

*The Link Between*

**CONTENT  
SHARING &  
IDENTITY**



**FRACTL**

“**[BuzzFeed’s process]** is] a close analysis of why people share media, not in the sense of how large networks function, but in the sense of **why an individual makes a single, social decision.**” – Ze Frank, Head of BuzzFeed Video

While companies and marketers eagerly look for big numbers of shares to climb on counters, the experience on the other side of the share button can be much different. Sharing online – reflecting what one finds interesting, entertaining, repulsive, or other – is an act of refining one’s identity. Studies have shown that users continually assess and reconsider the appropriateness of what they share; as many as **71% of users exhibit some level of last-minute self-censorship<sup>1</sup>** by deleting comments or posts before they hit Publish.

1 Sauvik Das and Adam Kramer, Carnegie Mellon University and Facebook [Self-censorship on Facebook](#)

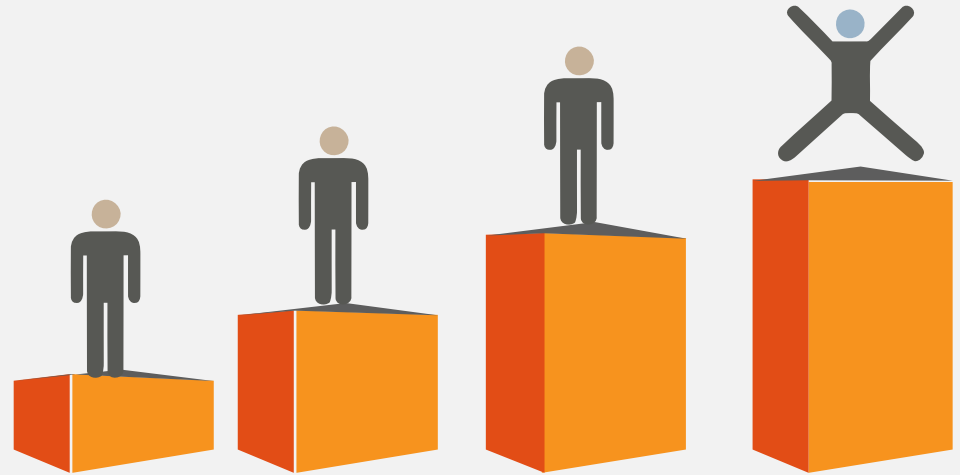


Understanding how identity theory works with content sharing will help you create campaigns that connect with the messages your audience **wants** to project.

# Methodology

“As individuals, we rank the many aspects of our identities in a hierarchy. **The higher an identity is ranked, and the larger and more important the social network associated with that identity, the more likely it is that we will take action to strengthen or reinforce that identity.**” – R.C. Morris, PhD<sup>2</sup>

We surveyed 1,000 people to investigate the connection between identity and content sharing, and the implications for marketers looking to create more engaging and highly-shareable content. Using an abbreviated version of the Social Science Aspects of Identity Questionnaire<sup>3</sup>, we asked participants to rank the importance of five broad facets of identity when they share on social media.



<sup>2</sup> Morris, Purdue University Identity Salience and Identity Importance in [Identity Theory](#)

<sup>3</sup> Cheek and Briggs, Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Sciences [Aspects of Identity Questionnaire](#)

# Most Salient Identities

Survey participants ranked their **relational** and **personal** identities as the **most important** factors they consider when sharing content online.

There are five broad aspects of identity:

