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Facebook as an implied author: an investigation into the characterization techniques employed by users of the social networking site, Facebook, through a comparative study with Jane Austen's *Emma.*

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Abstract

This research investigates how Facebook guides its users to characterize themselves. By using Jane Austen, and specifically her characterization techniques in *Emma* as a framework, Facebook is shown to use many of the same techniques to guide its co-authors into certain characters. Comparing a 21st century social networking site to a 19th century novel is unusual, but will show how in many ways Facebook functions as an implied author. The comparison is also used to suggest that, contrary to previous research into online social networking which focussed on profiles being used as an expresson of a users identity, Facebook profiles are a fictionalised version of

the users and their lives. A case study, a young female studying at a private university in Johannesburg, South Africa, is used to illustrate this. She is shown to have created a fictionalised and idealized Facebook character for herself, mostly through the use of photographs. Using her photos as examples, the importance of photographic representation as a Facebook characterization technique, including accompanying skills such posing for photographs and editing photographs, is explored, as are the implications of this visually based representation, for example the difficulty in portraying depth of character or a believable inner life. The research employs Barthes' writings on photography to guide these explorations.