

“ว่าด้วยการคงอยู่ของกรอบคิดตัวตนขั้นต่ำ  
ในปรัชญาของ Dan Zahavi  
ในบริบท Facebook”

The Objective Endurance of the  
Minimal Self According to Dan Zahavi  
and Its Implication on the Use of Facebook

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาการดำรงอยู่ของ "ตัวตนขั้นต่ำ" ในบริบทดิจิทัล โดยมุ่งเน้นการใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ Facebook เป็นหลัก และวิเคราะห์ผ่านกรอบแนวคิดปรากฏการณ์วิทยาของนักปรัชญา Dan Zahavi งานศึกษาเรื่องท้าทายสมมติฐานกระแสแหลกที่มองว่าอัตลักษณ์ออนไลน์ถูกสร้างขึ้นจากการเล่าเรื่องหรือปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมเพียงอย่างเดียว โดยเสนอว่าการใช้งานและการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ใช้ Facebook ไม่ใช่จะเป็นการนำเสนอตัวตนหรือการติดต่อบทางดิจิทัล ล้วนตั้งอยู่บนโครงสร้างเชิงประสบการณ์ที่จำเป็นของ "ตัวตนขั้นต่ำ" บทความนี้วิพากษ์แนวคิดที่เน้นการสร้างตัวตนผ่านกระบวนการต่าง ๆ โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่า แม้ Facebook จะเป็นพื้นที่ที่เอื้อต่อปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม แต่ประสบการณ์เชิงตัวตนของปัจเจกยังคงดำรงอยู่อย่างจำเป็นและไม่สามารถลดทอนได้ งานศึกษานี้เสนอว่าความเป็นตัวตนไม่ได้อยู่กับโครงสร้างทางสังคมหรืออัตลักษณ์เพียงอย่างเดียว หากแต่หยั่งรากอยู่ในความตระหนักรู้ต้นของระดับก่อนการสะท้อนคิด ผลการศึกษานี้สนับสนุนข้อเสนอของ Zahavi ที่ว่า ตัวตนไม่ได้ถูกกำหนดโดยการยอมรับจากภายนอก แต่มีพื้นฐานอยู่ในประสบการณ์เชิงปัจเจกซึ่งดำรงอยู่ในทุกมิติของชีวิตดิจิทัล บทความนี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงความจำเป็นในการทบทวนทฤษฎีอัตลักษณ์เชิงดิจิทัล โดยยืนยันความสำคัญของประสบการณ์เชิงปัจเจกในบริบทสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ควบคู่ไปกับการปฏิสัมพันธ์และการรับรู้ทางสังคม

**คำสำคัญ:** ตัวตนขั้นต่ำ, สภาพตัวตน, อัตลักษณ์ดิจิทัล, สภาพอัตโนมัติร่วม, สื่อสังคมออนไลน์, Facebook

## Abstract

This paper examines the endurance of the Minimal Self in digital environments, particularly within the context of Facebook. Drawing on Dan Zahavi's phenomenological framework, the study challenges the dominant assumption that online identity is entirely constructed through narratives or social interactions. Instead, it argues that digital engagement - including self-presentation and interaction on Facebook - presupposes the Minimal Self as an essential experiential structure. The paper critiques conventional theories of online identity that overemphasize narrative self-construction, demonstrating that, despite Facebook's role in mediating social relations, there remains an irreducible first-personal dimension to digital selfhood. Through an analysis of how Facebook users navigate their profiles, interactions, and digital traces, this study reveals that self-experience persists beyond social or algorithmic structuring. The findings reinforce Zahavi's claim that selfhood is not contingent on external validation but is grounded in pre-reflective self-awareness. The paper thus calls for a reconsideration of digital identity theories, recognizing the Minimal Self's role in shaping online presence and its implications for the study of human self-experience in networked environments.

**Keywords:** Minimal Self, Subjectivity, Digital Identity, Intersubjectivity, Facebook

## Introduction

The ubiquity of social media and its influence on contemporary life are widely acknowledged. More than half the global population are active on social media. Among these platforms, Facebook stands out as both the most widely used and the most socially embedded. As a platform built around user-generated content, Facebook functions not merely as a medium for communication but as a dynamic arena where users curate, project, and negotiate their identities. These identities are easily seen as formed and reshaped through interactions with both other users and the underlying platform architecture (Fuchs 2013).

Despite extensive empirical research into the behavioral and cognitive effects of social media - including studies on self-esteem, well-being, and algorithmic influence (Marino et al. 2018; Vitak, Ellison, and Steinfield 2011) - less attention has been given to the ontological nature of the social media user. While influential frameworks such as Goffman's dramaturgical model have dominated discussions of online behavior (Birnbaum 2008; Hewitt and Forte 2006), they often reduce the self to a set of performances, offering limited insight into the enduring structure of subjectivity itself. In recent decades, scholarly discussions of identity in digital contexts have largely been dominated by theories that foreground narrative construction and social interaction. According to this view, digital platforms such as Facebook provide individuals with a space to continuously construct and reconstruct their identities through curated self-presentation, social engagement, and performative expression. Identity is thus often understood as a dynamic, malleable, and intersubjectively negotiated phenomenon - produced through stories, recognition, and contextual performance.

This paper challenges such approaches by proposing that any digital engagement already presupposes a deeper experiential structure of selfhood - one that precedes narrative articulation and social validation. Drawing on Dan Zahavi's phenomenological framework, the study focuses on the concept of the *Minimal Self* as a foundational structure of subjectivity. The Minimal Self refers to the pre-reflective awareness that accompanies all conscious experience - what Zahavi calls *for-me-ness* - and constitutes the most basic sense of selfhood. Unlike narrative or socially constructed identities, the Minimal Self is not dependent on external recognition or discursive elaboration; it is, rather, the very condition that makes such elaboration possible in the first place (Zahavi 2005, 2021, 2023).

While social media environments like Facebook may appear to encourage the fragmentation or performative construction of identity, this paper argues that such platforms still rely upon and reflect the endurance of the Minimal Self. The act of posting, interacting, and managing one's profile cannot occur without a first-personal structure of experience. Even in the face of algorithmic governance, curated personas, and social feedback loops, there remains an irreducible subjective dimension that persists. The Minimal Self persists through and beneath all social engagement.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it offers a philosophical defense of Zahavi's notion of the Minimal Self against dominant digital identity theories, which tend to emphasize relationality, construction, or algorithmic shaping. Second, it demonstrates how the Minimal Self remains operative even in the algorithmically mediated, socially structured, and performative space of Facebook. The analysis situates phenomenology as an alternative framework for understanding digital identity - one that begins not from representation or interaction, but from lived experience itself.