• PERSONAL

• RELATIONAL

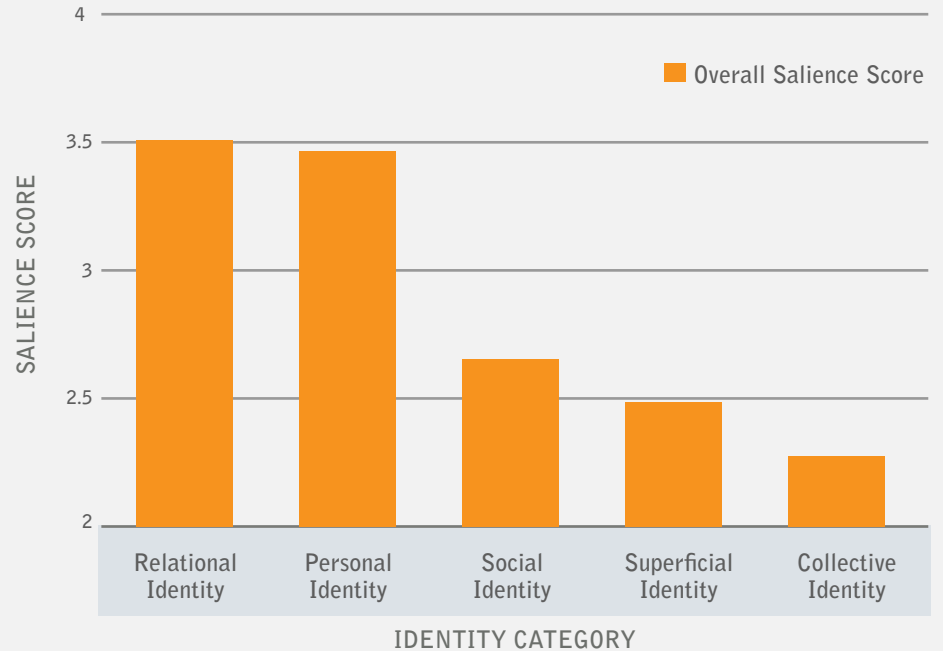
• SOCIAL

• COLLECTIVE

• SUPERFICIAL

Which identities are most important to users on social networks? 84% of respondents said their relationships and friendships are important factors when they share content; 63% ranked personal values and moral standards as important.

IDENTITY TYPE SALIENCE IN ONLINE SHARING

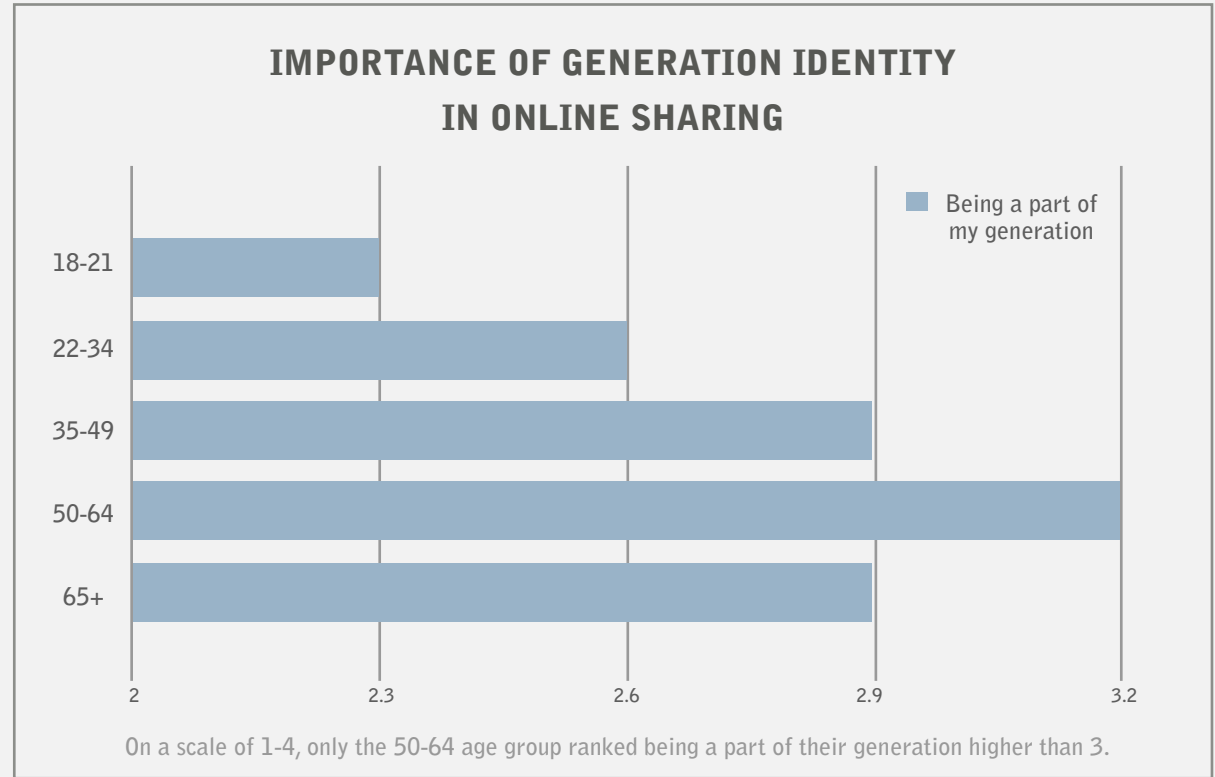


# Least Salient Identities

Fewer than 30% said their sex or age (superficial identity factors) was important; fewer than 10% of all participants ranked any collective identity factor as “extremely important.”

