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Protective Self-Presentation for Audiences with Interdependent Self-Construals on Ephemeral Platforms: The Case of Humblebragging



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ABSTRACT

Humblebragging is conceptualized as a form of protective self-presentation that utilizes complaints or humility to avoid social penalties. Across two online experiments, participants viewed a fictitious person's self-promotion attempt on Instagram, which differed in terms of self-presentation type (positive self-presentation vs. humblebragging) and message ephemerality (persistent vs. ephemeral). Results indicated that people who positively self-presented elicited greater task attraction among audiences than people who humblebragged. Mediation analyses also revealed that audiences perceived humblebragging as manipulative, which diminished their perceived social attraction and task attraction of the message sender. However, these advantages of positive self-presentation (vs. humblebragging) were constrained within persistent messages; the disadvantages of humblebragging were absent among ephemeral messages. Additionally, Study 1 found that audiences with greater interdependent self-construal appreciated humblebragging as an effective protective self-presentation strategy. Although prior research showed that humblebragging was ineffective, this research identified audience and message characteristics that minimized the deleterious effects of humblebragging.

A dominant perspective in interpersonal digitally mediated communication is that people have self-enhancement motivations, prompting them to engage in *acquisitive self-presentation* (Arkin, 1981), i.e., strategic self-presentation to acquire desired and believable identity images (Schlenker, 2012). Many seminal theories of (online and offline) self-presentation best lend themselves to acquisitive self-presentation. For example, Leary and Kowalski's (1990) impression management model posits that people strategically self-present based on their audience's values to attain their desired interpersonal goals. These tenets are generalizable to digital communication—which this research is premised upon. As suggested by the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996), message senders “can be more deliberative about choosing the message

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elements that convey their most desired impression online than in spontaneous speech” (Walther & Whitty, 2021, p. 122).

Amid the theoretical focus on acquisitive self-presentations, a distinct kind of self-presentation may have been unwittingly neglected: *protective self-presentation*, defined as “the desire to avoid significant losses in social approval or actually garnering social disapproval” (Arkin, 1981, p. 314). In several instances, protective self-presentation is conceptualized as *reticence*, i.e., omitting information or revealing less information (cf. Rui & Stefanone, 2013), such as “undesirable physical appearance and behavior” (Walther & Whitty, 2021, p. 122). This implicit prioritization of acquisitive self-presentation over protective self-presentation (e.g., Attrill & Jalil, 2011; Schouten et al., 2007) is not surprising: It is much easier to study something that is observable (e.g., self-disclosure) than something that is not (e.g., reticence).

Given the limited research on online protective self-presentation, the present study aims to advance understanding of this domain in several ways. First, it went beyond reticence and conceptualized protective self-presentation as having observable message elements. To this end, it operationalized protective self-presentations as humblebragging messages (defined as “bragging masked by a complaint or humility;” Sezer et al., 2018, p. 52). It also compared protective self-presentations with acquisitive self-presentations, which were operationalized as positive self-presentation messages. Instead of conceptualizing humblebragging as a form of impression mismanagement (Steinmetz et al., 2017), we argued that humblebragging should be viewed as a form of protective self-presentation that may be favored by people with high interdependent self-construals—people whose sense of self is highly entwined with their social group memberships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Second, this study proposed that ephemeral messages (i.e., messages that disappear after a fixed amount of time, like in Snapchat or Instagram Stories; Bayer et al., 2016) may be well-suited for protective self-presentation. Therefore, message senders should be perceived as more attractive (or less unattractive) if their self-presentation motives appear congruent with message ephemerality. Specifically, audiences could perceive ephemeral humblebragging messages as stemming from message senders’ genuine attempt to downplay their own accomplishments. Conversely, persistent humblebragging messages could indicate message senders’ insincerity (see Sezer et al., 2018). Thus, humblebragging should be more beneficial for senders when disseminated on ephemeral platforms than on persistent platforms.

Third, this study proposed that humblebragging is ineffective because it is seen as an attempt to control and influence the audience. It drew upon Friestad and Wright’s (1994) persuasion knowledge model (PKM) to explain how audiences recognize the “ulterior and self-serving motives” underlying humblebragging (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022, p. 4). Audiences then cope with these unsolicited persuasive messages by exhibiting negative evaluations and

behaviors toward a message sender (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). In doing so, this study also extended the PKM from advertising contexts to interpersonal digitally mediated communication.

Humblebragging

Humblebragging refers to “efforts to mask bragging in the guise of complaining or appearing humble” (Steinmetz et al., 2017, p. 6). One fictitious example offered by Sezer et al. (2018) was: “I am so tired of being the only person that my boss could trust to train the new employees” (p. 52). Real-life examples of humblebragging on Instagram collected by Kováčová (2022) include:

- (a) mariajblogs: [a medium shot of the user standing in the street] This time yesterday I found out I was nominated for instagrammer of the year in the @blogosphere_magazine #BlogosphereAwards2019 and I genuinely can't believe it... even more ironic that I didn't post yesterday 🤦 (p. 76)
- (b) robynpoppy: [a long shot of the user jumping in the street] Jumping for joy because life is good and I finally got up that blog post that I've been meaning to write for a while. It's all about gaining confidence whilst shooting in public! Because we all know it can be potentially awkward and uncomfortable at times! Let me know what you think 😬 (p. 78)

In the first instance, mariajblogs attempted to convey humility regarding her award nomination by saying that she did not immediately publicize her achievement despite finding out about it “[t]his time yesterday” and inserting a facepalm emoji. In the second instance, robynpoppy complained by saying that shooting in public—despite being part of her job as an influencer—“can be potentially awkward and uncomfortable.” In contrast, humility involves celebrating others or avoiding attention from others (Weidman et al., 2018)—qualities absent from these humblebragging examples.

Across multiple studies that included online experiments, field experiments, and diary studies, humblebraggers were perceived as more insincere, prompting others to like them less than people who positively self-present or even straightforward braggers¹ (Feng et al., 2023; Sezer et al., 2018). Although the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) was not explicitly tested in this research, one of its core tenets—that receivers amplify online cues to form exaggerated impressions of message senders—still applies. These online cues are typically amplified positively when message receivers recognize and cognitively magnify positive cues by message senders (Walther, 1996). However, the negative cues that denote humblebragging can also be magnified, resulting in “hyper-negative” interpretations (Sillars & Zorn, 2021). From this perspective, even the most subtle humblebragging can produce a substantial degree of perceived insincerity, leading to negative self-presentational outcomes for message

senders—such as less interpersonal attraction. McCroskey and McCain (1974) found that interpersonal attraction had three dimensions: social attraction (attraction to someone as a friend), task attraction (attraction to someone as a task collaborator), and physical attraction (attraction to someone's physical appearance). As physical attraction is irrelevant to the present research, we operationalized interpersonal attraction using two dimensions: social attraction and task attraction. Therefore:

H1: People who positively self-present engender greater (a) social attraction and (b) task attraction among audiences than people who humblebrag.