## Research Question and Methodology

This study seeks to reframe the discourse on digital identity by asking a central philosophical question: *How can Dan Zahavi's notion of the Minimal Self elucidate the nature of selfhood as it appears in the context of Facebook use?*

To answer this question, the study adopts a **theoretical and interpretive methodology** grounded in phenomenology and conceptual analysis. Phenomenology is employed here not as an empirical or psychological method but as a reflective inquiry into the structures of experience. Its purpose is not to test hypotheses about online behavior but to elucidate how digital life is lived and given to consciousness. As Zahavi (2005) notes, phenomenology seeks to describe the invariant features of experience as they are lived from the first-person perspective.

This approach begins from the assumption that every act of consciousness is intentional, i.e., directed toward something. Even seemingly trivial digital actions such as scrolling through a feed, clicking a reaction icon, or deleting a post are not mere mechanical gestures but intentional acts that reveal the structure of subjectivity. Through intentionality, consciousness constitutes its world as meaningful. Each digital engagement on Facebook discloses this basic directedness: there is always someone for whom the platform's contents appear. This experiential structure - the “for-me-ness” that accompanies each act - constitutes what Zahavi calls the Minimal Self.

By focusing on intentionality, this paper responds to concerns that phenomenology risks reintroducing an essentialist or Cartesian ego. The Minimal Self is not a metaphysical substance but the formal condition of experience. It is not something the subject has in addition to experiences; it is what it is to have experiences at all. Phenomenological analysis thus proceeds by reflecting on lived phenomena, which in this case forms of online self-presentation and engagement, and discerning how such phenomena presuppose pre-reflective self-awareness.

The methodological focus of this study is interpretive rather than descriptive in a positive sense. The paper does not attempt to prove the existence of the Minimal Self through empirical observation but rather to clarify how digital practices already imply it. To illustrate this, the analysis turns to the Facebook trend **“Felt Cute, Might Delete Later”** as a paradigmatic case. The purpose is to treat this phenomenon as a concrete manifestation of how digital selfhood expresses the temporal and first-personal structure of experience. The post-and/or-delete rhythm captures the lived tension between visibility and withdrawal, self-assertion and self-effacement, which reflects the diachronic continuity of selfhood that Zahavi describes.

This interpretive gesture allows phenomenology to engage with digital culture without abandoning its methodological rigor. It shows how even in mediated environments, the self remains the condition for all appearance, including its algorithmic and performative forms.

Accordingly, the paper proceeds in three parts. The first section situates Zahavi's Minimal Self within broader debates on the self, distinguishing it from both classical and constructivist models. The second examines how theories of digital and Facebook identity emphasize construction, relation, and performance, while neglecting the pre-reflective dimension of experience. The final section integrates these discussions through a phenomenological reading of Facebook engagement, arguing that the Minimal Self endures as the experiential foundation of all digital subjectivity.

## **Literature review**

### *1. The Self*

Selfhood typically pertains to the individual's sense of identity, consciousness, and subjective experience. It encompasses the awareness of oneself as a distinct entity, separate from others, and involves aspects such as self-awareness, self-recognition, and self-reflection. It often delves into questions about the nature of the self, its continuity over time, and its relationship with the body and mind. The notion of the self could mean different things -

self-consciousness, the soul, the body, the brain, non-being, or a bundle of perceptions - and assumptions about its nature carry serious further implications. In several academic fields, such as the social sciences, the concept of the self as constructs is widely accepted and further developed. However, from a philosophical standpoint, the self remains a topic of unresolved debate.

The ontological question “Is there a self, and if so, what is its nature?” has long preoccupied philosophy. While thinkers like Descartes, Locke, and Kant conceived the self as unified, rational, and autonomous, others such as Hume and Nietzsche challenged this view, portraying the self as an illusion or flux of impressions. With the rise of modern psychology and social theory, the self came to be seen less as a metaphysical constant and more as socially and psychologically constituted, as in Hegel and Marx. Since the mid-twentieth century, critiques from postmodernism, feminism, and post-colonialism have further eroded the idea of a stable, sovereign self. Today, the self is often treated as a functional construct - embedded in self-image, self-conception, or self-actualization - rather than a coherent, controlling subject. The modern self is now “merely a product of social and psychological conditions.” (Barresi and Martin 2013, 51) Nevertheless, philosophers, especially in the field of philosophy of mind, continue to defend and refine divergent views of selfhood. Following Zahavi’s (2005) typology, three major approaches can be distinguished in contemporary philosophical discussions: (1) the classical view of the self as a pure identity pole, (2) the view of the self as a construct - whether narrative or relational - and (3) the view of the self as an experiential structure, or the Minimal Self.

### *1.1 The Classical View of the Self as a Pure Identity Pole*

In the classical view, the self functions as a stable reference point that unifies the flow of consciousness. Kant’s transcendental ego exemplifies this approach: it is not an object of experience but the formal condition that renders experience possible. The self, in this sense, is not discovered through introspection but presupposed in all acts of cognition and perception. This model, while powerful, risks detaching the self from lived experience and reifying it as an abstract structure. It explains unity but not how the self is lived.

## 1.2 The Self as a Construct (of Social Relations or Narratives)

In contrast, constructivist theories reject the notion of a self existing prior to experience. They define identity as a process of ongoing construction through language, culture, and interaction. The narrative view (Ricoeur 1985; Schechtman 2014) conceives personal identity as the story one tells about oneself - a temporal synthesis of actions and interpretations that grants coherence to life. The relational view (Gergen 2009; Floridi 2015) extends this insight by emphasizing the constitutive role of social relations and technological mediation. The self is no longer autonomous but distributed across networks of interaction.

Constructivist models have dominated digital identity research, where the online self is portrayed as fluid, performative, and dependent on audience feedback. While this flexibility captures the dynamic nature of digital subjectivity, it risks collapsing into a view that denies any enduring subject at all. If the self is only narrative or relation, it becomes a product of discourse rather than a condition of experience. From a phenomenological standpoint, this move leaves unexplained the first-person perspective from which such construction occurs.

## 1.3 The Unified, Experiential Self (the Minimal Self / the Core Self)

Zahavi (2005, 2014, 2023) offers a corrective to both the transcendental and constructivist extremes through his concept of the *Minimal Self* - the most basic form of selfhood, defined as pre-reflective awareness. The Minimal Self is not a metaphysical ego nor a narrative construct, but the immediate sense of being an experiencer. It refers to the fact that every perception, memory, or emotion is experienced as mine. As Gallagher (2000, 15) also notes, “*even if all of the unessential features of self are stripped away, we still have an intuition that there is a basic, immediate, or primitive ‘something’ that we are willing to call a self.*” This view holds that such a structure is indispensable to conscious life - it is not separable from experience but immanent within it.

