

Self-Identity Formation and Social Perception of Individuals through Interaction on Social Media in a Digital World

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 May 2022

Revised 21 June 2022

Accepted 2 July 2022

Key words:

Social media,
Self-identity,
Social perception,
Psychological growth,
Social anxiety,
Social comparison,
Social connectionism.

ABSTRACT

Social media has become a profound communication tool for individuals in shaping their self-identity and social perception. Interactions on these platforms allow individuals to express different sides of themselves, but also create social pressures that relate to the idealized standards often promoted in social media. This research aims to understand how social media influences the formation of personal and social identities and the psychological growth of individuals in relation to the digital world. The results found suggest that while social media can strengthen social relationships, these platforms also have the potential to cause feelings of low self-esteem, social anxiety, and dissatisfaction with body image influenced by social comparison. It is important for individuals to be more aware of the negative impacts that can arise from online interactions, as well as how they can manage their exposure to social media wisely. By understanding the influence of social media, individuals can maintain a balance between the self-identity they want to present and a more authentic identity. Through this awareness, they can minimize the negative impact of social media and utilize this platform as a means for healthier and more positive identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, interactions on social media are increasingly becoming an integral part of everyday life. Individuals can easily communicate and share their experiences, views and identities online. The use of social media is not just for sharing information, but also a platform for individuals to shape and manage their public self-perception. This creates a complex relationship between personal and social identities, where individuals often try to build an ideal self-image by utilizing various social media features (Resnikoff & Nugent, 2021).

In particular, this phenomenon leads to the formation of self-identity that is often influenced by the social dynamics that exist on these platforms. Social media users tend to configure themselves to match social expectations or popular trends (Kumar et al., 2018). For example, individuals who are active on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok may feel compelled to adjust their appearance and behavior to be accepted in wider social groups, which can have an effect on how they understand themselves and how they want to be seen by others (Agustina, 2020).

The link between social media interactions and self-identity formation has attracted a lot of attention, especially in terms of its influence on individual psychological development. In many cases, overexposure to idealized images on social media can lead to dissatisfaction with oneself, especially in adolescents who are in the stage of self-discovery. As a result, social media has become more than just a communication tool, but also a medium that has the potential to influence how people construct and maintain their identities in the wider social sphere (Benn, 2017).

One of the main issues that has emerged in relation to social media is the negative impact on individuals' self-perception. Research suggests that constant exposure to unrealistic standards of beauty or success on platforms such as Instagram can lead to feelings of low self-confidence and anxiety (Chamsi et al., 2022). This is especially experienced by individuals who compare their lives to the images presented by others on social media (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). This phenomenon can lead to dissatisfaction with physical appearance or personal achievements.

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Social media can also worsen an individual's psychological state through the social pressure generated by the interactions that take place on these platforms. For example, individuals who do not receive enough attention or "likes" may feel that their identity is undervalued, which can then lead to feelings of isolation or even depression. This can have implications for the way individuals form and maintain their identities in the real world (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). When interactions and recognition gained through social media become the main determinants of one's self-esteem, the process of identity formation no longer relies on real experiences, personal reflections, or direct relationships, but rather on how they are perceived online. This can lead to an identity crisis or difficulty in establishing authentic relationships in everyday life.

In addition to self-perception issues, social media can also trigger conflicts in the formation of one's social identity. Users often feel pressured to conform to a certain group or community, which can sometimes override their original values and identity. They tend to adopt a more dominant lifestyle or outlook on the platform to gain recognition, which can obscure their true identity (Zhao et al., 2008). In an effort to create an impression of themselves online, many users present an idealized version of themselves that does not necessarily reflect real life. This gap between digital and real identities can weaken the clarity of one's identity in the long-term. This suggests that social media influences the self-identity search process indirectly through pressure from the social environment in cyberspace. The process of self-discovery becomes more difficult when individuals rely too much on external validation and neglect internal reflection.

