

Constructing Self Identity through Social-Media: In the Perspective of Gen Z

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Abstract: The study aims to explain the importance of social media usage and its significant influence on the construction of generation Z identity as the most users of social media platforms. Previous generation relied on the closest people for the identity construction process but the process now moved to the virtual sphere. Using case study method and generation Z as participants, this study shows that social media platforms provide an opportunity for Generation Z to establish their own identity. The process of constructing the identity is done by carefully selecting and putting in maximum effort to produce a photo or post that is worthy of being shared on their social media accounts. This construction process of identity is the part of conformity to the values embraced by the social media for most of the users.

Keywords: self identity, construction, social media, generation Z.

1. Introduction

Defining identity is a complex task, but it can be understood as an individual's self-awareness and how they perceive themselves. It greatly influences an individual's behavior, thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and also connects them to the society. Cooley as cited in Berger and Luckmann emphasizes the interconnection between self and society, highlighting how they both have a profound impact on each other [1].

Individuals learn and develop their self-identity through socialization agents such as family, school, play groups, and mass media. An individual's culture, values, and habits are strongly related to their identity. Language, for example, is a significant part of one's identity and is determined by the culture of the group from birth. As individuals grow from childhood to adulthood, they develop their understanding of themselves based on their environment. Identity is not only complex, but it also develops based on the culture and environment in which the individual lives.

A person's self-perception is shaped by their social environment, including factors such as culture, ethnicity, and social class, as well as personal choices like interests and preferences. Society provides opportunities for self-development and language that allows individuals to express and claim their identity. However, individuals also have agency and can contribute to the social structure through their interactions with others who share their values.

Berger and Luckmann stated that identity is a crucial aspect of one's subjective reality [1]. Similar to subjective reality as a whole, identity is intertwined in a dialectical connection with society. Essentially, one's identity is shaped by social processes. Once an identity is established, it becomes subject to the influence of social relationships and may undergo modifications over time. The formation and preservation of identity are heavily influenced by social processes, which are dictated by the social structure. However, the individual's awareness and interactions also have a significant role in shaping and maintaining their identity. Ultimately, it is the interplay between the individual and society that gives rise to a unique identity.

The socialization process is considered fully accomplished when individuals have effectively internalized a comprehensive perception of other individuals into their consciousness. In order for a child to develop a strong sense of self-identity, their emotional attachment to their parents during primary socialization is crucial. However, it is important to note that this emotional bond is not necessary during secondary socialization. Effective socialization can occur through mutual communication between individuals. It should be acknowledged that during primary socialization, the child only identifies with their parents and those closest to them as no one else holds more significance. Society has predetermined a set of important individuals for the child to accept, leaving no room for other options. As a result, it is essential to recognize that the individual's first world is constructed during primary socialization and cannot be easily altered [1].

After an individual has completed the primary socialization process, they become recognized as a member of society and develop a sense of self. However, it's important to understand that the process of internalizing reality and identity isn't a one-time occurrence. Socialization is an ongoing process that never truly ends. Secondary socialization involves instilling institutional values or occurs in institutions broader than primary socialization. The complexity of the division of labor and distribution of knowledge influence the character and scope of this secondary socialization [1]. New communication technologies like the internet and social media have been introduced, and they now play a significant role in shaping one's identity [2]. Generation Z has been experimenting with their identity in this creative space or laboratory provided by the development of social media as a communication medium and secondary socialization agent [3].

Generation Z, also known as the internet generation or digital natives, encompasses those born between 1995 and 2010. Their preference for social media as the primary mode of communication is a direct result of growing up in an interconnected world where the internet is omnipresent [4]. Technological advancements in communication and interaction have resulted in significant changes in their behavior, attitudes, and lifestyle [5].

Due to their upbringing in a technology-dominated world, Generation Z is inclined to explore and socialize in the virtual realm through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter. These platforms facilitate the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of their social value by allowing them to construct and share their online identity and receive feedback from others [6]. The youth, well-versed in using the internet and social media, are comfortable expressing themselves through various mediums. This includes commenting on reality, evaluating their purchases and experiences, and detailing their activities. Communication is viewed as a two-way process by this generation. By sharing their thoughts and experiences, they also expect to receive feedback, which they highly value [7].

While identity formation is largely influenced by the real world, there has been a recent shift towards virtual identity formation in cyberspace, particularly among generation Z. This generation, born and raised during the rise of internet technology and social media, is most affected by this change. As technology continues to shape communication and social interaction, it will have a significant impact on how generation Z constructs their own identity. This study seeks to understand how generation Z identifies themselves and builds their identity through social media.