The Minimal Self is thus distinguished from the Kantian transcendental ego: it is not an abstract structure but the lived subject of experience. It is also set apart from narrative or relational accounts by its pre-discursive immediacy. Philosophers such as Strawson (2000, 2011) and Frege (1956) have reinforced this

point, asserting that experience necessarily implies an experiencer. The self is not a metaphysical object but a phenomenological structure - the primitive form of subjectivity that underlies even the construction of identity.

This perspective might sometimes be mischaracterized as essentialist or individualist, explicitly rejects the notion of an ontologically independent, unchanging substance. Zahavi (2014) argues that the Minimal Self should not be equated with the soul-like self of Cartesian dualism. Rather, it is a phenomenological insight: subjectivity as lived, embodied, and temporally situated. While constructivists and eliminativists (e.g., Metzinger 2003; Albahari 2006) argue that the self is either illusory or reducible to brain functions, Zahavi contends that rejecting the substantial self does not necessitate abandoning the minimal, experiential self.

Recent trends in philosophy of mind and phenomenology have moved toward recognizing this distinction. As Zahavi (2002) observes, “after a long period of neobehaviorist functionalism, it is nowadays almost commonplace to argue that the experiential or first-personal dimension of consciousness must be taken seriously.” The Minimal Self - variably termed the core self (Damasio 1999), the experiential self (Gallagher & Zahavi 2012), or the first-personal self - is increasingly seen as foundational for understanding self-consciousness. It constitutes a middle path between outdated metaphysical models and overly reductive constructivist ones. To make sense of the self, Zahavi argues, we must begin with the primitive form of self-experience - without which no narrative, recognition, or relation would be possible (Zahavi 2005, 2007).

## *2. Literature on Social Media*

The term social media designates a vast array of digital platforms that facilitate interaction, content creation, and the circulation of user-generated meaning. Defined as “internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), social media encompass blogs, content-sharing sites, and social network services such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms mediate not only communication but also modes of self-presentation, transforming how individuals appear to themselves and to others.

Research on social media has expanded rapidly. Most academic research on social media has approached these phenomena from sociological, psychological, or communication-based perspectives. However, few studies have addressed the ontological structure of the self that underlies these behaviors. Meta-studies (e.g., Ngai, Tao, and Moon 2015; Kapoor et al. 2018) reveal a methodological focus on social science models but not on the foundation of identity. While platforms are shown to influence identity construction and maintenance, the self is often equated with psychological constructs such as self-image, self-representation, and self-esteem. Identity is treated as malleable and intersubjective, with little attention to the enduring first-person perspective that makes such representation intelligible in the first place.

Much of the early discourse on the “Net self” (Tambyah 1996) emphasized anonymity and discontinuity between online and offline personas. However, scholars have noted that this distinction is increasingly blurred. Shannon Vallor (2016) points to the integration of online and offline presence, and Hogan & Quan-Haase (2010) suggest that social media fosters an increasingly unified self-presentation across both realms. More recent studies explore idealized self-presentation as a response to social feedback loops and algorithmic architectures (Fox and McEwan 2019; Gabernet, Feixas, and Montesano 2023), yet few investigate the experiential conditions that make such identity negotiation possible. Papacharissi (2010, 2018) has described the “networked self” as a flexible identity assembled through connectivity, performance, and affective circulation. This framework illuminates how individuals negotiate their sense of self through networked publics and algorithmic visibility. Similarly, Sherry Turkle (1984, 2011) portrays digital life as producing *tethered selves* - simultaneously autonomous and dependent, fragmented yet continuous across online and offline worlds. These accounts are invaluable in explaining the social dynamics of online life, but they stop short of addressing the experiential dimension that makes such dynamics meaningful. They describe how selves are connected, but not how these selves are lived from within. The ontological question - *what is the nature of the self that experiences the digital world* - is typically bypassed.

Posthumanist and materialist approaches have extended this line of inquiry by decentering the human subject and emphasizing hybridity between user and technology (Hayles 1999; Braidotti 2019). Yet this decentering often comes at the cost of effacing the first-personal dimension of experience. Digital anthropology, too, has illuminated the cultural embedding of online life (Miller et al. 2016; Wang 2016), but tends to focus on identity as a social construct rather than as lived subjectivity. Even ethical discussions of online identity (Ess 2015) remain framed within relational paradigms, while the experiential self remains undertheorized.

Against this background, Zahavi's phenomenology of the Minimal Self offers a needed supplement. It reintroduces the lived, first-person dimension that underlies all digital practices. Rather than treating identity as a product of representation, it insists that representation presupposes subjectivity.

### *3. Literature on Facebook*

As the world's most widely used social media platform, Facebook plays a central role in shaping digital identity. With over 2.7 billion users globally (Kemp 2023), its sheer scale and functional reach have made it a crucial site for self-presentation and online sociality. Unsurprisingly, a vast body of scholarship has emerged to examine how Facebook affects user behavior, identity formation, and communication. Much of this research focuses on Facebook's effects on well-being, social capital, political participation, and relationship maintenance (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2011; Tang and Lee 2013; Rousseau, Frison, and Eggermont 2019). However, what remains underexplored is the ontological question of the self—what sort of subjectivity underlies the construction of the Facebook self.

Most analyses of Facebook identity cluster around three paradigms: the narrative, the relational, and the constructionist. The narrative model interprets the Facebook profile as an autobiographical project, where users assemble their life stories through posts, photos, and memory prompts, echoing Paul Ricoeur's (1988) idea that narrative confers temporal unity on identity. The relational model

draws on Cooley's (1902) "looking-glass self" and Mead's (1934) theory of social interaction, emphasizing how likes, comments, and tags form feedback loops that sustain self-recognition. The constructionist approach, following Goffman (1959), views Facebook as a stage for impression management, where users perform curated identities before networked audiences.

Turkle (2011) discusses Facebook as a key expression of the tethered self, showing how constant connection and audience feedback reshape intimacy, autonomy, and authenticity. Zizi Papacharissi (2010, 2015) likewise identifies Facebook as a principal arena of the networked self, where identity emerges through connectivity, affective exchange, and algorithmic visibility across overlapping publics. These frameworks reveal how Facebook fosters curated, relational self-presentation, turning personal experience into socially legible traces. Yet they share an assumption that selfhood is externally constructed - arising from representation or response, mediated by social validation and technological affordance - while leaving unexamined the first-personal structure that enables such construction.

