interests	26	38	3	4	29	19.5
Mutual friends	8	12	0	0	8	5.5
Anyone on Facebook	3	4	0	0	3	2
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
- Calculated X^2: 50.5 Degrees of freedom : 4 Significance level: 0.05 tabulated Chi-Square value: 9.49 - Result: There are statistically significant differences between the variables of gender and the basis for choosing friends.						

Source: Prepared by researchers

The examination of the table above reveals that the majority of sample members prioritize adding family members (40%), followed by those who base their choice on friendship and prior acquaintance (33%). Users selecting their contacts based on common interests represent 19.5%, while those who add individuals without distinction (undifferentiated criteria) constitute only 2% of the total.

These results confirm that social networks, and Facebook in particular, primarily serve to consolidate pre-existing relationships from real life. Users seek to strengthen their connections with family and friends known offline, using these platforms as a lever to consolidate these relationships through their virtual identity. This category also includes friendships initiated through mediated interaction that subsequently transitioned into a physical dimension (face-to-face); in such cases, actors disclose their real identity to stabilize and perpetuate the relationship. Numerous studies corroborate this finding, highlighting that individuals are more inclined to interact via digital networks with people from their immediate social circles than to establish new links. (M, Boyed et B 2008, 211)

The analysis of the study data according to the gender variable reveals a significant correlation between gender and the modalities of contact selection, as confirmed by the Chi-squared test (X^2 test). It appears female gender overwhelmingly prioritize adding family members (56%), followed by friends and prior acquaintances (40%). Additions based on common interests represent only 4% of

the female sample. Finally, no occurrences were recorded among female regarding additions based on suggested friendships or the undifferentiated acceptance of unknown contacts. Conversely, the male cohort is distinguished by a more marked propensity to select friends based on common interests (38%), followed by acquaintances and friends (25%), family (21%), mutual friends (12%), and, marginally, the acceptance of any user (4%).

These results highlight that women use Facebook more as a tool for consolidating pre-existing social connections (family and close friends) rather than as a space for relational prospecting with strangers. This trend can be explained by socio-cultural and religious determinants, as well as an increased mistrust of digital alterity, with virtual accounts being perceived as potentially deceptive. Qualitative data from the interviews corroborate this finding: five female respondents stated they do not trust individuals they have not met physically, systematically refusing friend requests without prior acquaintance. One respondent even recounted having encountered an account impersonating a friend. In contrast, a portion of the respondents (7 male and 2 female) emphasized that Facebook has indeed contributed to expanding their social and professional capital, sometimes leading to meetings in the physical world.²

From a theoretical standpoint, the rigorous selection of a friend list constitutes the primary step in segmenting interaction spaces between public and private spheres. Facebook's functionalities allow for the regulation of digital identity visibility by acting upon the very composition of the contact network. This process enables the dissociation of the front region (controlled performance) from the backstage (spontaneous performance). By configuring their friend list—through adding, removing, or blocking—the user masters the nature and scope of their audience. They reserve access to their most intimate content exclusively for "intimates," as the latter are the only ones capable of perceiving the "most authentic expression of self", (Nizar Khadem 2020, 118), namely close friends and family members.

4. Space Segmentation via Privacy Settings

In March 2008, the Facebook platform began implementing technical features allowing users to exercise increased control over their content, particularly regarding which other persons are authorized to view their detailed personal data, posts, and photographs. In this regard, **Mark Zuckerberg** stated that with the introduction of these new measures, the site was now providing tools that allowed for the selective and direct sharing of information. He further emphasized that these procedures did not reduce the volume of data shared on Facebook; on the contrary, they

²Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 26/12/2025 at 11:10.

encouraged users to increase their posting frequency by providing them with a sense of mastery over their audience . (Ben Sghir 2023, 179-180).