If humblebragging is disliked, why do people still humblebrag? Sezer et al. (2018) proposed that “people believe that humblebragging allows them to highlight their positive qualities and convey competence with a brag, while enabling them to elicit liking by masking their self-aggrandizing statements in a complaint or humility” (p. 52). The present research, however, presents a different but complementary perspective: People humblebrag not to elicit liking, but to avoid accruing dislike.

Humblebragging as Protective Self-Presentation

According to Schütz (1998), there are two types of protective self-presentation. The first type, “trying not to look bad by avoiding the conveyance of negative impressions” (Schütz, 1998, p. 617), is commonly discussed in the digitally mediated communication literature. That is, people exploit the relatively fewer cues in online interactions (vs. face-to-face interactions) to conceal undesirable traits to intended audiences. In offline contexts, this behavior has been given different labels such as reticence or communication avoidance (Phillips, 1991). The second type, “trying not to look bad by fighting off negative typifications,” is used to “minimize the damage that has been done after desired identities have been threatened or damaged” (Schütz, 1998, p. 618). Humblebragging potentially falls into the second type of protective self-presentation. For instance, people may perceive straightforward braggers as arrogant and inconsiderate because the bragging made them feel inferior. To mitigate these unfavorable perceptions, humblebraggers could express humility or complain about the inconveniences arising from their personal achievements. Given this reasoning, questions that arise include whether humblebragging is always impression mismanagement, as Steinmetz et al. (2017) claimed. Would audiences, for instance, think that humblebraggers fear others' negative evaluations, and hence judge humblebraggers less harshly under certain circumstances?

Humblebragging as protective self-presentation can thus be seen as a response to the potential drawbacks of acquisitive self-presentation. The

problem with straightforward bragging (or to a lesser extent, positive self-presentation) is that although it can make a message sender appear impressive or competent, it can also impinge on the *positive face*² of audiences, that is, “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), message senders’ straightforward bragging “indicates [their willingness] to cause distress to [their audience], and/or doesn’t care about [their audience’s] feelings” (p. 67). Echoing this point, Brody and Peña (2013) argued that “messages that denote that the sender is bragging or boasting . . . are threats to positive face because they can potentially affect the self-image of a message hearer” (p. 209). Put differently, bragging may elicit malicious envy among audiences, who also want good things to happen to themselves (Feng et al., 2023). Therefore, from this perspective, message senders mix their acquisitive self-presentations (e.g., brags, positive self-presentations) with protective elements (e.g., humility or complaints) to minimize the potential injury to their audience’s positive face.

Considering the foregoing, if humblebragging is perceived as a form of protective self-presentation, audiences should view humblebraggers as having relatively high “apprehension at the prospect of being evaluated negatively” (Leary, 1983, p. 371), otherwise known as fear of negative evaluation.

H2: People who humblebrag are perceived to have a greater fear of negative evaluation than people who positively self-present.

Conditional Effects of Humblebragging

Although we expect positive self-presentations to—generally—garner more favorable perceptions of social and task attraction for a message sender than humblebragging, there may be some exceptions. Empirical research has shown that the effects of self-presentation types can be conditional. Specifically, two studies show that bragging/humblebragging outcomes depend on the perceived status of a message sender. In advertising contexts, Paramita and Septianto’s (2021) study found an interaction effect between the type of self-presentation (bragging vs. complaint-based humblebragging) and the message sender’s status (high status, operationalized as celebrities vs. low status, operationalized as influencers). Among celebrities, humblebragging engendered more positive brand attitudes than straightforward bragging. Among influencers, however, bragging engendered more positive brand attitudes than humblebragging. The authors argued that message senders with high status, such as celebrities, are expected to receive privileges and can reap rewards “when they disclose their misfortunes” (Paramita & Septianto, 2021, p. 1299), but message senders with low status,

such as influencers, may be perceived as being ungrateful if they complain about their privileges. Chen et al. (2020) found a similar pattern of results in their study about online tourism reviews. Among high status (expert) reviewers, humblebragging about a hotel engendered more positive perceptions of the hotel than bragging; but among low status (inexpert) reviewers, bragging engendered more positive perceptions of the hotel than humblebragging (Chen et al., 2020).

The conditional effects of humblebragging can also be attributed to the audience's values. In particular, Leech's (1983) modesty maxim states that one should "minimize praise of self" or "maximize dispraise of self" (p. 136). By bragging or positively self-presenting, a message sender may be perceived as having violated the modesty maxim, and thus be viewed as impolite. According to Leech (1983), the modesty maxim may be more valued in certain cultures such as Japanese society. Conversely, in English-speaking cultures, it is more polite to accept a compliment than to deny it. Is it then possible that humblebragging is more efficacious among particular audiences that value modesty? In the following section, we propose *interdependent self-construal* as an indicator of an audience's preference for modesty and as a better alternative to cultural-level explanations.

Self-construal

People's self-concepts are not wholly made up of inward-focused elements such as their personalities or cognitions; rather, self-concepts also involve social components (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). With this perspective, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed the concept of self-construals to explain intercultural differences arising from variations in people's self-perception. There are two types of self-construals: independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal. People with high *independent* self-construal perceive themselves as unique individuals "whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to [their] own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). Comparatively, people with high *interdependent* self-construal perceive themselves "as part of an encompassing social relationship," whereby their thoughts, feelings, and actions are prescribed by and contingent on the prevailing social group norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227).

From a cultural perspective, Feng et al. (2023) suggested that because "humility is widely considered a virtue in Chinese culture" (p. 2), humblebragging is more aligned with Chinese moral norms and can weaken the negative connotation of straightforward bragging. Therefore, humblebragging may—in societies where most individuals have high interdependent self-construal—serve as an adequate method of protective self-presentation after self-promotion. However, interdependent self-construal was not measured in Feng et al.'s (2023) study. Despite noting that Chinese culture values humility,

Feng et al. (2023) found that humblebragging engendered greater envy and greater perceived insincerity in Chinese audiences than bragging.

Feng et al.'s (2023) evidence that humblebragging is ineffective in China is one thing, but equally important for the present purposes is the revealing of a potential incompatibility between cultural-level explanations and individual-level measures: If self-construals were conceptualized as individual-level traits, to what extent are they appropriate for making cultural-level generalizations? Would not an individualistic society have members with high interdependent self-construal, and a collectivistic society have members with high independent self-construal?