Recent analyses extend this view to the infrastructures that condition visibility itself. Taina Bucher (2017) shows how algorithms govern what becomes perceptible on Facebook, proposing that users develop an algorithmic imaginary - a lived sense of being evaluated by opaque computational processes. Still, she finds that the user's agency - posting, revising, withdrawing - remains central, reminding us that even mediated expressions are experienced as one's own acts of self-presentation.

In this sense, Zahavi's concept of the Minimal Self can complement and deepen digital-identity studies. It does not reject the constructivist or relational view tout court but shows that these processes presuppose a pre-reflective subjectivity through which all digital life is lived. Facebook may fragment expression, yet it cannot dissolve the structure of selfhood that makes fragmentation intelligible.

## Theoretical Framework: Dan Zahavi's Concept of the Minimal Self

Dan Zahavi's concept of the **Minimal Self** stands at the intersection of phenomenology, philosophy of mind, and selfhood studies. Across twenty years, Zahavi (1999, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017) has consistently argued that the self must be understood as an *experiential structure* - a pre-reflective dimension of consciousness that makes experience intelligible as mine. This framework provides a way to understand subjectivity without returning to metaphysical essentialism or dissolving the self into linguistic or social construction.

Zahavi might not be the only scholar who argues for the view of the Minimal Self (Strawson 2011), but he is the most ardent in putting forward and defending his view. In order to sustain his view of the self, Zahavi is not shy to address surrounding issues, including the limitations of other views of the self, such as the relational view and social constructionist view, and engaging with other disciplines, for example, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, in which such views are prominent.

Within Zahavi's framework, the Minimal Self as a pre-reflective structure of subjectivity that is always already present in conscious experience. It is the immediate, first-personal “for-me-ness” of experience, present not as a narrative, reflective construction but as an intrinsic condition of awareness itself. Zahavi describes this as “a minimal sense of self present whenever there is self-awareness,” one that is “integral to our experiential life” (Zahavi 2005, 146) While he does not entirely reject the role of cultural or social mediation in shaping identity, he argues that such mediation presupposes a more fundamental form of selfhood. In this light, social or narrative accounts of the self remain incomplete unless they also account for the first-personal structure of experience that makes interpretation and social engagement possible in the first place. Zahavi critiques radical social constructivism for “fail[ing] to capture the nature of the human self,” and emphasizes that “any convincing theory of consciousness has to account for the first-personal or egocentric givenness of our conscious states” (Zahavi 2022, 397)

## *1. Phenomenological Grounding: Intentionality and Lived Experience*

Phenomenology begins with the conviction that consciousness is always intentional: it is directed toward something, whether an object, an event, or another person. Every act of consciousness contains a subject–object polarity - it is about something, and there is always *someone* for whom the act occurs. Husserl describes this structure as “a consciousness that is consciousness of something and, at the same time, consciousness of itself” (*Ideas I*, §84). Zahavi’s account of the Minimal Self arises from this foundational insight. Selfhood is not a separate substance underlying experience, but the formal structure through which experience takes place (2005). In this sense, the Minimal Self cannot be observed as an object among others. It is the condition that allows objects to appear in the first place. When I post a photograph on Facebook, when I respond to a message, or when I decide to delete an earlier post, each act is constituted by intentionality - by a directed awareness that this is something I am doing. Even if such acts are mediated by algorithms or social feedback, they still belong to a first-personal field of experience.

Zahavi’s notion of pre-reflective self-awareness captures this immediacy. Before any explicit reflection or narrative articulation, experience already includes a tacit awareness of itself as lived by someone. This is not an act of introspection but an inherent feature of consciousness. It is the difference between knowing that one is angry and simply feeling anger as one’s own. Such self-awareness is primitive, non-inferential, and inescapable. This level of experience is not socially derived. It precedes language, culture, and recognition. Zahavi acknowledges that our identities are shaped through social interaction, yet insists that all such shaping presupposes an already existing subjectivity. The Minimal Self is therefore not opposed to the social, but foundational to it.

## *2. Phenomenological Lineage*

Zahavi grounds his account of the Minimal Self in the classical phenomenological tradition, emphasizing the subject’s indispensable role in

experience. He identifies this tradition as offering the clearest articulation of what he calls the “experiential dimension of selfhood” (Zahavi 2007). Reinterpreting Husserl, Zahavi develops the notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness - a basic, non-introspective form of self-awareness that is more fundamental than reflective self-observation. Zahavi argues that this foundational concept is echoed across major phenomenologists. Sartre, for instance, rejects the idea of a unified, temporally extended ego, instead emphasizing self-givenness or ipseity as the essence of consciousness. For Sartre, consciousness is always individuated and self-unifying, giving rise to a self even prior to reflection (Sartre 1936, quoted in Zahavi 2005, 100). It is this pre-reflective cogito that makes the Cartesian cogito possible (Sartre 1943, 19–20, quoted in Zahavi 2014, 22). Similarly, Husserl’s notion of inner time-consciousness underscores the inseparability of consciousness and self-awareness, while Merleau-Ponty highlights the primordial manifestation of the self through temporal embodiment (Henry 1963; 1965, quoted in Zahavi 2007)

Together, these thinkers challenge views of the self as either a metaphysical substance or a transcendental condition, instead affirming its phenomenological reality. Zahavi synthesizes their insights to argue that selfhood is intrinsic to consciousness itself - first-personal, experiential, and irreducible (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012). Zahavi sees them also as a coherent account of subjectivity as *lived, embodied, and temporally situated*. Building on this interpretation, Zahavi points to the intricate interplay between consciousness and self-awareness, inviting deeper scrutiny into the phenomenological structure of human experience.

In this way, digital mediation does not cancel embodiment; it reconfigures it as mediated intentionality or a form of bodily extension through technological interfaces (Ihde 1990; Verbeek 2005). Thus, Zahavi’s Minimal Self thus remains operative not in spite of digital mediation but through it, as the embodied subject who experiences technology as part of its lived horizon.

### *3. The Structure of the Minimal Self*

Zahavi distinguishes three interrelated dimensions within the Minimal Self: subjectivity, pre-reflectiveness, and diachronic continuity.