Finally, overuse of social media in identity formation can also lead to psychological dependency. Individuals who are overly dependent on feedback from social media, such as "likes" or positive comments, may have difficulty in building a strong and healthy identity in the absence of external validation. This dependency risks causing psychological disorders, such as social anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (Fuchs, 2017). In extreme cases, they may even experience symptoms of social anxiety disorder, as they feel constantly judged by an online audience. Over time, this need for recognition can trigger a cycle of compulsive social media use, where individuals constantly monitor and adjust their online behavior to maintain a false sense of self-worth. When digital experiences become the only source of meaning and self-acceptance, the risk of psychological disorders such as depression, chronic stress, and even post-traumatic stress disorder becomes even greater.

Observing the phenomenon of interaction on social media and its impact on self-identity is crucial, given the deepening role of social media in human life. The increased accessibility and use of social media has changed the way individuals understand themselves and interact with the social world around them. This process of identity formation has far-reaching impacts, not only in psychological aspects, but also in social relationships and daily life. The research on how social media plays a role in shaping and influencing individual identities is crucial to understanding its long-term impact on personal and social growth.

This research aims to understand how interactions on social media influence the formation of individuals' self-identity and social perceptions. By delving deeper into the role of social media in shaping the way individuals perceive themselves, this research focuses on the impact of various forms of interactions that occur on social platforms on individuals' psychological and social growth. It will also look at the ways in which individuals are influenced by the digital environment in their search for and formation of self-identity.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this research is a literature study approach, which aims to review various previous studies related to the influence of social media on the formation of self-identity and social perception of individuals. This literature study relies on relevant and reliable sources, such as journal articles, books, and published research reports in the fields of psychology, communication, and social science. By utilizing various existing publications, this research will identify trends, theories, and important findings regarding how social media affects individuals in terms of their personal and social identity formation. For example, research by Manago et al. (2008) and Gonal (2017) revealed that social media plays a key role in shaping adolescents' identities, through online interactions that allow individuals to explore and present different aspects of themselves.

The literature review approach also allowed the researcher to critique and compare findings from different sources to gain an understanding of the topic. One relevant study is that of Perloff (2014), who investigated the relationship between social media and body image, suggesting that exposure to idealized images on social platforms can affect self-perception and lead to body dissatisfaction. Through synthesizing these research findings, this literature review aims to present an understanding of how social media dynamics affect individuals' identity formation and social perception in a broader scope, as well as to identify areas that require further research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the past few decades, social media has rapidly grown to become an indispensable part of human life. The use of various social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter not only facilitate communication but also influences the way individuals shape and express their self-identity. Unlike in-person interactions that tend to be more spontaneous and limited by the context of time and place, social media gives users more control over how they want to be seen by others. Users can select specific photos, edit captions, or filter content to match the self-image they want to present. The interactions that take place online allow individuals to play an active role in creating their desired self-image, but also create psychological challenges that are often overlooked. This process brings significant changes in the formation of personal and social identities that are more complex than face-to-face interactions (Gere et al., 2020).

Identity formation on social media is not only related to how individuals convey themselves to others, but also how they receive and interpret the feedback that comes from the digital environment. When individuals share content such as photos, thoughts, or activities, they are not only expressing their identity, but also opening themselves up to responses from others. Every interaction, be it comments, “likes,” or private messages, plays a role in leading individuals to further shape their identity. The impact is not always positive, as individuals are often exposed to unrealistic standards of beauty, success and popularity, which risks damaging their self-perception. This suggests that social media plays a dual role, being both a tool for identity formation and a source of social comparison that often lowers self-esteem (Papaioannou et al., 2021).

Understanding the influence of social media interactions on identity formation is crucial, given the powerful impact it has on individuals' psychological and social growth. As an inevitable communication tool, social media should be further understood in relation to broader social constructs (Gündüz, 2017). Social media is no longer just a means of communication, but a social space that shapes how individuals see themselves and are seen by others. The interactions that occur on these platforms - whether in the form of comments, likes or followers - become a kind of social mirror that constantly reflects one's self-worth. Attention needs to be paid to how interactions on social media shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their place in the social world, to avoid any negative impacts that may arise.