Indeed, various scholars have moved beyond making cultural comparisons and used self-construal to explain individual differences pertaining to social phenomena (e.g., Shim et al., 2016; Singelis, 1994). Instead of making a cultural argument, the present research proposes that the more people have interdependent self-construals, the more they appreciate message senders who make an effort to protect audiences' positive face, and who adhere to the modesty maxim.

H1 predicted that, overall, people who positively self-present garner more favorable perceptions of social and task attraction than people who humblebrag. However, the empirical evidence (Chen et al., 2020; Paramita & Septianto, 2021) and the reasoning behind interdependent self-construals point to the conditional effects of humblebragging:

H3: Among audiences less interdependent in their self-construals, people who positively self-present engender greater (a) social attraction and (b) task attraction than people who humblebrag; but among audiences more interdependent in their self-construals, people who humblebrag engender greater (a) social attraction and (b) task attraction than people who positively self-present.

Message Ephemerality

Although social media messages can persist in cyberspace for a long time, the creation of Snapchat and Instagram Stories (among others) has led to the conceptualization of message *ephemerality*, which refers to the transient nature of social media messages that disappear after 24 hr or after they are read (Bayer et al., 2016). Across various studies, people have professed strikingly similar reasons for using social media to send ephemeral messages. For example, Bayer et al. (2016) found that “the content shared via Snapchat was typically mundane, quotidian ‘little snippets’ of everyday life” (p. 966). Xu et al. (2016) noted, “knowing that content will disappear quickly gives people the license to share more than they would in a more ‘permanent’ medium” (p. 1665). Luria and Foulds (2021) found that people preferred ephemerality when their messages were personal or

silly, and that people felt embarrassed when old content that did not reflect their current selves was still publicly accessible. The reasoning undergirding all these explanations is that people send ephemeral messages when they do not want their self-presentations to exemplify themselves in the long-term.

As such, a person who desires to show off should self-present using persistent social media messages. Conversely, if one was truly sincere about not showing off (i.e., adhering to the modesty maxim) or not flaunting one's achievements (i.e., not violating others' positive face), one should celebrate one's achievements via ephemeral messages. This perspective is also congruent with the notion that humblebragging is a form of protective self-presentation: People should ensure that their self-presentations are ephemeral if they want to avoid being seen as arrogant while showing off. Therefore:

H4: People who positively self-present engender greater (a) social attraction and (b) task attraction among audiences than people who humblebrag, and this difference is less pronounced for ephemeral messages but more pronounced for persistent messages.

Perceived Manipulative Intent

Friestad and Wright's (1994) persuasion knowledge model (PKM) posits that people learn about persuasion motives and tactics through their personal observations, interpersonal interactions, and "culturally-supplied folk wisdom" (p. 1). Over time, people acquire persuasion knowledge—a set of beliefs about the topic (e.g., products, services, issues) and message sender (e.g., advertiser), which informs their recognition, interpretation, and assessment of persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham & Nelson, 2016). Upon activating their persuasion knowledge, people "select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 3).

Upon encountering persuasion attempts, people actively scrutinize the observable message elements to identify whether a message sender has ulterior motives (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). Contextualizing the PKM's tenets to this study, audiences should recognize contradictions between the message sender's self-promotion (e.g., winning the top paper award at a prestigious academic conference) and their efforts to convey humility. Since audiences perceive humblebragging as insincere attempts to conceal the message sender's self-promotion (Sezer et al., 2018), they should exhibit negative coping responses to the message sender's trivialization of their own achievements (e.g., "It's not a big deal") and attribution of success to luck (e.g., "I just got lucky!"). Hence, an indirect effect is predicted:

H5: People who humblebrag engender greater perceived manipulative intent than people who positively self-present, and this greater perceived manipulative intent leads to less (a) social attraction and (b) task attraction among audiences.

Study 1: Method

A 2 (self-presentation type: positive self-presentation/humblebrag) \times 2 (message ephemerality: persistent/ephemeral) between-subjects experiment was conducted to test the hypotheses. Participants were randomly placed into one of four possible conditions, and thereafter, shown the appropriate stimuli. To encourage participants to observe the stimuli, the “next” button on the questionnaire was disabled for the first 30 s. After 30 s have passed, participants clicked “next” and completed the questionnaire. Two attention checks (e.g., “Select strongly disagree if you’re paying attention”) were placed in the questionnaire. Participants who failed either attention check ($n = 16$) were removed from analyses.

Sample

Power analyses assuming a small-to-medium effect size indicated that at least 259 participants were required to obtain at least 80% power when performing a F test on four groups. US-based participants were recruited from Prolific. Participants also had to use Instagram, as the stimuli were based on this app. After eliminating those who failed attention checks, a total of $N = 377$ participants remained.

Among the 377 valid participants, 52.3% were female, 45.6% were male, 1.1% were non-binary, and 1.1% indicated “prefer not to say.” Their ages ranged from 18 to 74 years old ($M = 34.49$, $SD = 8.64$). 69.5% were White, 9.0% were Black, 5.8% were Asian, 5.3% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 0.3% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and the rest indicated mixed or other ethnicities.

Stimuli

In all conditions, the message sender was a fictitious man who used “i.m. thomasjwilson” as his Instagram handle, and whose profile photo was AI-generated. All participants saw a photo depicting the back view of a man giving a presentation to a crowded room.

Self-presentation type was manipulated using the caption. Conditions featuring *positive self-presentation* showed the message sender was “proud” to



Figure 1. Stimuli, Study 1. From left to right: persistent positive self-presentation, persistent humblebrag, ephemeral positive self-presentation, ephemeral humblebrag.

have won a top paper award at a conference and that “this achievement [meant] a lot” to him. Conditions featuring *humblebragging* showed the message sender was “humbled” to have won a top paper award at a conference, accompanied with his claim that he “just got lucky.” Message ephemerality was manipulated using different Instagram content types. The *persistent* self-presentation was shared as an Instagram post, while the *ephemeral* self-presentation was shared as an Instagram Story. In the questionnaire, the experimental manipulation was reinforced by embedding a description of the different Instagram content types above the image. See [Figure 1](#) for all four conditions.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all responses were scored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The question stem for social and task attraction instructed participants to “answer the following questions while thinking of the profile owner you just saw on Instagram.” Social attraction was measured using three items from McCroskey and McCain (1974): “I think he could be a friend of mine,” “I would like to have a friendly chat with him,” and “He would be pleasant to be with,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$. Task attraction was measured using another three items from McCroskey and McCain (1974): “I have confidence in his ability to get the job done,” “If I wanted to get things done I could probably depend on him,” and “You could count on him getting a job done,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$.

Perceived manipulative intent was measured using three items adapted from Cotte et al. (2005): “The profile owner tried to manipulate the audience,”

“The profile owner attempted to control what the audience thought,” and “The profile owner desired to influence the audience without them knowing it,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$.