#### *3.1 Subjectivity*

At the heart of Zahavi's theory is the notion that each experience is inherently *for-me*. This "for-me-ness" constitutes subjectivity, marking every perception, memory, or emotion as distinctively one's own (Zahavi 2014). Even as attention shifts - from perceiving one thing to recalling another—the self remains the stable center of experience. Zahavi defines this first-personal givenness as the most basic form of egocentricity in consciousness. It involves not just recognizing perceptions, but grasping them with a sense of "mineness." This immediacy captures what it is like to undergo an experience, thereby establishing the Minimal Self as intrinsic to self-awareness.

Importantly, Zahavi distinguishes this experiential subjectivity from political or social conceptions of subjectivity. While the latter concern power and identity, perspectival ownership refers to the simple fact that experiences are lived from a unique, first-person perspective - tasting cognac, feeling pain, or enjoying a walk. He warns against conflating these different senses of subjectivity, arguing that political accounts do not address the nature of the self as such (Zahavi 2023).

#### *3.2 Pre-reflectiveness and the Non-social Character of the Self*

The Minimal Self is characterized by pre-reflective awareness - a non-inferential and non-objectifying self-awareness embedded in each conscious experience. Selfhood in this level is non-social: it is not shaped by language, interaction, or cultural norms, but arises directly from the structure of experience itself. This irrelational quality of the Minimal Self challenges theories that center on external validation or social construction. Zahavi insists that selfhood persists even in the absence of others - it is the ground of experience, not its outcome. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that human experience unfolds socially, and that

constructionist accounts may coexist with his model. They simply operate at a different level: while identity is shaped intersubjectively, experience itself presupposes a subject who experiences (Zahavi 2014).

Thus, Zahavi maintains the formal, non-social level of subjectivity while leaving room for phenomenological accounts of intersubjectivity, where understanding others depends on one's own experiential self-awareness. Even when I see myself through the eyes of others - through Facebook metrics, comments, or reactions - there remains a deeper stratum of lived experience that is irreducibly mine.

### *3.3 Diachronic Unity*

Although often associated with synchronic self-consciousness, Zahavi extends the Minimal Self to encompass diachronic unity - the persistence of selfhood over time (Zahavi 2014). Consciousness, he argues, is not limited to isolated present moments but unfolds across time through retentional processes.

Drawing on Husserl's theory of inner time-consciousness, Zahavi likens this continuity to the flow of music or the motion of a bird - each moment retains traces of the previous, forming an enduring structure of awareness (Husserl 1962, as quoted in Zahavi 2014, 65–67). This temporal structure enables the self to persist across experience without requiring reflective thought or narrative construction. Though Zahavi avoids engaging directly with metaphysical debates on personal identity (Zahavi 2014, 92), his account nonetheless addresses core concerns about identity over time, particularly in digital contexts. Unlike narrative theories that link continuity to storytelling, Zahavi emphasizes that temporal selfhood is rooted in experiential continuity. This perspective is especially relevant in the age of social media, where fragmented digital personas raise questions about what constitutes personal persistence. Zahavi's diachronic Minimal Self offers a compelling answer: the self persists because experience itself unfolds with unity - not because it is narrated, but because it is lived.

#### *4. Agency and Autonomy*

Dan Zahavi's account of the Minimal Self highlights the interplay between the sense of agency, sense of ownership, and perspectival autonomy. Agency refers to the lived sense of initiating an action, while ownership refers to the awareness that one's experiences and movements belong to oneself (Zahavi 2008, 143). These two elements together constitute the for-me-ness of experience. Zahavi emphasizes that our engagement with the world is rooted in practical action, and that even a thin, non-reflective self-awareness suffices to support agency. Remarkably, this experiential self persists even under severe mental pathology; individuals with dementia may lose autobiographical memory or narrative structure yet retain their first-personal perspective. Beyond the individual, Zahavi also contends that the Minimal Self is foundational for community, as it secures perspectival autonomy - enabling individuals to retain subjective experience while participating in shared social life (Zahavi 2014, 2023).

As previously stated, Zahavi maintains a distinction between phenomenological subjectivity, which is grounded in the immediacy of first-person experience, and the forms of subjectivity emphasized in political or sociological discourse, which pertain to power, recognition, and structural positioning. By anchoring autonomy in pre-reflective self-awareness, Zahavi offers a model in which agency is not granted by external structures but emerges from the individual's lived capacity to act and experience intentionally (Zahavi 2023). In other words, autonomy is therefore not bestowed by external recognition or institutional structures but arises from the immediacy of lived experience. The Minimal Self underwrites all possible forms of social agency because it grounds the capacity to act, to intend, and to respond.

### *5. Clarifying the Non-Cartesian Character of the Minimal Self*

One recurring criticism or concern of the minimal view of the self is that the Minimal Self risks reinstating a Cartesian cogito. Zahavi addresses this by emphasizing that the Minimal Self is not an *object* of thought but the structure of experiencing. It is not a metaphysical substance separate from the world but an immanent dimension of being-in-the-world. Zahavi (2014) explicitly rejects any essentialist interpretation: the Minimal Self is neither an isolated ego nor an unchanging kernel. It is enacted in experience, always embodied and situated. As such, it can be phenomenologically described but not observed from outside. To seek empirical “proof” of the Minimal Self is to misunderstand its nature. Its reality lies in the self-manifestation of consciousness itself.

This clarification aligns with Husserl’s principle that the ego is not discovered as an entity within experience but disclosed through intentional life. Thus, the Minimal Self is not a reified essence but the implicit structure through which lived phenomena - including digital engagements - are given.

### *6. Implications for Digital Experience*

When applied to the digital context, Zahavi’s theory suggests that even the most mediated forms of self-presentation presuppose a pre-reflective subjectivity. On Facebook, users may construct identities, negotiate visibility, and perform for audiences, yet all these acts arise from a first-personal standpoint. The user’s sense of “I am the one posting, I am being seen, or I choose to delete this” reveals the persistence of the Minimal Self beneath narrative and relational layers.

Algorithmic curation and social feedback may influence representation, but they cannot eliminate the for-me-ness of experience. The self that scrolls, hesitates, or feels exposure remains the ground of all digital appearances. Zahavi’s phenomenology thus invites us to see digital subjectivity not as a new kind of self but as a continuation of the same experiential structure that has always defined consciousness.

## Meta-theoretical Debate: Minimal Self vs. Constructivist Theories of Self

### 1. The Narrative Self and the Problem of Fiction

Zahavi's most sustained critique is directed at the narrative view of the self, which holds that personal identity is constituted through autobiographical storytelling. In *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (2005), Zahavi condenses his objections into three key concerns: fiction and confabulation, finitude, and ethics.

First, narratives can easily lapse into fiction. As Zahavi draws from Dennett's idea of the self as a "center of narrative gravity," he warns that treating the self as a linguistic construction risks reducing it to a social invention - one that exists only insofar as the story is coherent or accepted.