Table No. 03: Nature of the study sample's friends

Privacy settings methods Audience Categories	All data and posts		Most data and posts		Some data and posts		Hide all data and posts		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Family	98	65	20	13.5	23	15.5	9	6	150	100
Close friends	107	71	30	20	13	9	0	0	150	100
Other friends	72	48	35	23	37	25	6	4	150	100
Your professors/ teachers at university, school or institute. Your supervisor at work	54	36	26	17.5	44	29	26	17.5	150	100
Study or work colleagues	63	42	31	21	36	24	20	13	150	100
Strangers (anyone on Facebook)	38	25	8	5.5	51	34	53	35.5	150	100

Source: Elaborated by the researchers

The table above demonstrates that the configuration of privacy settings on Facebook by young users varies significantly according to the nature of the groups with which they interact. The results are presented as follows:

- **Family Circle:** The majority of respondents (**65%**) choose to make all of their profile information and posts visible to this category.
- **Close Friends Circle:** A similar trend is observed, as **71%** of respondents state they configure their profiles so that all their data and posts are accessible to their friends.
- **Other Acquaintances (Less Close Friends):** This visibility rate drops significantly, with only **48%** of users agreeing to share all of their data with this category.
- **Professional and Academic Sphere (Teachers and Superiors):** Only **36%** of respondents authorize full access to their information for this specific group.
- **Work or Study Colleagues:** The proportion of those displaying all their data rises to **42%**.

- **Strangers (General Public on Facebook):** For this category, the trend reverses radically. The majority of respondents (35.5%) choose to hide all of their data. An identical proportion (35.5%) states they conceal the majority of their information and posts from this audience.

These results suggest that the majority of respondents actively manage their profile privacy and segment their interaction spaces by controlling access to their information and activities. This process operates through a sequential approach, beginning with the rigorous selection of friend list members, followed by the technical configuration of privacy settings. The study reveals a marked trend toward full data visibility for the friendship circle, contrasting with total or partial concealment from individuals outside the network (non-friends).

Data from virtual interviews confirm this trend: a significant portion of respondents (5 men and 8 women) stated they prefer the "Friends only" visibility mode to restrict content sharing to those who share their interests, thereby preserving their privacy by avoiding "Public" mode. Conversely, a minority (2 male and 1 female) adopts a public visibility strategy, aiming to maximize the reach of their posts and increase their audience (followers and new contacts). Finally, the remaining respondents modulate privacy in a granular manner based on the nature of the shared content: some messages are intended for the global network, while others are reserved for a restricted circle. For example, one participant highlighted the use of codes or "inside jokes" shared exclusively with intimates, creating a symbolic complicity inaccessible to other people.³

Privacy control constitutes the crucial step in segmenting interaction spaces into public and private spheres. This process is carried out by adjusting the visibility of posts and identification data, either through "Friends only" mode, by restricting access to custom audience lists, or by selectively concealing certain personal information—with the exception of immutable elements such as the surname, which remains visible by default.

In this regard, the study by **Ellison and al.** highlights that social network users possess three levers to regulate data privacy: controlling the number of connections (friend list), the technical configuration of the platform, and the selection of exposed data. Correlating with this work, **Chen and Chen** demonstrated that individuals harboring reservations about their privacy adopt preservation strategies by drastically limiting their number of contacts and reducing the amount of information published on their personal profiles. (Taha 2023, 437)

Thus, the user grants the personal profile the status of either a public or private space based on the degree of visibility of the information they choose to disclose or withhold. Control here lies in defining the audience authorized to access the profile: it can be, in turn, a public space, a space

³ . Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 10/01/2026 at 14:10.

dedicated to a specific category, or a strictly private space. This means that the Facebook platform, through its technical structure, offers a configurational flexibility allowing for a fluid transition between the front stage and the backstage, depending on the adopted digital behavior.

For **Goffman**, human behavior in everyday life conforms to the specific role required by the place and the situation: the individual adopts distinct roles at home, at work, in the street, or at university, each governed by its own social norms and conventions to which they strive to conform. (Goffman 1956, 39-41). It is precisely according to this same paradigm that the individual perceives and inhabits virtual space.