Interdependent self-construal was measured using eight items from three sources (Detenber & Rosenthal, 2018; Levine et al., 2003; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002). Sample items include: “It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group,” “My relationships with those in my group are more important than my personal accomplishments,” and “I respect the majority’s wishes in groups of which I am a member,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$.

The manipulation check items for self-presentation type asked participants to evaluate how much the profile owner was trying to “appear humble” and “overtly brag.” The manipulation check for ephemerality read, “The screenshot you saw was:” followed by a 7-point semantic differential scale from *only temporarily accessible to audiences* to *accessible to audiences for a long time*.

Study 1: Results

Manipulation Checks

Participants rated the message sender who humblebragged ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.50$) as trying to appear humble to a greater extent than the message sender who positively self-presented ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(375) = 8.14$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 0.84$. Participants did not perceive the message sender who positively self-presented ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.68$) as trying to overtly brag to a greater extent than the message sender who humblebragged ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.86$), $t(375) = 0.63$, $p = .527$. Taken together, participants accurately perceived the message sender’s attempt at appearing humble in the humblebragging conditions vis-à-vis the positive self-presentation conditions.³

Additionally, persistent messages ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 1.28$) were perceived to be accessible for a longer time than the ephemeral messages ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.75$), $t(375) = 25.48$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 2.63$.

Hypothesis Tests

A t -test was performed to ascertain whether humblebragging is perceived as a form of protective self-presentation (H2). Participants rated the message sender who humblebragged ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.35$) as having a greater fear of negative evaluation than the message sender who positively self-presented ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(375) = 4.57$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 0.47$, supporting H2.

This research used effect coding for the following analyses. For self-presentation type, positive self-presentation = -0.5 , humblebragging = $+0.5$. For message ephemerality, persistent = -0.5 , ephemeral = $+0.5$.

Interdependent self-construal and perceived manipulative intent were mean-centered.

To test H1(a), H3(a), and H4(a), social attraction was regressed on (a) self-presentation type, (b) interdependent self-construal, (c) message ephemerality, the two-way interaction between (a) and (b), as well as the two-way interaction between (a) and (c). The overall model was significant, $F(5, 371) = 10.001$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .119$, $R_{adj}^2 = .107$. Interdependent self-construal predicted social attraction, $b = 0.329$, $p < .001$, $\eta_{\text{partial}}^2 = .08$, although this effect was not theoretically relevant for the present purposes.

The self-presentation type \times interdependent self-construal interaction was significant, $b = 0.283$, $p = .018$, $\eta_{\text{partial}}^2 = .02$, supporting H3(a). See [Figure 2](#). A simple slope analysis (using *emtrends* in R) showed that the slope representing positive self-presentations ($b = 0.187$) was significantly different from zero, $p = .029$, as was the slope representing humblebrags ($b = .470$), $p < .001$. The slope for humblebrags was also steeper than the slope for positive self-presentations, $t(371) = 2.38$, $p = .018$. Thus, the interaction was driven by the slope representing humblebrags being steeper than the slope representing positive self-presentations.

The self-presentation type \times message ephemerality interaction was also significant, $b = 0.662$, $p = .013$, $\eta_{\text{partial}}^2 = .02$, supporting H4(a). See [Figure 3](#). A post-hoc analysis (using *emmeans* in R, alpha-corrected using the Holm method) showed that there were two significant pairwise differences: (i) between the persistent positive self-presentation condition ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.13$) and the persistent humblebrag condition ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.44$), $p = .042$, and (ii) between the persistent positive self-presentation condition and the ephemeral positive self-presentation condition ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.25$),

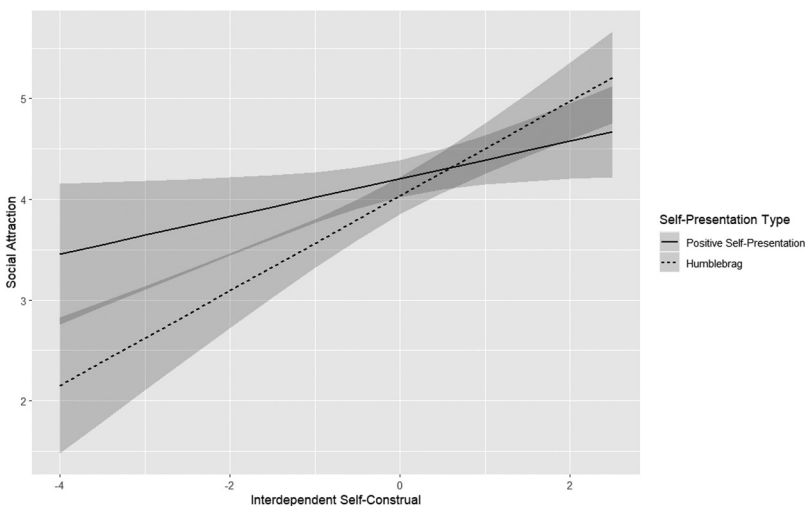


Figure 2. Self-presentation type \times Interdependent self-construal interaction, Study 1.

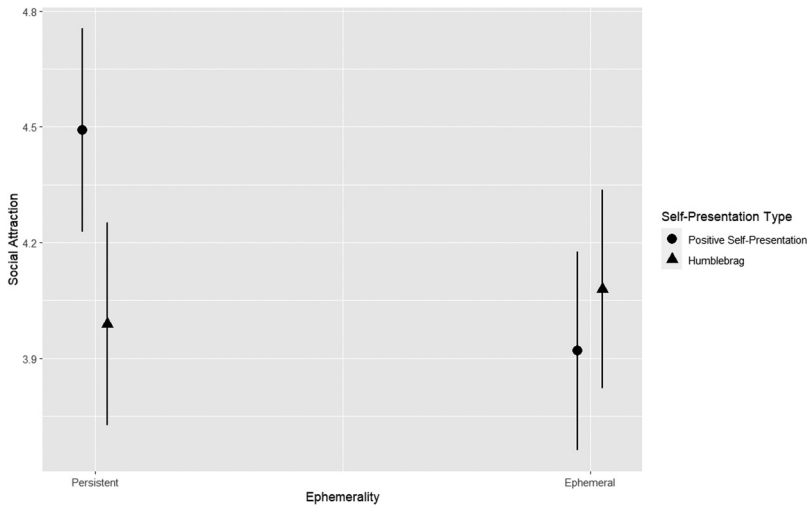


Figure 3. Self-presentation type x Message ephemerality interaction, Study 1.