Collective identity – factors relating to generation, race, and religion – ranked as the lowest considerations in online sharing behavior. 55% of survey respondents said religion in particular was “not important.”

Superficial identity, which includes material possessions, age, and gender, ranked second lowest.



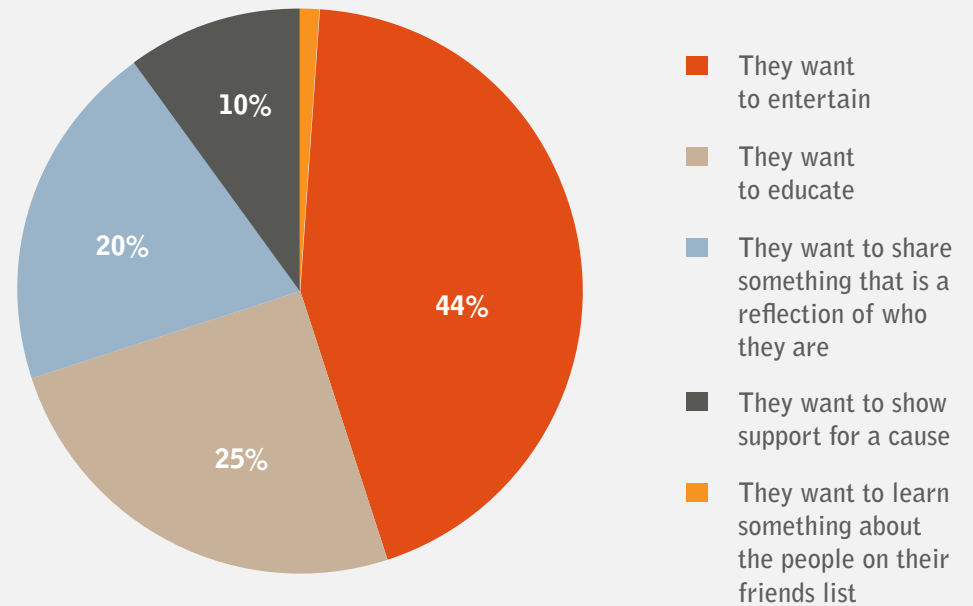
# Social Motivations

44% of respondents rank **entertaining others** as the most important motivation behind sharing a piece of content.

Users reported the most social of the sharing motivations – entertaining and educating, which inherently have an effect on others – as being the most important of their considerations when they decide to share content.

However, just because a motivation didn't rank highly doesn't mean users don't want to share that type of content. In this study, 13% of women and 8% of men ranked altruism as the most important reason they share, but 44% of women and 27% of men said they'd shared content to support a cause in the past week.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN CONTENT SHARING?



# Sharing Articles

Content that is **most entertaining, least personal, or pertaining to shared experiences** is more likely to be shared.

Social media users are sharing content primarily to strengthen their social and relational identities – those aspects of themselves relevant to their relationships, friendships, values, and goals – rather than their personal, collective, or superficial identities.

To test this further, we then took some of the most-shared articles online<sup>4</sup> and asked users which they'd be most likely to share. One article emerged as the clear winner:

Nearly 44% said they'd share [The 25 Funniest AutoCorrects of 2012](#).

<sup>4</sup> Fractl [Publisher Engagement Analysis](#)



# Sharing Articles

**Between 30% – 40% said they'd share these articles:**

- This Might Be the Scariest Trail in the World. You'll NEVER Guess Where it Leads. Unbelievable. (38.22%)
- What State Do You Actually Belong In? (36.43%)
- Bully Calls News Anchor Fat, Anchor Destroys Him on Live TV (35.73%)
- 2 People Described the Same Person to a Forensic Artist (34.23%)
- Oddest Job Interview Questions at Tech Companies (34.13%)
- How Y'all, You, and Youse Guys Talk Interactive Graphic (34.13%)
- Which Career Should You Actually Have? (31.24%)

**Less than 30% said they'd share these articles:**

- The Day I Stopped Saying 'Hurry Up' (26.05%)
- 'I Am Adam Lanza's Mother': A Perspective on the Mental Illness Conversation in America (24.75%)
- Which European Country Do You Actually Belong In? (23.25%)
- 9 out of 10 Americans Are Completely Wrong About This Mind-Blowing Fact (22.65%)
- Pushing for Sexual Equality in Jordan (21.76%)
- WestJet Christmas Surprise Will Make You Believe in Santa (18.96%)
- Dustin Hoffman Breaks Down Crying Explaining Something That Every Woman Sadly Already Experienced (15.47%)

See how these results compare to the overall popularity of these articles in our [Publisher Engagement Analysis](#).