Second, coherence alone is insufficient. Narrative accounts rely on internal and external consistency to validate identity. But Zahavi argues that selfhood cannot be justified solely by coherence - it requires experiential continuity, the kind of diachronic unity found in pre-reflective self-awareness

Third, even narrativists like Ricoeur recognize that narrative identity is incomplete without an ethical dimension - a capacity for responsibility and promise-keeping.

Zahavi is also critical of social constructivist accounts that posit the self as entirely a product of cultural, linguistic, or social processes. While he acknowledges the influence of these forces, he contends that they cannot eliminate the need for a subject of experience. As he writes, "in order to begin a self-narrative, the narrator must... possess a first-person perspective" (Zahavi 2005, 114). Constructivist views, when taken to extremes, risk eliminating agency and autonomy altogether by reducing experience to a set of externally imposed scripts

Zahavi emphasizes that even narratives require a self that narrates. The ability to say "I" or distinguish self from non-self presupposes mineness - the for-me-ness of experience that is foundational to selfhood. Without this layer, constructivist accounts become epistemologically thin and metaphysically unstable.

## 2. The Relational Self and Zahavi's Rebuttal

Zahavi himself has not separately targeted 'the relationalist' view of the self. He seems to use the terms the relational self, the self as a construct, and the narrative self interchangeably, except for when he discusses the one prominent aspect of each view (Zahavi 2009, 2007). Therefore, his objections against the self as the sum of relations are the same as above. However, the concept of relational self *per se* is much more heavily used in the philosophy of technology, psychology, and media studies. To strengthen the argument for Zahavi, I will now provide a comparative analysis between Zahavi's concept of Minimal Self and another perspective on personal identity in a digital context, proposed by Luciano Floridi, a philosopher specializing in information and technology. I would argue that Zahavi's Minimal Self is more suitable as a foundational notion than the one that is intended for an informational/digital system.

In the *Onlife Manifesto*, Floridi and associates lay out different challenging aspects such as hyper connectivity, politics, the public sphere, and identity and selfhood. The type of self that emerges in this context is the relational self - the self that is free but with a deep connection with other selves, technological artifacts, and the rest of nature (Floridi 2015). To become an informational self, one must progress through the organism stage, gain intelligence, and then obtain consciousness while individualized as a Kantian transcendental subject watches over. Floridi calls the information and communication technology the 'technology of the self' because of its influence on the self and the construction of identities (Floridi 2011).

While Floridi's account of the relational self offers a comprehensive framework for understanding identity in a hyperconnected world, it raises critical structural and philosophical concerns.

Firstly, the nature and structure of the self require a coherent explanation. While Floridi's framework implies a relational self from the outset, he still must account for individuation and unity - tasks Zahavi addresses directly from the beginning through his focus on the Minimal Self. Secondly, Floridi incorporates Kant's transcendental self to unify the three membranes of his informational self, but this move introduces contradictions. If a Kantian self is already presupposed, what role do the membranes play? And if the self is purely informational, can it still be reconciled with Kantian agency and autonomy? In attempting to ground the self both in information and transcendental subjectivity, Floridi risks undermining the coherence of his model. Zahavi avoids these problems by grounding selfhood in pre-reflective experience. His Minimal Self offers a stable experiential anchor - sufficient for unity without requiring full-blown sociality - and remains compatible with the layered construction of identity in networked environments.

### *3. Experiential Grounding as Necessary Supplement and Implications for Theories of Digital Identity*

Zahavi's critique does not reject narrative or relational theories outright. Rather, it shows that they presuppose what they cannot themselves explain: the for-me-ness of experience. The Minimal Self functions as a necessary supplement, providing the experiential ground upon which construction and relation unfold. Without this ground, identity would be an empty process, lacking an experience to sustain it.

This distinction has direct implications for the study of digital identity. Narrative and relational models describe how users construct and negotiate their online selves - through posts, interactions, and algorithmic visibility - but they overlook who is doing the construction. Even the act of performing identity presupposes the lived awareness of being the one who acts. Zahavi's phenomenology restores this foundational level, showing that digital identity is not

purely performative but also experiential. By grounding selfhood in lived experience, Zahavi avoids two symmetrical errors. The first is reductionism, which dissolves the self into social or technological processes. The second is substantialism, which isolates the self from the world. The Minimal Self occupies a middle ground: it is neither an external construction nor an internal object, but the condition for both.

In the digital environment, these distinctions become crucial. Platforms such as Facebook are seen as operating within what Papacharissi (2015) calls “affective publics,” where identities circulate through expressions, emotions, and interactions. Users curate their profiles, respond to feedback, and measure their social presence through metrics. These practices exemplify narrative and relational selfhood. Yet beneath these visible layers lies the ongoing fact of experience: each act is lived from a first-person perspective. Zahavi’s framework thus reframes digital subjectivity. The self that engages online is not merely constructed; it is lived. Social and technological mediations may shape appearance but cannot abolish the immediacy of experience. Even in algorithmic environments where visibility and recognition depend on external systems, the sense of agency and ownership remains. To engage as a user is to enact one’s Minimal Self.

## **The Facebook Self**

Digital life invites individuals to appear to themselves and others through mediated forms of expression. Among social platforms, Facebook remains paradigmatic: it organizes life into visible traces, including posts, comments, memories, and shared moments, that seem to both construct and preserve identity. The Facebook self thus becomes a point of convergence for narrative, relational, and performative dimensions of subjectivity. Yet beneath these representational forms lies a question that phenomenology insists upon: *what is the mode of experience through which this digital self is lived?*

### *1. Narrative, Relational, and Constructed Selves on Facebook*

Broadly, the Facebook self has been understood in terms of three overlapping but distinct models: the constructionist, the relational, and the narrative.

First, the constructionist view emphasizes intentional identity performance. Users actively craft their profiles through curated content - choosing photos, status updates, affiliations, and more - to project a desired self-image. This process is ongoing and iterative, shaped by user decisions and platform affordances. The performative aspect of this construction points to a self that is flexible, edited, and multiply reproducible.

Second, the relational view locates the self in social interactions. On Facebook, identity emerges through communicative acts: tagging, commenting, liking, sharing. These exchanges form a dynamic network of social feedback that collectively constitutes one's online persona. The Facebook self here is co-authored, fluid, and responsive to others.

Third, the narrative model sees the self as a temporal construction - a story told. Users shape identity through the chronological documentation of life events, curated photo albums, and reflective posts. The Facebook timeline lends formal support to this view, organizing scattered posts into an implicit autobiographical arc. This echoes Ricoeur's and MacIntyre's views that narrative gives unity to identity over time.