Table 1. Predictors of Social Attraction, Study 1.

	b	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	4.120	0.066	62.351	<.001
Self-presentation type	-0.171	0.132	-1.292	.197
Message ephemerality	-0.241	0.132	-1.819	.070
Interdependent self-construal	0.329	0.059	5.527	.000
Self-presentation type x Message ephemerality	0.662	0.265	2.498	.013
Self-presentation type x Interdependent self-construal	0.283	0.119	2.383	.018

$p = .015$. Commensurate with H4, the difference between the ephemeral positive self-presentation condition and the ephemeral humblebrag condition was non-significant ($p = 1.000$).

All other predictors were non-significant, including the main effect of self-presentation type. People who positively self-presented ($M = 4.21, SD = 1.23$) did not engender greater perceptions of social attraction than people who humblebragged ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.47$), $p = .197$. Thus, H1(a) was unsupported. See Table 1 for the full results.

To test H1(b), H3(b), and H4(b), task attraction was regressed on the same predictor variables as in the previous analysis for social attraction. The overall model was significant, $F(5, 371) = 11.881, p < .001, R^2 = .138, R_{adj}^2 = .126$. Self-presentation type predicted task attraction: People who positively self-presented ($M = 5.52, SD = 0.83$) garnered greater task attraction than people who humblebragged ($M = 5.08, SD = 1.05$), $b = -0.421, p < .001, \eta_{partial}^2 = .06$. Therefore, H1(b) was supported. Like before, interdependent self-construal predicted task attraction, $b = 0.245, p < .001, \eta_{partial}^2 = .09$, but this was not theoretically relevant to the present study. No other predictor was significant; H3(b) and H4(b) were unsupported. See Table 2 for the full results.

Table 2. Predictors of Task Attraction, Study 1.

	b	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	5.303	0.047	113.379	<.001
Self-presentation type	-0.421	0.094	-4.501	<.001
Message ephemerality	-0.101	0.094	-1.078	.282
Interdependent self-construal	0.245	0.042	5.815	<.001
Self-presentation type×Message ephemerality	0.224	0.187	1.194	.233
Self-presentation type×Interdependent self-construal	0.020	0.084	0.238	.812

H5(a) and H5(b) were tested using model 4 of Hayes' (2022) PROCESS. For H5(a), the overall model predicting perceived manipulative intent was significant, $F(1, 375) = 13.810$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .036$. Self-presentation type predicted perceived manipulative intent, $b = 0.605$, $p < .001$. The overall model predicting social attraction was significant, $F(2, 374) = 35.154$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .158$. Perceived manipulative intent predicted social attraction, $b = -0.337$, $p < .001$, but self-presentation type did not, $b = 0.016$, $p = .905$ (i.e., the direct effect was non-significant). The total effect of self-presentation type on social attraction was non-significant, $b = -0.188$, $p = .179$. The indirect effect of self-presentation type on social attraction—estimated using 10,000 bootstrapped samples—was significant, indirect effect = -0.204 , $SE_{\text{bootstrapped}} = 0.060$, 95% CI = $[-0.329, -0.092]$. Therefore, H5(a) was supported.

To test H5(b), the relationship between self-presentation type and perceived manipulative intent is exactly the same as that reported when testing H5(a). The overall model predicting task attraction was significant, $F(2, 374) = 28.318$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .132$. Perceived manipulative intent predicted task attraction, $b = -0.175$, $p < .001$. Self-presentation type also predicted task attraction, $b = -0.331$, $p = .001$ (i.e., the direct effect was significant). The total effect of self-presentation type on task attraction was significant, $b = -0.437$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect of self-presentation type on task attraction—again estimated using 10,000 bootstrapped samples—was significant, indirect effect = -0.106 , $SE_{\text{bootstrapped}} = 0.035$, 95% CI = $[-0.178, -0.044]$. Therefore, H5(b) was supported.

Study 1: Discussion

Study 1 found that humblebraggers were perceived to have a greater fear of negative evaluation than people who positively self-present. Therefore, the findings established humblebragging is perceived as a form of protective self-presentation, where people simultaneously self-promote, convey humility, and alleviate potential injury to their audience's positive face.

Perceived manipulative intent mediated the effect of self-presentation type on evaluations of message senders. Congruent with Friestad and Wright's

(1994) PKM, audiences drew upon their persuasion knowledge to evaluate the message sender's humblebragging. In the process, audiences recognized that the message sender utilized humility to conceal their self-promotion intent. Since audiences perceived humblebragging as insincere and manipulative, they exhibited negative coping responses by perceiving the message sender with less *social* attraction and *task* attraction.

Furthermore, Study 1 provided partial support that humblebragging can be more effective than bragging. Although Feng et al. (2023) suggested that humblebragging is regarded favorably among cultures that valued humility, this study argues that self-construal better explains why audiences within the same culture exhibit idiosyncratic differences. Among audiences with *lower* interdependent self-construal, people who positively self-presented engendered greater social attraction than humblebraggers. In contrast, among audiences with *higher* interdependent self-construal, humblebraggers elicited greater social attraction than people who positively self-presented. This interaction nullified the main effect of self-presentation type on *social* attraction—positive self-presentation did not directly elicit significantly greater social attraction among audiences than humblebragging. Hence, the findings implied that audiences with higher interdependent self-construal interpreted humblebragging as humility (Leech, 1983) or considerate attempts to mitigate malicious envy (Feng et al., 2023), which enhanced the message sender's social attraction. However, interdependent self-construal failed to magnify or mitigate the (in)effectiveness of humblebragging on task attraction. Positive self-presentation consistently engendered significantly greater *task* attraction among audiences than humblebragging.

This study also analyzed whether the detriments of humblebragging are mitigated when conveyed through ephemeral messages. Consistent with extant literature (e.g., Sezer et al., 2018), persistent positive self-presentation evoked greater social attraction among audiences than persistent humblebragging. Yet, the advantages of positive self-presentation (vs. humblebragging) were attenuated for ephemeral messages. Additionally, the interaction effect between self-presentation type and message ephemerality was not found for task attraction. Therefore, ephemeral messages only partially mitigated the repercussions of humblebragging.

Overall, the findings from Study 1 can be interpreted with the following caveat. Manipulation checks revealed that the message sender who positively self-presented was *not* perceived as trying to overtly brag to a greater extent than the message sender who humblebragged. This non-significant difference was not detrimental to the inferences made because participants randomly assigned to the humblebragging condition accurately recognized the message sender's intent to convey humility. However, a fairer comparison would require participants to rate the message sender who positively self-presented as overtly bragging and the message sender who humblebragged as trying to

appear humble. In other words, a higher bar to test the effects of humblebragging requires participants to have a reason to dislike the message sender in the humblebragging conditions (because he is trying to appear humble while showing off) and also in the positive self-presentation conditions (because he is overtly bragging). Therefore, Study 2 exaggerates the message sender's bragging in the positive self-presentation condition. This should make Study 2 a sterner test of the hypotheses (i.e., it stacks the deck against obtaining statistical significance), as it minimizes the difference in interpersonal attraction toward positive self-presenters and humblebraggers.