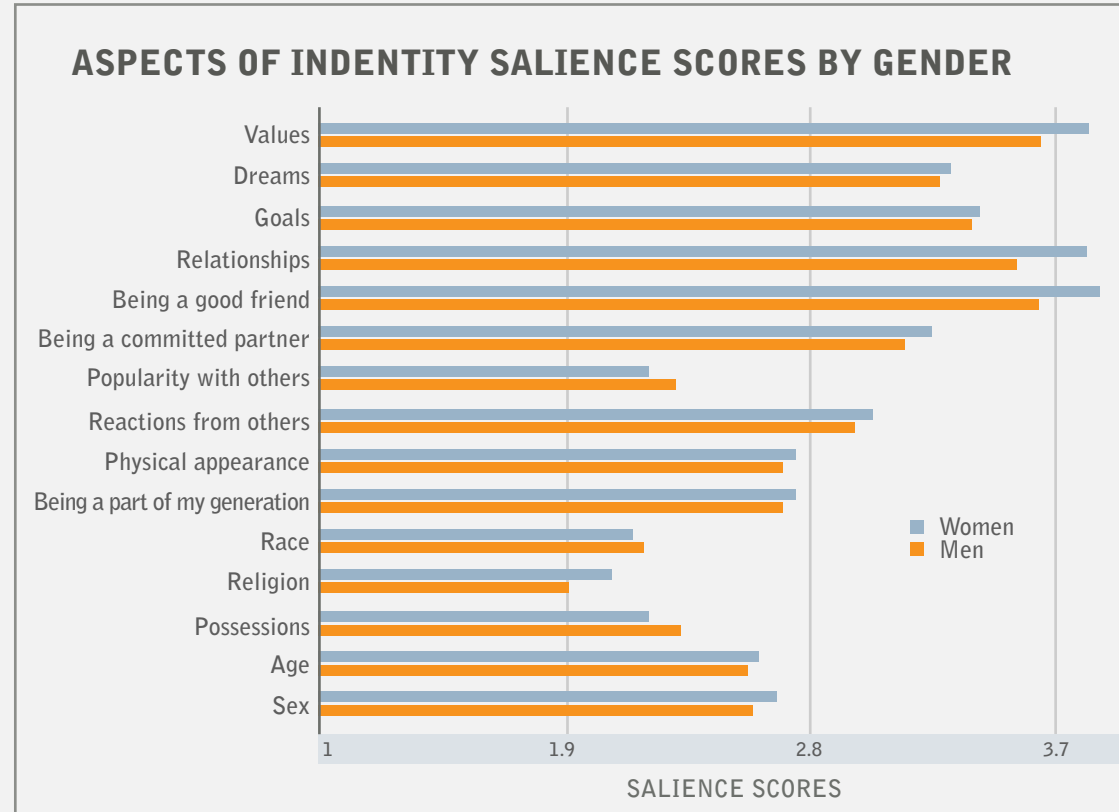
# Social Motivations

Women valued almost all aspects of identity slightly more than men. This trend translated to the articles they said they'd share – but not their actual sharing behavior.

Popularity, race, and possessions were the only identity factors more important to men than women; similarly, “9 out of 10 Americans are completely wrong about this mind blowing fact” was the only article that men said they'd share more than women.

However, when it comes to actual sharing behavior, **men appear to share more. 71% of men posted between 4-7 times in the past week versus 66% of women, and 51% of men posted 1-3 times compared to 43% of women.**

Their sharing motivations differed slightly as well. Women ranked sharing to reflect themselves and sharing to support a cause 10% higher than men, whereas men ranked sharing to entertain 7% higher and sharing to educate 3% higher.