2. Method

For this study, a qualitative research method was used with a case study approach. The objective was to explore an event, process, or activity in-depth for one or more individuals. A case is defined by time and activity, and various data collection procedures are utilized continuously. To facilitate the exploration of the social situation being studied, a purposive sampling technique was used to select data sources with specific considerations [8]. The informants were limited to university students who are part of generation Z, as they are the most active users of social media. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants through face-to-face interviews, utilizing structured and unstructured questions that were generally open-ended to obtain views and opinions from the participants. Documentation was also collected through sound recordings and pictures during the interview process. Public or private documents were studied to supplement the data from interviews and documentation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Data analysis involved selecting, sorting, and organizing data collected from field notes, observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation to obtain a thorough understanding. The results of this study are expected to be deep, meaningful, and unique, providing new descriptive findings and patterns of relationships between categories of the objects studied. the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Process of Constructing Gen Z's Self Identity through Social-Media

This study revealed that Instagram is a crucial tool for constructing one's identity on social media. Users meticulously select their outfits, backgrounds, and filters to enhance their photos and reduce the appearance of blemishes. This process ensures that the final photo meets social media's high standards. While individuals have the freedom to choose what they post, they are still subject to the ideal standards of social media. This is in line with the symbolic interactionism concept of self-concept, which implies that self is a reflexive process of social interaction. Humans can be both the subject and object of their own self in this reflexive process [10].

The participants of this study carefully select photos to share on social media in hopes of receiving likes from other users. The number of likes a post receives is seen as a measure of popularity and validation for the user. Popularity is highly valued as it allows users to be easily identified and is measured by the number of followers one has. Social media posts contribute greatly to one's identity and this is supported by Eleuteri research, which suggests that digital performance on social media is a crucial developmental task in modern times [11]. The number of comments, likes, and followers on social media also reflect one's online identity, self-confidence, and belief in themselves. Choosing a post theme is another way to build one's identity on social media. Prior to posting, users often plan their theme. For example, if someone's theme is traveling, they may feel pressured to only share travel-related posts. Visual branding plays a significant role in building one's identity on social media, as users carefully curate images to attract followers and maintain a positive online presence [12].

3.2 First and Second Account: Between Real and Online Self

As per the study, most participants maintain multiple social media accounts on the same platform. These accounts project various versions of themselves, with the first account being more adaptable and open to accepting friend requests from strangers. On the contrary, the second account is specifically for sharing more personal and authentic posts with known friends from the real world.

The first account is intended to display the user's desired self-image on social media, containing only the best things they are willing to share. They usually have only one post on this account and aim to gain likes and followers through interesting content. In contrast, the second account allows users to be more daring in sharing their real-life experiences, such as expressing sadness or sharing unfiltered photos and hobbies. This account is typically named something different from the user's real name and is only shared with their closest friends. Overall, the study suggests that users have a complicated relationship with social media, using different accounts and personas to navigate their online and offline identities.

It can be challenging when someone's online persona or social media identity differs from their true self. This complexity is further heightened when that individual tries to display two different identities in the virtual world. Research by Gashkova highlights that self-identification cannot be fully achieved on social media and is limited by the rules of cyberspace.

While experimenting with one's identity in virtual environments is possible, it leads to a constantly transforming personal identity that remains incomplete. The virtual self, which performs self-identification repeatedly in the digital space, ultimately loses its individuality [3]. To maintain personal integrity, an individual must be able to display their true identity in the real world, while also managing two identities in the virtual world through separate accounts.

4. Conclusion

According to this study, individuals belonging to Generation Z tend to shape their sense of self through social media. Although one's personal identity is ultimately formed in the real world, the emergence of various social media platforms provides an opportunity for Generation Z to establish their own identity to a certain extent. This process of constructing one's identity is done by carefully selecting and putting in maximum effort to produce a photo or post that is worthy of being shared on their respective social media accounts. In this case, every photo or post uploaded on their social media accounts serves as a representation of their self-identity. It is crucial to produce high-quality photos that meet certain standards, such as proper lighting and supportive clothing, in order to gain more likes from other users. The more likes one gets, the more followers they can expect to gain, and the easier it is for them to be identified within the platform. Likewise, establishing a unique theme or aesthetic is also a part of the identity construction process, as having a distinctive online presence makes it easier for others to identify them. The presence of more than one account is also a factor in this complex process of identity construction, as each account caters to different followers and serves as a representation of the user's personal identity. All of these factors suggest that the process of self-identification in the digital space may not be complete, but can be regulated to a certain extent.

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