A major limitation of Study 1 was its single-message design (Reeves et al., 2016). Study 2 therefore aimed to replicate the findings from Study 1 in a different context and with different expressions of humblebragging and positive self-presentations. Taking both studies together, the present research minimized the drawbacks associated with single-message experimental designs, enhancing the findings' generalizability (Thorson et al., 2012).

Study 2: Method

Study 2 replicated the participant recruitment, experimental design, and procedure in Study 1, except for the following: Beyond excluding participants ($n = 26$) who failed either—or both—of two attention checks (e.g., “Select strongly disagree if you're paying attention”), a new attention check for message ephemerality required participants to recall whether they encountered “An Instagram post,” or “An Instagram story that was not included in the Highlights section.” Participants who gave the wrong answer or indicated that they do not know/cannot remember were also excluded ($n = 30$).

This resulted in $N = 297$ valid participants. Among the valid participants, 56.2% were female, 38.7% were male, 3.7% were non-binary, and 1.3% indicated “prefer not to say.” Their ages ranged from 19 to 76 years old ($M = 39.08$, $SD = 12.89$). 60.6% were White, 12.5% were Black, 11.1% were Asian, 4.0% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 0.7% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and the rest either indicated mixed or other ethnicities.

Stimuli

The fictitious Instagram profile from Study 1 was reused. All conditions featured an aerial photograph of Paris with the Eiffel tower in the background. The captions in the positive self-presentation conditions bragged that traveling to Paris for work is “a massive deal” and “nobody else even came close to earning this chance.” The captions in the humblebragging conditions expressed humility by saying that “I guess it's a big deal, but I'm not one to brag—only humbled to be given this responsibility.” The experimental



Figure 4. Stimuli, Study 2. From left to right: persistent positive self-presentation, persistent humblebrag, ephemeral positive self-presentation, ephemeral humblebrag.

manipulations for *persistent* and *ephemeral* messages were identical to Study 1. See Figure 4 for all four conditions.

Measures

The measures were the same as those used in Study 1. Their reliabilities in Study 2 are as follows: Social attraction: Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$, task attraction: Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$, perceived manipulative intent: Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$, and interdependent self-construal: Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$. The manipulation checks remained the same.

Study 2: Results

Manipulation Checks

All manipulations worked as intended. Participants perceived the message sender in the humblebragging conditions ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 2.17$) as trying to appear humble to a greater extent than the message sender in the positive self-presentation conditions ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(295) = 9.58$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.11$. Participants also perceived the message sender in the positive self-presentation condition ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.37$) as trying to overtly brag to a greater extent than the message sender in the humblebragging condition ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.87$), $t(295) = 2.57$, $p = .011$. Finally, the persistent messages ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.16$) were perceived to be accessible for a longer time than the ephemeral messages ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.51$), $t(295) = 26.19$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.04$.

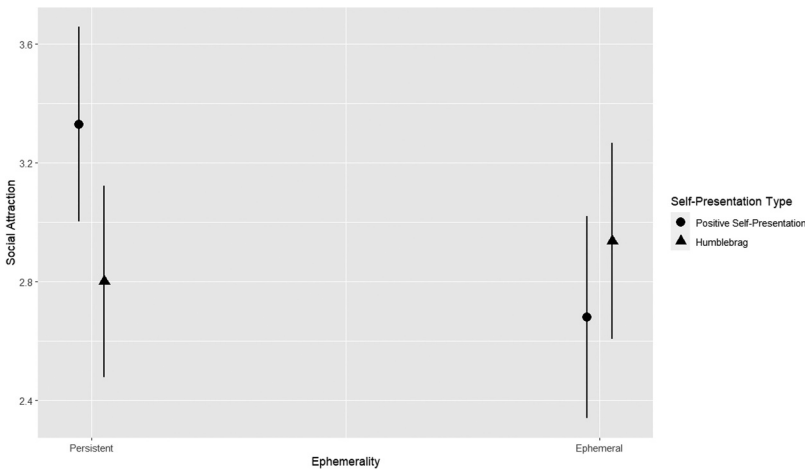


Figure 5. Self-presentation type×Message ephemerality interaction, Study 2.

Hypothesis Tests

As predicted in H2, participants rated the message sender who humblebragged ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.56$) as having a greater fear of negative evaluation than the message sender who positively self-presented ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(295) = 2.47$, $p = .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.29$.

For the following regressions, the same contrast codes as those in Study 1 were employed. Interdependent self-construal and perceived manipulative intent were, similarly, mean-centered.

To test H1(a), H3(a), and H4(a), social attraction was regressed on the same set of predictors as in Study 1. The model was significant, $F(5, 291) = 3.412$, $p = .005$, $R^2 = .055$, $R_{adj}^2 = .039$. Interdependent self-construal predicted social attraction, $b = 0.197$, $p = .010$, $\eta_{partial}^2 = .02$, but this effect was not theoretically relevant in this study.

As in Study 1, the self-presentation type×message ephemerality interaction was significant, $b = 0.786$, $p = .020$, $\eta_{partial}^2 = .02$. See Figure 5. A post-hoc analysis using Holm correction revealed a significant pairwise difference between persistent positive self-presentation ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.47$) and ephemeral positive self-presentation ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.36$), $p = .043$. The difference between the ephemeral positive self-presentation

Table 3. Predictors of Social Attraction, Study 2.

	b	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	2.936	0.084	35.040	<.001
Self-presentation type	-0.136	0.168	-0.814	.416
Message ephemerality	-0.257	0.168	-1.532	.127
Interdependent self-construal	0.197	0.076	2.602	.010
Self-presentation type×Message ephemerality	0.786	0.335	2.346	.020
Self-presentation type×Interdependent self-construal	0.232	0.151	1.532	.127

Table 4. Predictors of Task Attraction, Study 2.

	b	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	4.663	0.073	64.198	<.001
Self-presentation type	-0.316	0.145	-2.177	.030
Message ephemerality	0.199	0.145	1.373	.171
Interdependent self-construal	0.141	0.066	2.154	.032
Self-presentation type×Message ephemerality	0.282	0.290	0.972	.332
Self-presentation type×Interdependent self-construal	-0.142	0.131	-1.081	.280

and the ephemeral humblebragging was non-significant ($p = .862$), and so was the difference between the persistent positive self-presentation and the persistent humblebragging self-presentation ($p = .120$). As H4(a) required a significant difference between the persistent positive self-presentation condition and the persistent humblebragging self-presentation—which the post-hoc tests did not show—H4(a) was unsupported. Nevertheless, it is notable that the ephemeral positive self-presentation condition (and not any of the humblebragging conditions) accrued the worst social attraction relative to the persistent positive self-presentation condition. Other predictors were non-significant, including the self-presentation type×interdependent self-construal interaction observed in Study 1. Therefore, H1(a) and H3(a) were also unsupported. See Table 3 for full results.