This leads us to a deeper notion in Goffman's perspective: that of maintaining situational consistency. According to him, a performance can be compromised if actors "step out of character"—whether deliberately or accidentally—or if there is a dissonance between the definitions the parties give to the situation. The embodiment of a role involves both conscious and unconscious dimensions: we intentionally transmit information to others to shape our image, but we simultaneously emit, unbeknownst to us, cues that others intercept and integrate to decide how to conduct themselves toward us. (Goffman 1956, 39-41)

This is exactly why people use these segmentation and regulatory strategies to protect the image they want to project. To maintain the credibility of their front before certain categories of contacts with whom they maintain formal relationships—such as work colleagues or superiors—or toward whom they show a level of deference that prevents them from revealing certain facets of their private life, they restrict access to specific content.

5. Segmenting Virtual Spaces via Profile Locking:

Facebook users now have the option to "lock" their profile, thereby making their data invisible to anyone not included in their friend list. This setting offers enhanced protection and privacy for those experiencing intrusions from unwanted other people. We will focus here on the process of profile locking among the young respondents and its significance in the segmentation of virtual interaction spaces.

Table No. 04: Distribution of Profile Locking among respondents according to the gender variable.

Gender Responses	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	20	30	46	55.5	66	44
No	48	70	36	44.5	84	56

Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
Calculated X^2 :10.15 Degrees of freedom : 1 Significance level: 0.05 tabulated Chi-Square value:3.84 Result: There are statistically significant differences between the variables of gender and locking of personal profile						

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Based on the information above, it looks like the majority of individuals (56%) have not locked their personal profiles, while 44% have done so. The analysis demonstrates that the "gender" variable is a determining factor in this regard; the Chi-squared test (X^2 test) confirms the existence of statistically significant differences between gender and the use of profile locking, with a significantly more marked prevalence among women.

Through profile locking, some users—particularly women—aspire to enhanced privacy. This technical feature restricts access to the profile page to members of the friend list only, preventing other people from examining its details. This constitutes the construction of a hermetic barrier delimiting the private space (the profile), maintained as a withdrawal zone. By this means, the general public's access to the backstage is strictly regulated and reserved for intimates, the latter being the only ones familiar with the "most authentic expression of self". (Nizar Khadem 2020, 118)

The data collected during the interviews (15 respondents) corroborate this finding: the primary motivation for locking is the desire to evade nuisances and preserve the integrity of private life. On this point, the gender distribution is revealing, with 15 female versus 5 male citing the protection of intimacy as their motivation. Conversely, 5 male respondents specified that they did not lock their profiles with a view toward increased visibility, aiming to maximize the reach of their content and expand their relational network.⁴

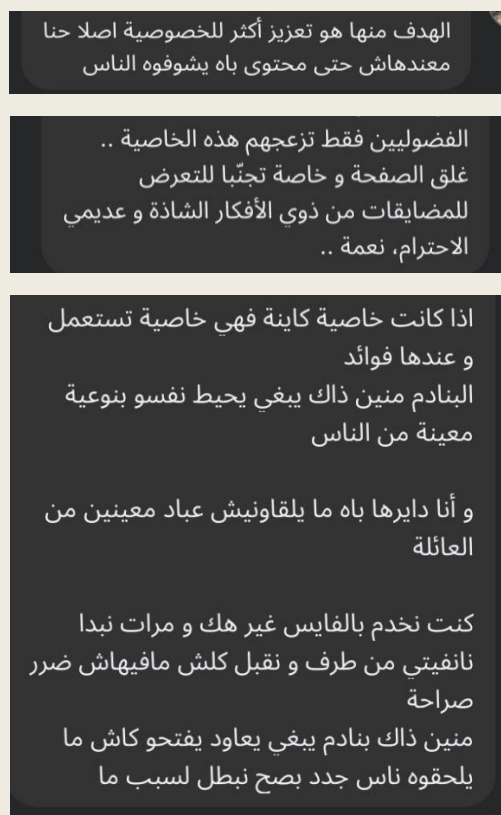
We observed heterogeneity of reactions within the studied groups of young people regarding the practice of profile locking. Opinions fluctuate between support, opposition, and derision, as evidenced by the interactions generated by a post dedicated to this topic in one of the groups. These exchanges indicate that profile locking serves as a lever for increased protection and privacy, particularly for female users. The latter are, in fact, frequently exposed to nuisances and embarrassing situations resulting from intrusive behaviors, most often originating from male users.