Interactions on social media can influence individuals' self-identity formation and social perceptions in complex and multifaceted ways. One of the main ways social media influences self-identity is through the formation of a self-image that is influenced by social standards and expectations often formed by other users on social platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. The various posts, photos and comments posted by individuals or groups form norms that can influence how individuals judge themselves and how they want to be seen by others (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). When people see posts that showcase success, beauty, or a certain lifestyle, they often compare themselves to these images, forming expectations of how they should look and act in digital social spaces. In cyberspace, social expectations are often more idealized and do not always reflect reality, which can cause individuals to feel pressured to conform to a more perfect image or standard.

Interactions on social media also allow individuals to be more active in exploring and displaying different aspects of their identity. Social media provides space for individuals to try on various personas or roles, from more authentic to more structured and tailored to social expectations. Research by Manago et al. (2008) shows that adolescents, for example, often use social media to experiment with their identities, trying to understand themselves through interactions with peers and the responses received online. It becomes a means to explore who they are and how they want to be recognized in society. Every digital interaction they experience contributes to the formation of a more consistent self-image or, conversely, challenges their own perceptions. It is important for users, especially adolescents, to be equipped with adequate digital literacy and emotional support so that identity exploration through social media remains healthy, reflective and not detrimental to their development.

Although social media gives freedom to experiment with identity, the social pressures brought about by image and recognition culture can shape how individuals perceive themselves (Halder, 2016). The tendency to comparison with others on social media often leads to individuals feeling dissatisfied with their identity (Sinanan, 2020). Many individuals, particularly adolescents, experience feelings of inferiority due to the inability to achieve the standards of beauty or success often exhibited by others (Fardouly et al., 2015). These feelings can undermine their self-perception, with individuals focusing more on the external image presented rather than on their internal or authentic values.

The impact of social media on self-identity can also be seen in the way people present themselves on these platforms. Social media allows individuals to control public perception in ways that are not always possible in the real world. Individuals can select the photos or statuses they post to portray themselves in a more favorable light. This selection process is often influenced by what is perceived as positive values in social media culture, such as success, beauty or popularity (Chou & Edge, 2012). This creates a self-image that is sometimes detached from reality and focuses more on presentation that conforms to social expectations.

Social media influences can also affect an individual's psychological growth, particularly in terms of social anxiety and pressure to be accepted. Individuals who rely too much on external validation, such as "likes" or positive comments, may experience emotional dependence on such feedback. Research shows that individuals who rely heavily on social media often experience anxiety and stress related to their self-image (Kross et al., 2013). They may feel anxious or underappreciated when not receiving responses that match their expectations, which then impacts their psychological growth, leading to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

Although social media can negatively affect self-image and social perception, these platforms can also provide opportunities for more positive social identity formation. Social media can introduce individuals to communities that share similar values and interests, allowing them to feel accepted and valued by others who share similar views or experiences. Research by Ellison et al. (2007) shows that social media, especially Facebook, can increase the sense of social connectedness, as individuals can interact with friends or groups that support their identity. Social media can strengthen one's social identity and provide space for individuals to thrive in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Social media can also play a role in the process of group social identity formation. These platforms allow individuals to identify with certain groups based on shared interests or beliefs, which can strengthen their sense of social identity. This identification with the group reinforces a sense of social attachment and forms a frame of reference that helps individuals assess who they are in a broader context. For example, individuals who engage in certain online communities, such as music-loving or social activism groups, may develop a clearer social identity through interactions with members of these groups. This contributes to the formation of a strong sense of community and empowerment through the reinforcement of shared values (Zhao et al., 2008).

Social media can also create sharper social divisions and intensify differences between individuals based on their social identities. When individuals are exposed to different groups that have very different views or lifestyles, this can exacerbate a sense of difference and incompatibility. This creates conditions where social identities become exclusive and defensive, rather than inclusive and dialogic. This kind of polarization can lead to digital segregation, where individuals are only exposed to narratives and opinions that confirm their own beliefs, unhealthily reinforcing the boundaries of group identity. Social media is often a space where social comparisons are more pronounced, with individuals feeling that their identities are inferior or less valuable than those of other groups or individuals they meet on the platform (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Social media has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and worsen intergroup relations.