While each model highlights a distinct emphasis - performance, interrelation, or coherence - they share key assumptions: (1) that identity is constructed, not given; (2) that it is social and dynamic; and (3) that platform design significantly influences self-presentation. In sum, these models collectively frame the Facebook self as a malleable, context-sensitive identity shaped by interaction, temporality, and technological mediation.

## *2. Reinterpreting Facebook Through the Minimal Self*

Now we apply Zahavi's critiques to the relational, constructed, and narrative nature of the Facebook self: fiction and confabulation, finitude, and ethics - each of which sheds light on the limitations of Facebook's model of identity. Firstly, Facebook invites users to assemble their lives into coherent timelines through selective posts, photos, and milestones. But this narrative structure, while polished, often conceals the complexity, discontinuity, and contradictions of real experience. Zahavi would see this curated self as vulnerable to fictionality, where the demand for coherence leads users to embellish, omit, or harmonize events into stories that are aesthetically compelling but ontologically hollow. Secondly, Facebook users are constrained not only by the medium's fragmentary format but by its incentives - likes, comments, algorithmic visibility - that favor sharable highlights over messy realities. Life is rendered as a sequence of legible moments, but much of what is pre-reflectively lived - ambiguity, contradiction, fleeting moods - goes unrepresented. Seeing the self on Facebook as the construction of narratives leads to the inevitable limitation of narrative to capture the whole of lived experience. Finally, Facebook's dominant logic of self-display - driven by audience approval, performance metrics, and algorithmic reward - can displace the ethical self with a performative one. The self that emerges is reactive, not responsible; visible, not answerable. In Zahavi's view, such a structure fails to support the integrity of selfhood.

Zahavi argues that beneath all these forms lies a more fundamental layer: the Minimal Self - the pre-reflective, first-personal sense of selfhood. It does not depend on narrative, social validation, or constructed presentation. Instead, it is the ever-present subject of experience. While some critics may claim that the Minimal Self is unobservable within digital traces, Zahavi (2012, 2014) counters that it is not something to be found but something that constitutes experience

itself. The Minimal Self is not an object within experience but the subject of it: the pre-reflective awareness that makes first-personal experience possible (Zahavi 2012, 155). It cannot be “found” because it is always already present in every lived moment. Even retrospective thoughts and memories are unified through the same first-personal perspective. This objection echoes a category mistake in cognitive science—assuming selfhood must be localized in the brain. Zahavi (2014, 207) notes that the absence of neural or digital correlations does not negate selfhood; rather, selfhood is constituted through first-personal givenness. Facebook posts, though external artifacts, originate from this subjective ground and maintain an underlying continuity. Even in disembodied or fragmented digital spaces, the Minimal Self persists as the structural unity that enables coherent self-experience over time (Zahavi 2012, 157).

Zahavi’s recent work (Osler and Zahavi 2023) critiques the limitations of online interaction, noting how platforms like Facebook reduce perceptual access to others and mediate sociality. Yet, he maintains that the Minimal Self endures these mediations. Digital identity may be fragmented, but its experiential ground - subjective awareness - persists. He even sees Goffman, whose work championed the self-presentation and self-construction view (Ross et al., 2009), as emphasizing an awareness of self-presentation - an understanding of how others perceive and respond to us in any interaction (Osler and Zahavi, 2023). In short, even underlying Goffman’s self-presentation is the Minimal Self.

Phenomenologically, every digital act manifest intentional consciousness which is directed toward something, involving anticipation or evaluation, and lived from a first-person point of view. Even the smallest gesture bears the mark of mineness: updating a profile picture, sharing a memory, or receiving reactions all carry the implicit awareness, I am doing this; this is addressed to me. Facebook amplifies and externalizes this structure. Its design turns act of self-presentation into visible traces, yet these remain grounded in lived awareness. Algorithmic curation and social feedback shape appearance but cannot annul the for-me-ness of experience: even within technological mediation, there persists a self who scrolls, notices, and responds.

Thus, while Facebook fosters relational, narrative, and constructed selves, it presupposes the Minimal Self as their condition of possibility. The experiential continuity that underlies each click, post, and interaction affirms the objective endurance of selfhood - even in digital space.

### *3. The “Felt Cute” Trend and the Endurance of the Minimal Self*

This section analyzes how Zahavi’s Minimal Self manifests in the real-world context of social media use, specifically through the Facebook trend containing the phrase “Felt cute, might delete later.” The phrase and its variations typically accompany a photo, selfies or self-portraits, emphasizing a subject-centered digital presence.<sup>1</sup> Even non-selfie posts typically maintain the individual as focal point, highlighting intentional self-presentation. On the other hand, it also reflects an immediacy that aligns with Zahavi’s assertion that self-consciousness is embedded in our experiential engagement with the world prior to reflective interpretation.

Drawing from a 50 posts across multiple public user profiles, the analysis identifies a spectrum of self-expressions—spontaneous, recurring, and socially situated—that illustrates how pre-reflective selfhood persists in the algorithmically mediated, performative space of Facebook.<sup>2</sup> The analysis is organized around three interlocking themes: (1) pre-reflective moments of self-attunement, (2) the temporal structure of identity across retained posts, and (3) the coexistence of narrative and Minimal Selfhood in digital contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> Variations like #FeltCuteMightDeleteLater and #FeltCuteWontDelete appear to signal different levels of confidence, yet both reflect intentional acts of digital self-presentation. Posts labeled “might delete” often remain online, suggesting that the expression of hesitation is itself performative rather than literal.

<sup>2</sup> To address privacy concerns, this study analyzes Facebook posts using detailed descriptions of publicly available screenshots instead of reproducing images. This method ensures ethical standards are maintained while offering comprehensive insights into trends and themes related to the Minimal Self in digital environments.

- *Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness in “Felt Cute” Posts*

The “Felt Cute” caption appears alongside selfies and casual portraits that do not narrate life events but instead mark a fleeting moment of self-awareness - “this is me, now.” The Minimal Self is defined by its pre-reflective quality, its immediate “for-me-ness” embedded in each conscious act. These posts exemplify this structure: they are not efforts to tell a story, but to share a moment of embodied recognition.