Furthermore, the perception of profile locking appears to be subject to a gendered double standard among male users: the act is judged with opprobrium (or is socially devalued) when practiced by a

⁴ Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 01/12/2025 at 17:14.

man, whereas it is perceived as a natural and legitimate step when it originates from a woman. The following figure illustrates a sample of these reactions:

Figure N (1): Reactions of a panel of young people to the profile locking process.⁵



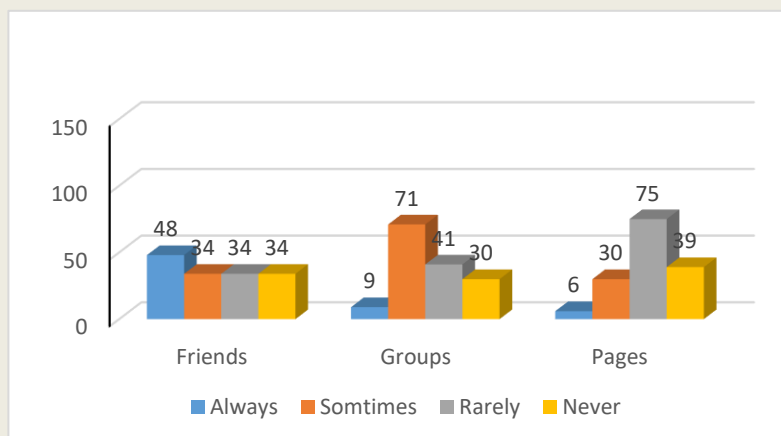
Source: Observation tool within Facebook groups

6. Segmenting Virtual Spaces Through Interaction and Posting

The manner in which a user interacts with content within Facebook's spaces constitutes a major indicator of their level of engagement and activity. It reflects, on one hand, their degree of integration into these digital environments and, on the other, their methods of segmentation and their social representations of these spaces. Furthermore, the frequency and modes of interaction testify to the user's posture—oscillating between openness and withdrawal—as well as their strategies for delimiting interaction spaces.

Figure (02): Represents the intensity of respondents' interaction with different parties

⁵ . Source: Observation tool, conducted within the youth groups where the study was carried out on 12/01/2026.



Source: prepared by the researchers.

The graph above highlights a variation in the frequency of interactions depending on the targeted entities (friends, groups, pages). The statistical results are as presented below:

- **Interaction with friends' posts:** The largest cohort of respondents (42%) states that they "sometimes" interact with content shared by their friends.
- **Interaction within groups:** A similar trend is observed, as the majority of respondents (47%) "sometimes" interact with group content.
- **Interaction with page content:** Half of the respondents (50%) claim to "rarely" interact with this type of content.

It appears from these results that the overall activity of the sample members, as measured by interaction, is moderate. Indeed, the response "sometimes" is the dominant frequency, with a total of 135 occurrences across all categories. These data also indicate a hierarchy in engagement: respondents prioritize interaction with friends over groups, and within groups over pages.

This suggests an inverse correlation between the degree of the space's publicity and the engagement rate: the more an interaction space is perceived as public (or generalist), the more respondents manifest a communicative disinterest (or withdrawal). Conversely, the frequency of interaction seems indexed to the degree of privacy and the intimacy of social connections. Relational proximity with the friendship circle thus fosters more sustained engagement than in more impersonal or open spaces.

This finding is corroborated by the statements of seven interviewees (five women and two men). They specified that their reluctance to interact within public spaces, such as groups or pages, is dictated by a desire to preserve their private sphere. One respondent notably highlighted that she

systematically received unsolicited messages from other users whenever she posted a comment in an open space. Conversely, the other thirteen interview participants stated they perceived no major obstacles to expressing themselves or commenting within these public spaces.⁶

7. Posting and Commenting via the Anonymity Feature within Groups

In its recent updates, Facebook introduced a new function: anonymous posting within groups. This service, the activation of which depends on settings defined by group administrators, allows for content to be posted without the author's digital identity (name and profile picture) being visible to other members. Only administrators and moderators retain access to the sender's information. More recently, an anonymous commenting function has also been deployed, though its widespread availability requires the installation of the latest version of updates of the application.