The impact of social media on self-identity and social perceptions can also vary depending on the age and experience of the individual. For adolescents, for example, the process of identity formation is strongly influenced by the social interactions they have on social media, given that they are in a more vulnerable stage of psychosocial development. Excessive exposure to unrealistic beauty or lifestyle standards may increase feelings of self-dissatisfaction in this group (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Meanwhile, in mature individuals, although the impact of social media remains, their life experiences and psychological maturity are often more powerful in regulating the way they react to social standards shaped by social media. While not completely immune to the influence of social media, adults usually have more mature reflective skills, which allow them to separate the idealized image in the virtual world from the complex reality.

In the broader social sphere, social media can also exacerbate feelings of alienation or social isolation for some individuals. Although social media facilitates communication, the interactions that occur are often superficial and do not replace direct relationships that are more in-depth and emotional. This can lead to individuals feeling isolated although connected to many people online (Hampton et al., 2011). Reliance on social media for social recognition can create feelings of loneliness, which can further undermine an individual's psychological well-being. While not completely immune to the influence of social media, adults usually have more mature reflective skills, which allow them to separate the idealized image in the virtual world from the complex reality. They are also better able to form digital boundaries and maintain emotional distance from manipulative content.

Social media plays a dual role in the formation of individuals' self-identity and social perceptions. It provides opportunities to build relationships and strengthen social identity, but can also exacerbate a sense of self-dissatisfaction and create excessive social pressure (Melonashi, 2017). The interactions that take place within them can create excessive social pressure, especially when users feel they have to meet certain expectations for validation. It is important to continuously monitor the impact of social media interactions on individuals' psychological and social growth, so that individuals can manage their exposure to social media in a healthy and productive way.

Social media has become a key arena for individuals to shape and perform their identities in an increasingly connected social context. These platforms provide vast freedom to experiment with various aspects of ourselves, from appearance to attitudes and views. This freedom also brings great challenges, where the idealized image often promoted on social media risks creating excessive social pressure (Melonashi, 2017). Reliance on external validation, such as "likes" and comments, can often lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and anxiety in individuals, impacting their mental health (Trültzsch-Wijnen, 2020). When social expectations are not met, or when the response received is not as expected, self-esteem can drop drastically.

In addition to emerging social pressures, social media can also exacerbate a sense of social isolation. Although it allows connectivity with others, interactions that occur online often do not provide the same emotional depth as in-person encounters (Pang, 2022). This can make individuals feel lonely, even though they are connected to many people virtually. Reliance on feedback from virtual worlds can also cloud individuals' understanding of who they really are, given that interactions often do not reflect reality (Prabhakararao, 2016). The mismatch between the image displayed and one's true identity can trigger an existential crisis or identity confusion.

Given the complexity of social media's influence on identity formation and self-perception, it is important to continue to explore its long-term impact. Although social media provides opportunities for interaction and social networking, it is important for individuals to wisely manage their exposure to the virtual world. Only with a cautious approach can one avoid the negative impacts that may arise and be able to maintain psychological health and integrity in forming a more authentic and balanced identity. Individuals who are fully aware of their impact and able to navigate the digital world are more likely to maintain personal integrity.

CONCLUSION

Given the complexity of social media's influence on identity formation and self-perception, it is important to continue to explore its long-term impact. Although social media provides opportunities for interaction and social networking, it is important for individuals to wisely manage their exposure to the virtual world. Only with a cautious approach can one avoid the negative impacts that may arise and be able to maintain psychological health and integrity in forming a more authentic and balanced identity.

As a way forward, it is important for individuals to be more aware of how social media shapes their self-perception. Individuals need to have a better understanding of the psychological risks that come with online social comparison and how they can maintain a balance between their authentic identity and the image they present. Education on healthy social media use and self-acceptance is key so that individuals can utilize these platforms without harming their psychological development. Through self-awareness and wise social media management, one can form a more balanced and positive identity in this increasingly digitized social world.

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