To test H1(b), H3(b), and H4(b), task attraction was regressed on the same set of predictors as in Study 1. The model was significant, $F(5, 291) = 2.843$, $p = .016$, $R^2 = .047$, $R_{adj}^2 = .030$. Similar to Study 1, people who positively self-presented ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.20$) engendered greater task attraction than people who humblebragged ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.32$), $b = -0.316$, $p = .030$, $\eta_{\text{partial}}^2 = .02$. Therefore, H1(b) was supported. Interdependent self-construal also predicted task attraction, $b = 0.141$, $p = .032$, $\eta_{\text{partial}}^2 = .02$, but this effect was not theoretically relevant in this study. Other predictors were non-significant; H3 (b) and H4(b) were unsupported. See Table 4 for full results.

H5(a) and H5(b) were tested using model 4 of Hayes’ (2022) PROCESS. For H5(a), the overall model predicting perceived manipulative intent was significant, $F(1, 295) = 22.230$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .070$. Self-presentation type predicted perceived manipulative intent, $b = 0.807$, $p < .001$. The overall model predicting social attraction was significant, $F(2, 294) = 37.940$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .205$. Perceived manipulative intent predicted social attraction, $b = -0.450$, $p < .001$, but self-presentation type did not, $b = 0.200$, $p = .209$ (i.e., the direct effect was non-significant). The total effect of self-presentation type on social attraction was non-significant, $b = -0.163$, $p = .340$. The indirect effect of self-presentation type on social attraction (10,000 bootstrapped samples) was significant, indirect effect = -0.363 , $SE_{\text{bootstrapped}} = 0.082$, 95% CI = $[-0.532, -0.208]$. Therefore, H5(a) was supported.

The test of H5(b) also required regressing perceived manipulative intent on self-presentation type, and these results were previously reported as part of testing H5(a). The overall model predicting task attraction was significant, $F(2, 374) = 14.108, p < .001, R^2 = .088$. Perceived manipulative intent predicted task attraction, $b = -0.229, p < .001$. Self-presentation type did not predict task attraction, $b = -0.145, p = .324$ (i.e., the direct effect was non-significant). The total effect of self-presentation type on task attraction was significant, $b = -0.330, p = .025$. The indirect effect of self-presentation type on task attraction (10,000 bootstrapped samples) was significant, indirect effect = $-0.185, SE_{\text{bootstrapped}} = 0.054, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.300, -0.088]$. Therefore, H5(b) was supported.

Study 2: Discussion

Study 2 successfully replicated the following results of Study 1 across a different context and with different messages. First, both studies found that people who humblebragged were regarded to fear negative evaluation more than people who positively self-presented. Although this research did not collect data from message senders—and thus cannot claim that message senders humblebrag *because* they want to engage in protective self-presentations—this finding is commensurate with the perspective that humblebragging is perceived as a form of protective self-presentation. Second, both studies attested to the ineffectiveness of humblebragging compared with positive self-presentation. Audiences perceived a message sender's attempt to convey humility as manipulative, consequently rating the message sender with less social attraction and task attraction. Moreover, both studies demonstrated that people who positively self-presented engendered more social attraction than people who humblebragged. These findings were exclusively observed for persistent messages rather than ephemeral messages.

However, Study 2 did not replicate the self-presentation type \times interdependent self-construal interaction and the self-presentation type \times message ephemerality interaction found in Study 1. This discrepancy could be attributed to the operationalization of positive self-presentation: In Study 2, participants perceived positive self-presentation to involve more overt bragging than humblebragging (which was an intentional design choice as it worked against the hypotheses), but this was not so in Study 1. An exploratory simple slopes test was conducted to analyze the two conditions for self-presentation type in isolation from each other. Among participants who saw the humblebragging posts, interdependent self-construal had a positive relationship with social attraction, $b = 0.313, p = .005$. But among participants who saw the positive self-presentation posts, interdependent self-construal had no significant relationship with social attraction, $b = 0.081, p = .434$. Examining the conditions in

isolation thus revealed a pattern that was similar to that found in Study 1. More research is needed to affirm or dispute the robustness of this effect.

General Discussion

Research in digitally mediated communication often conceptualized protective self-presentation as the omission of undesirable personal information (e.g., Attrill & Jalil, 2011; Hancock & Toma, 2009). But omission is difficult to observe, which may have contributed to the relative lack of work in this domain compared to acquisitive self-presentation. Separately, prior research has treated humblebragging as impression mismanagement, with no redeeming quality (Steinmetz et al., 2017). Bringing together these two lines of work, this research argued that humblebragging is an observable form of protective self-presentation that may fail or succeed depending on the communication medium and on audiences' traits.

There were three findings pertaining to how humblebragging fails as a protective self-presentation across both studies, which covered two different professional contexts (academic and corporate sectors) and involved different self-presentation messages. First, audiences perceived that humblebraggers fear others' negative evaluation, compared to people who positively self-presented. This is an important finding, to the extent that fear of negative evaluation could be an attribution that audiences make to explain the behavior of humblebraggers. Hence, it appears that even if audiences can understand why people humblebrag, they generally seem unwilling to temper their unfavorable views of humblebraggers. Future research may expand on this line of reasoning to investigate other hitherto unstudied moderating factors: For example, if audiences perceive that humblebraggers fear negative evaluation, would audiences who are more introverted or more socially anxious evaluate humblebraggers less harshly? Perhaps, they too have a strong desire to avoid negative evaluation and therefore can better empathize with humblebraggers. Future research may also take the perspective of message senders to learn whether their fear of others' negative evaluations increases their intent to humblebrag.

Second, audiences perceived humblebragging as a message sender's manipulative intent to appear humble while self-promoting, consistent with the PKM's tenets (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Consequently, audiences had lower perceived social attraction and task attraction toward the message sender. This finding complements earlier work that identified insincerity as a reason why audiences dislike humblebraggers (Sezer et al., 2018). Taking together our present results on manipulative intent with previous work on perceived insincerity, the overall understanding on how humblebraggers accrue negative evaluations becomes clearer: Audiences find humblebraggers insincere (and/or non-credible)⁴ because they perceive humblebraggers as having the intention to manipulate audiences.