The emergence of this feature reinforces the idea of Facebook spaces being perceived as distinct zones, where differentiated behavioral patterns manifest. Consequently, how do the members of our sample appropriate this interaction tool?

Table N (5): Represents the use of the anonymity feature for posting and commenting according to the gender variable.

Gender Categories	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	21	31	48	59	69	46
No	47	69	34	41	81	54
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
-Calculated X^2 :9.9 Degrees of freedom : 1 Significance level: 0.05 tabulated Chi-Square value:3.84 -Result: There are statistically significant differences between the variables of gender And using the anonymous posting and commenting feature.						

Source: prepared by the researchers.

The table above indicates that the majority of respondents (54%) do not use the anonymity feature (anonymous posting/commenting) within groups, compared to 46% who report using it. The analysis reveals a significant correlation between the "gender" variable and the use of this feature, as confirmed by the Chi-squared test (X^2 test). A female predominance is noted, with a usage rate of 59% among female, compared to 31% among male. These statistical data are corroborated by our

⁶ Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 13/01/2026 at 20:17.

field observations within the studied groups: the majority of anonymous posts originate from female users, as evidenced by the themes addressed as well as the linguistic cues (gender agreements and pronouns) employed.

This gender disparity is explained by the propensity of female gender to seek to evade potential nuisances, a motive cited by the majority of female interviewees (7 out of 10). Anonymity is also mobilized as a safeguard against hostile reactions (cyber-violence) or to address intimate subjects likely to generate a sense of embarrassment, a reason mentioned by four respondents (2 male and 2 female). For users wishing not to disclose their real identity, digital anonymity thus fulfills several strategic functions. Finally, ten other participants emphasized that this feature fosters greater freedom of expression during debates on matters of general interest.⁷

The use of the anonymity function acts as a social mask or a shield, allowing the user to express themselves freely within a public space such as Facebook groups, which are characterized by a vast and heterogeneous audience. In practice, digital invisibility is not perceived negatively, especially when it allows users to avoid the derogatory or inappropriate comments they do not wish to face under their real identity. This confirms that psychological factors are directly at the root of identity concealment.

As for the reception of anonymous posts by group members, reactions fluctuate between acceptance and rejection, as illustrated by the following example:

Figure N (3): represents some of the reactions to posting and commenting using the anonymous feature.⁸



Source: Observation tool.

⁷ Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 18/01/2026 at 18:15.

⁸ Source: Observation tool, conducted within the Facebook groups where the study was carried out on 01/02/2026

Actors who expressed rejection of the use of anonymity emphasized that this practice is likely to alter the quality and level of interactions within groups with a serious purpose. According to them, it opens the door to a transgression of the norms and values required for debate and exchange. A negative perception of anonymous posting is thus observed, as it appears to cause a substantial loss of credibility in the eyes of virtual community members. Individuals tend to grant more credit to narratives supported by real identities (or even pseudonyms), while posts under the cover of technical anonymity are often exposed to indifference or hostile reactions. This finding is shared by several interviewees, who highlighted the deleterious effects of identity invisibility, despite its manifest advantages regarding protection against harassment and embarrassment.⁹

It also appears that the digital context in which this feature is used radically influences the nature of the reactions. In scientific and academic groups, characterized by the rigor of exchanges, this mode of interaction is generally prohibited or rejected. Conversely, in social or recreational groups comprising diversified profiles, anonymous posting is perceived as an ordinary practice and benefits from positive resonance and reactivity from members. Furthermore, our observations indicate that the anonymity of posts and comments has sometimes contributed to a depreciation of content quality, by facilitating the emergence of unethical themes or by encouraging a disregard for the rules of netiquette and dialogue within the comments.¹⁰

Table No. 06: Hierarchy of virtual spaces by respondents, from most private to most public, according to the gender variable.

Gender Virtual Spaces	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conversations	37	54	53	65	90	60
Personal profile	14	21	24	30	38	25
Groups	15	22	4	5	19	13
Pages	2	3	1	1	3	2
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
-Calculated X^2 :10.97 Degrees of freedom : 3 Significance level: 0.05 tabulated Chi-Square value:07.81						
- Result: Statistically significant differences exist between gender and how respondents evaluate virtual						

⁹ Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 17/01/2026 at 18:11.