What distinguishes these posts is not their aesthetic but their phenomenological content: the felt immediacy of self-awareness expressed without explanation, context, or explicit meaning. The caption’s minimalism reinforces its ontological significance: it reflects a subject who is present to themselves without needing to justify that presence. These expressions are direct, unmediated, and affirm Zahavi’s insight that “the self is not inferred but given in the act of experiencing” (Zahavi 2005, 126)

- *Retention, Repetition, and Temporal Continuity*

The recurring appearance of the same caption across years by the same user points to a deeper layer of diachronic unity. While the posts express spontaneity, their non-deletion, recurrence, and even meta-variations (“won’t delete,” “probably won’t delete”) reveal patterns of self-continuity over time. Zahavi (2012) argues that selfhood persists not as a static identity but through the continuity of first-personal experience over time. A user in the posts, for example, posted variations of “Felt cute, won’t delete” over the span of two years, each time combining it with selfies in different emotional registers - celebratory, natural, humorous. The consistency of the phrase anchors the posts in a first-person temporal structure, despite changes in visual context, physical appearance, or emotional tone.

This pattern underscores a critical point: identity is not created by coherence but by continuity of experience. Experience retains its own past and anticipates its future. The post is not merely a statement of identity but a trace of ongoing self-awareness. Even in the potential act of deletion, the *for-me-ness* of experience persists: it is I who might delete, I who reconsiders, I who remains. What binds these posts together is not narrative elaboration but the recurring moment of self-recognition - a structure Zahavi describes as "the same fundamental first-personal character" carried across time (Zahavi 2012, 149)

Seen phenomenologically, "Felt Cute" might not be an empirical proof of the Minimal Self but a manifestation of it. It demonstrates how selfhood is lived across time, through changing moods, social responses, and digital mediation. It also exemplifies the tension between visibility and withdrawal that characterizes digital selfhood. On the surface, the phrase signals playfulness or irony: an image of oneself posted temporarily, open to evaluation, then possibly erased. This oscillation between expression and withdrawal exemplifies what Husserl described as internal time-consciousness, where each moment of experience retains its immediate past and anticipates its future (Husserl 1991). Thus, it is the pre-reflective awareness that unites these acts is what allows them to be recognized as belonging to the same person.

- *The Interplay of Minimal and Narrative Selves*

There are some "Felt Cute" posts suggests how the Minimal Self operates alongside narrative and socially constructed elements in digital self-presentation. A playful, self-referential caption amid a formal ceremony signals immediate self-recognition that is not fully absorbed into the event's social meaning. The caption introduces an individual, affective tone that distinguishes personal experience from social role. The event may be socially structured, but the expression is phenomenologically first-personal, showing that the self is not dissolved in relationality but persists alongside it (Zahavi 2022, 405). It also supports Zahavi's broader argument that the Minimal Self underlies all experiences, including those that are shaped by cultural structures.

### *Affirmation, Agency, and Challenging the Narrative Self*

The tension between being seen by others and acting on a private impulse, captured in the phrase “might delete”, gives these posts a deeper personal meaning. That these posts remain, often for years, suggest that the pre-reflective act of posting itself becomes part of the user’s autobiographical fabric, not because it is woven into a narrative, but because it is sustained in memory and presence.

Finally, the interplay between the minimal and narrative selves in “felt cute” posts further challenge the notion that selfhood is purely a constructed narrative. While the narrative self introduces elements of self-evaluation, anticipated social perception, and digital performativity, it does not replace the pre-reflective foundation from which all these processes emerge. The act of recognizing oneself in a previously posted “felt cute” image, or reaffirming that a past post still represents oneself, demonstrates that selfhood operates on multiple layers. The fact that these posts often remain undeleted suggests that the pre-reflective assertion of selfhood which was felt in the moment of posting persists despite later reflective scrutiny. In this way, rather than presenting a contradiction, the tension between the minimal and narrative selves serves as evidence of the Minimal Self’s enduring presence, even in the most socially mediated spaces of self-expression.

### **Discussion: Revisiting Zahavi’s Minimal Self in the Context of Facebook**

The analysis of the “Felt Cute” posts offers more than a mere application of Zahavi’s concept; it demonstrates that the Minimal Self remains the indispensable structure of experience, even within spaces often presumed to be dominated by narrative or performative identity construction. Unlike Goffman’s dramaturgical model or Ricoeur’s narrative identity, Zahavi’s framework allows for a closer engagement with those fleeting, non-discursive aspects of digital selfhood that precede storytelling and performative acts. The Minimal Self offers a phenomenological grounding that remains operative even in the highly curated

expressions of identity typical of platforms like Facebook. While constructivist and relational theories offer insight into the social formation and discursive maintenance of identity, they often risk overlooking the immediateness of experience that animates even the most performative gestures online.

In this way, Zahavi's approach reveals that an online gesture - often dismissed as trivial or overly interpreted as a reflection of the user's identity - may, in fact, be anchored in enduring structures of selfhood. The decision to retain a post, repeat its form across time, or simply engage with one's own image in the moment all points to a continuous self-experience that resists being fully explained by external validation or narrative construction.

Furthermore, Zahavi's insistence on the first-personal character of experience clarifies how digital platforms do not exhaust or replace subjectivity. While Facebook structures and constrains user agencies through algorithmic design and social affordances, it does not eliminate the phenomenological core from which users engage, resist, and express themselves. In moments of seemingly minimal significance, such as "felt cute" posts, we find evidence of this subjective continuity -- a Minimal Self that endures even in the most disjointed and curated corners of digital life.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that Dan Zahavi's phenomenological account of the Minimal Self offers an important corrective to dominant theories of digital identity. While relational, narrative, and constructivist views foreground the social, performative, and mediated nature of online selfhood, Zahavi draws attention to the pre-reflective, first-personal structure that underlies all experience - including that of social media use. The paper also provided a theoretical reflection on these dominant views, highlighting their conceptual strengths and limitations, and situating Zahavi's intervention as a response to their blind spots.

Through an interpretive analysis of the “Felt Cute” trend, the study illustrates how the Minimal Self manifests in transient, performative, and algorithmically mediated acts of self-expression. Rather than reducing online selfhood to curated performances or social feedback loops, the analysis in this study illustrates an experiential substrate that remains operative beneath these layers. Selfhood, even on social media, cannot be entirely accounted for by narrative coherence or external validation. The act of posting, repeating, and retaining content across time reflects a continuity of subjective experience that aligns with Zahavi’s claim that selfhood precedes narrative and social inscription.

In doing so, the paper affirms the relevance of phenomenological inquiry in digital contexts, challenging assumptions that the self is only a linguistic, cultural, or technological construct. The Minimal Self endures not as a metaphysical entity but as a lived structure of experience, and this endurance remains observable - even in the ephemeral gestures of a platform designed for performance and circulation.

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