Third, positive self-presentations—including straightforward bragging—prevailed over humblebragging in evoking audiences' task attraction. Although this finding is *prima facie* less noteworthy than the previous two findings, it highlights the importance of assessing message senders on multiple dimensions. Insofar as task attraction—how much one trusts a target individual to get work done—is concerned, humblebragging consistently leads to more unfavorable outcomes than positive self-presentations. But when audiences evaluate message senders' level of social attraction—how much one thinks a target individual can be a friend—they can be relatively more generous toward humblebraggers. Thus, under some circumstances, humblebragging is feasible as a form of protective self-presentation.

Specifically, there were two findings showing how humblebragging is a valid strategy for protective self-presentation. Humblebragging may work if audiences have high interdependent self-construal. Study 1 found that audiences who have high interdependent self-construal indeed value humility, preferring message senders who do not stand out in ways that may violate others' positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This result also supported Leech's (1983) modesty maxim, according to which audiences with higher interdependent self-construal should show greater appreciation for humblebragging than positive self-presentation.

Humblebragging may also work if the humblebragging message is ephemeral rather than persistent. Across both studies, post-hoc tests for the self-presentation type \times message ephemerality interaction showed that persistent positive self-presentations (even if they were straightforward brags) elicited the greatest amount of social attraction. Conversely, ephemeral positive self-presentations consistently elicited the least amount of social attraction. Although the mean social attraction scores for ephemeral humblebrags were, in both studies, slightly lower than those for persistent positive self-presentations, the difference was non-significant. This result is commensurate with our argument that if message senders were genuine in not wanting to show off, they would self-present via ephemeral messages. Therefore, humblebragging and ephemeral messages are congruent. In contrast, humblebragging via persistent messages sends the signal that message senders want their accomplishments to be accessible to audiences long term—which makes humblebragging and persistent messages incongruent. At a broader level, these results are consistent with previous findings that ephemeral media are for the mundane or trivial and are not meant to be taken too seriously (Bayer et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016). Audiences seem to understand this, and thus do not take ephemeral humblebrags too seriously—they do not penalize message senders for humblebragging using ephemeral messages.

In a way, humblebragging is no different from other types of impression management strategies, in that message senders tailor their self-presentations to what they think their audience values (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and leverage

the affordances of social media to curate aspects of themselves (Walther & Whitty, 2021). But the duality of humblebragging makes it unique—message senders are simultaneously claiming a desired identity image (e.g., successful) and repudiating an undesired one (e.g., arrogant). And from this perspective, this research lays the preliminary groundwork for scholars to understand the interplay between acquisitive and protective self-presentations.

Limitations and Future Research

One unresolved issue in the present research pertains to the question of what should be used as a comparison condition for humblebragging. Should humblebragging be compared to an overt, showboating type of brag (Study 2) or a milder brag that reflects positive emotions such as pride and happiness (Study 1)? People should be allowed to brag a little: If they won an award, for example, they should be allowed to feel proud of themselves and tell people about what they achieved. But at what point does the brag become too much, and pride in one's own achievements becomes trying to rub it in other people's faces? Future research should carefully consider this issue when creating experimental treatments.

Although this research exclusively assessed humblebragging in professional domains, future studies may replicate these findings across other contexts (e.g., cryptocurrency investors flaunting their financial gains, public displays of affection). Moreover, this research only assessed humblebragging on Instagram, which is a platform that predominantly comprises well-curated and visually appealing images. Given that people present disparate aspects of their lives on different platforms (Hoffman, 2020), future studies may assess the effectiveness of various self-presentation strategies across different platforms, and with a greater variety of messages.

Future research can attempt to identify more mechanisms related to humblebragging, other than perceived (in)sincerity and perceived manipulative intent. In particular, although this research argued that positive self-presentations may threaten an audience's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), this was not assessed. Researchers can therefore test, as mediators, constructs such as injury to audiences' positive face, disregard for audiences' feelings, or even malicious envy.

Future studies can also test parasocial relationships (i.e., illusory relational intimacy or psychological connections; see for review Dibble et al., 2016) as a moderator to demonstrate the conditional effects of humblebragging. It is plausible that audiences who possess greater parasocial relationships with a message sender are more likely to look past the perceived manipulative intent underlying the humblebragging, thus exhibiting favorable responses toward the message sender.

Finally, future research should attempt to replicate the present findings by manipulating, rather than measuring, interdependent self-construal. To this end, Kühnen and Oyserman's (2002) manipulation for interdependent self-construal—a priming exercise where participants were instructed to circle pronouns in a text that represented relational self (e.g., “we,” “our,” and “us”)—could be adopted.

Conclusion

This research makes several contributions to the extant literature: First, it clarifies scholarly understanding regarding humblebragging by conceptualizing it as protective self-presentation. Second, this research identified novel factors that moderate the relationship between self-presentation type and self-presentation outcomes: interdependent self-construal and message ephemerality. Third, this research extrapolates Friestad and Wright's (1994) PKM beyond brand promotion to self-promotion. While the PKM's tenets originally accounted for consumers' negative coping responses toward advertisements, this study provided empirical evidence for its generalizability for predicting interpersonal attraction. Finally, the findings provided practical insights regarding online self-presentation strategies. People may humblebrag when their target audience possesses high interdependent self-construals, but they should positively self-present through persistent media.

Notes

1. Positive self-presentation refers to “selective self-presentation behaviors that ‘showcase’ the self in an exclusively positive manner” (Lee-Won et al., 2014, p. 413). Bragging is a type of positive self-presentation that incorporates more superlatives, highlights how one's successes are deserved, and deprioritizes others who may have contributed to one's successes (Miller et al., 1992).
2. In contrast to the negative face, which is “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62).
3. Ideally, both tests should be significant: (a) participants should perceive the message sender's humblebragging as trying to appear humble to a greater extent than the message sender's positive self-presentation and (b) participants should perceive the message sender's positive self-presentation as overtly bragging to a greater extent than the message sender's humblebragging. This ideal scenario is impartial, as it gives participants a reason to dislike the message sender in both the humblebragging conditions and the positive self-presentation conditions. However, only comparison (a) was significant, and not comparison (b). These results did not indicate a manipulation failure because the essence of the present study was about humblebragging and the critical test—comparison (a)—was significant. However, we acknowledge that they made obtaining support for the hypotheses easier. Participants have a reason to dislike only the humblebragging conditions, and not the positive self-presentation conditions, thus making it easier to obtain significant differences between the two groups. We discuss this bias in the Study 1 Discussion and resolved it in Study 2.

4. Sezer et al.'s (2018) operationalization of (in)sincerity comprised two items rated on 7-point scales. One item, appropriately, asked about perceived sincerity. But the other item, questionably, asked about perceived credibility. They averaged the two items to create the variable of perceived sincerity. Here, we acknowledge their theoretical argument regarding perceived insincerity while noting that their measure may be imperfect.

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Data Availability Statement

The materials underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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