

Digital Ethnography and Goffman's Theory of Self:

The Case of Product-Promotion Videos on YouTube*

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This study explores how digital ethnography helps researchers apply language-related theories originally designed for face-to-face communication to digital social interaction. It provides an empirical case study on YouTube to illuminate some of the ways digital ethnography proves the analytical appropriateness of theories modeled on language use before the computer era, or from relatively old computer-mediated discourses, to technology-mediated communication. By investigating product-promotion videos created by YouTuber Chien-Chien, this study draws on Goffman's theory of self (1959) to investigate online interaction between Chien-Chien and viewers based in Taiwan. Specifically, I analyze how this YouTuber crafts personae to increase purchases, while maintaining some consistent characteristics of her authentic self. As I conducted research on Chien-Chien's YouTube channel starting in 2021, I employed three primary digital ethnography techniques: participant observation, analysis of electronic logs of data, and contextualization of data with constellations of sociocultural realities. The analysis shows four primary practices Chien-

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Chien discursively uses to present the diversity of self: code-switching, her “signature move,” establishing herself as a professional eater, and giving detailed sensory descriptions of food. The first strategy, code-switching, mostly between Mandarin Chinese and Southern Min, projects a “girl next door” image. The second is a gestural flourish she developed to promote her brand and celebrity status. The third and fourth strategies go hand in hand: Chien-Chien demonstrates a healthy appetite and a proclivity for evaluating food multimodally. That is, to engage viewers’ attention she uses actions and verbal descriptions of culinary experience through which viewers can vicariously eat with relish. Distinctive dimensions of Chien-Chien’s self are on show: She presents as amiable, professional, ebullient, and a person who banters with friends and displays a theory of mind from viewers’ perspectives. These techniques together illuminate the self in digital presentations.

Participant observation has given me a clear view of microcelebrities’ interactions with viewers. By joining their online communities regularly, I take a natural approach to comprehending the self and its construction in situated communications. A byproduct of this extended participant observation has been the accumulation of an electronic archive of data. Retaining that data in a synchronic collection, I can revisit videos and comments produced in a specific spatiotemporal configuration. Additionally, social context adds depth to my interpretation of the data. Along with consideration of the viewers, other microcelebrities, and sponsors, contextual features help me arrive at a pragmatic and interactional interpretation of the connotations of self in YouTube videos.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, it reviews how the theory of self has been applied to digital interaction. Second, I explore the anthro-linguistic nuances of YouTubers’ and viewers’ language use in relation to a concept of self that is less discussed in the current scholarship on Mandarin Chinese social media. Furthermore, this study offers methodological inputs for digital ethnography as an effective means of analyzing community-based interaction and the interpretation of meaning on social media platforms.

Keywords: celebrification, digital ethnography, product-promotion videos, self, technology-mediated communication

數位民族誌於高夫曼自我理論之應用： 以YouTube商品行銷影片為例

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本文探討數位民族誌如何協助研究者運用高夫曼自我理論於多媒體分析，以探究科技中介溝通的自我概念及語言互動。此論文從分析與反思之雙重角度出發，詳探作者近年來遇到的挑戰：數位民族誌如何擴展或侷限發展於網路普及前的語言人類學理論？再者，數位民族誌在社交媒體平台之自我建構與觀眾回應，扮演什麼角色？本文以YouTube影音頻道台灣網路名人千千的食物行銷影片為例，討論她如何透過名人化策略建構自我形象並促銷商品，以及觀眾如何回應她的名人化策略。分析結果顯示了四種常用策略。第一，語碼轉換，千千經常交換使用在臺華語及閩南語，建立鄰家女孩可親形象，並且強化食物在地連結。第二，招牌姿勢，用以強化名人氣勢，展現推薦美食之自信。第三個策略和第四個策略經常並用，分別是呈現暨懂門道也懂享受之專業美食家形象，以及使用豐富的五感經驗描述食物風味。本文立基於作者自2021年以降在千千YouTube社群的數位民族誌研究，詳探三個民族誌方法－參與觀察、建立數位資料檔案、脈絡化資料詮釋－如何協助作者理解自我的動態建構。本文提供三方面貢獻。本文耙梳多媒體研究對自我概念的文獻；其次，本文從語言人類學和社會語言學的取徑分析中文文獻較少討論的多媒體自我呈現；再者，本文探討數位民族誌的方法運用，以及自我概念運用於多媒體之理論考量。

關鍵詞：名人化，數位民族誌，商品行銷影片，自我，科技中介溝通