¹⁰ Source: Observation tool, conducted within the Facebook groups where the study was carried out on 15/01/2026

spaces.

Source: Developed by the researchers.

The data presented in the table indicate that the majority of sample members (60%) consider private messaging (Messenger) to be the most confidential space. The personal profile ranks second (25%), followed by groups (13%), while pages come last with only 2%.

The analysis demonstrates that the "gender" variable significantly influences the respondents' choices, as confirmed by the Chi-squared test. A clear divergence appears in the evaluation of the personal profile as a high-privacy space: the rate is higher among female (30%) than among male (21%). Conversely, regarding groups perceived as more public spaces, male represent the largest proportion (22%) compared to only 5% for female.

This classification reflects the way respondents segment Facebook spaces into public and private spheres. According to the interviews conducted (11 respondents), spaces such as messaging and the profile allow for more confidential interaction due to the ability to control the number of interlocutors. In contrast, interaction is deemed "exposed" in spaces like pages and groups, where it is difficult to control the audience for posts and comments—particularly in public mode compared to secret or closed groups.¹¹

Consequently, we can establish a hierarchy of virtual spaces, from the most private to the least private, as follows: Private Messaging > Personal Profiles > Groups > Pages.

In this configuration, public spaces (groups and pages) act as the front region (or stage), while messaging and profiles shared with intimates constitute the backstage (back region). The latter offer optimal control over the accessibility of content (messages, posts, comments), whereas the former do not allow the user to regulate who views their interactions.

A computer and virtual worlds enthusiast, known by the pseudonym "Nerd," highlighted that he perceives Internet spaces as distinct zones. He explains that when browsing the Web, his mind fragments: he feels as though he is two, three, or more people, shifting from one mental state to another with each change of browser window. (Rabeh 2014, 35)

This idea aligns precisely with Goffman's thesis, which posits that the individual conforms to the requirements of each "scene" during their daily interactions. Each scene imposes its own specific codes: language, signs, appearance, and particular expressions, without the actor confusing these different theaters of action. Thus, the individual acquires the ability to transition fluidly from one scene to another, almost unconsciously.

¹¹ Source: Virtual interviews conducted via Messenger on 10/01/2026 at 21:10.

Following the same logic, the user manages their virtual behavior through the multiplicity of windows within the digital environment. They project a different image of the self from one interface to another, depending on the data of the interactional context specific to each window and the nature of the audience being addressed.

Conclusion

The interpretive analysis of Facebook users' behavior demonstrates that their perception of privacy is intrinsically linked to their digital agency, aimed at reconstructing and reshaping their own social boundaries. In this context, the segmentation of virtual spaces emerges as a strategic adaptation mechanism within the digital environment. By mobilizing technical control tools—such as friend list selection, privacy settings, profile locking, or the use of anonymity—users reactivate social contexts governed by a logic akin to Erving Goffman's theory on the division of interaction spaces into public and private spheres. This approach seeks to regulate the nature of the audience authorized to access specific segments of the self-presentation, which varies according to the degree of visibility granted.

Consequently, performance and interaction prove to be spontaneous, free, and authentic within spaces the user classifies as "private" (personal profiles, messaging). Conversely, they tend toward theatricalization and formalism in spaces perceived as "public" (groups, pages). In each virtual theater, the individual conforms to the requirements for posting and interacting. They thus manage their digital behavior through the multiplicity of windows in the digital environment, projecting differentiated facets of their personality according to the interactional context of each interface. This process is analogous to everyday life interactions, where the individual adjusts their language, signs, dress, and expressions to the setting inhabited, developing a capacity to transition fluidly from one scene to another without explicit awareness.

In conclusion, understanding digital behavior related to the perception of privacy on social networks cannot be limited solely to legal or technical dimensions. It necessitates an opening toward broader sociological approaches, viewing these behaviors as social practices aimed at reorganizing the digital interactional space. As such, the analysis of virtual space segmentation strategies constitutes an essential key to understanding the modalities of the permanent negotiation of social presence boundaries in an era of profound mutations induced by digital communication tools.

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