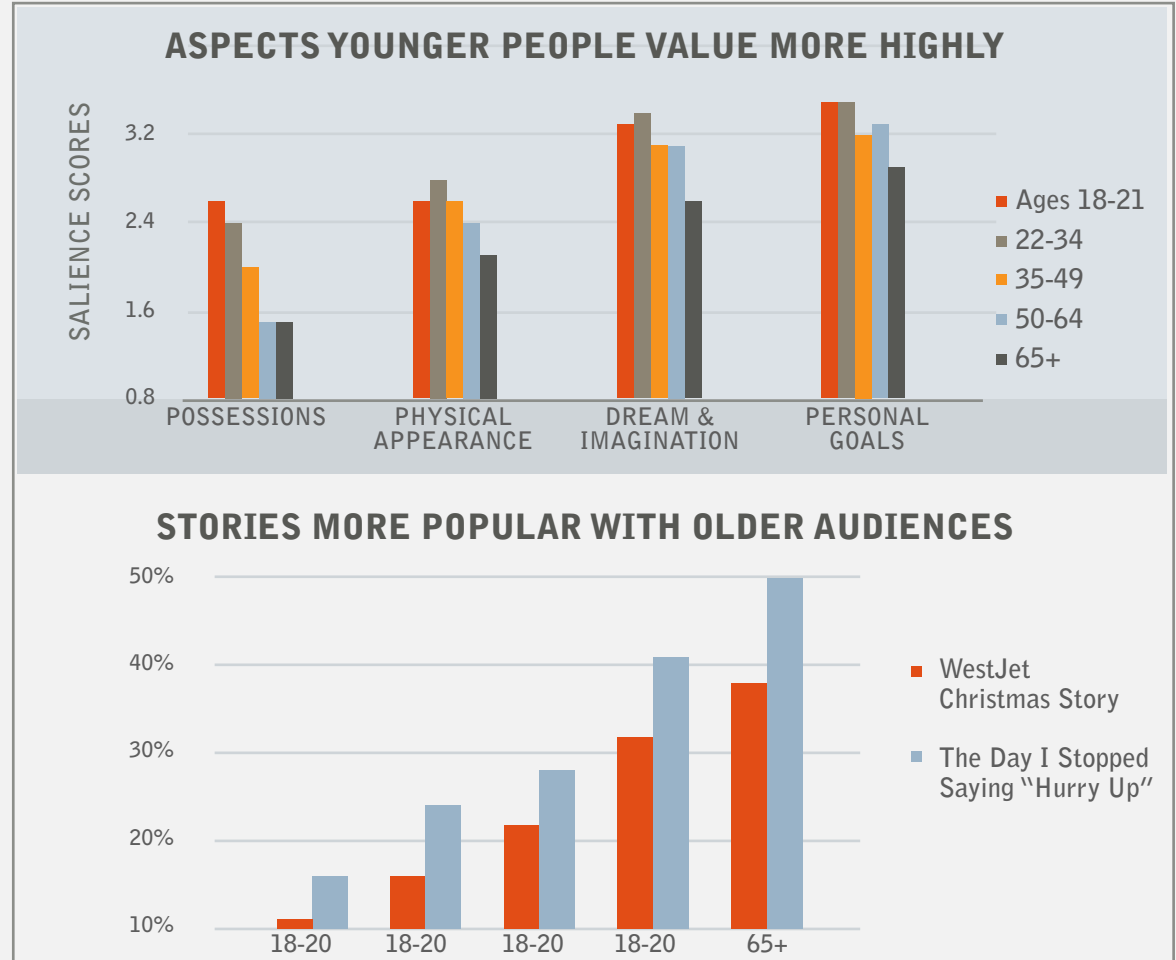


# Generational Differences

Relationships ranked higher than any other aspect in this survey among those 65 and older.

Relationships ranked highly for all our survey participants, but none more so than the oldest generation. Conversely, Millennials showed more interest in physical appearance, dreams and imagination, personal goals, and strikingly, possessions, than older groups.

When it came to sharing specific articles, only two titles were more popular with earlier generations than younger groups: "The Day I Stopped Saying 'Hurry Up'" and "WestJet Christmas Surprise Will Make You Believe in Santa."





**This study shows us how audiences want to portray themselves when they share content online. Build messages that reflect these insights, and you'll be creating content that people want to share.**

# FRACTL

We leverage the science behind great content.

Our Mission

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**TO PRODUCE THE MOST ENGAGING AND  
EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES ON THE WEB.**

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Fractl is a full-service digital marketing agency that specializes in content marketing, social media, and lead generation. Fractl focuses on the high impact of viral content marketing as it relates to SEO, rankings, and online growth. Fractl is a team with a broad set of talents and skill sets. Most notably, we maintain a highly talented team of programmers, writers, editors, PR professionals, technical search engine talent, animators, graphic designers, project managers, producers, and creative thinkers. Find out how our superior results can increase your bottom line today.