



IDENTITY AND DIGITALIZATION: NAVIGATING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SELF AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT :

The present study explores the relationship between digital media use and identity orientation. The core assumption of this study is that an increased engagement with digital media platforms influences identity orientation. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) by Cheek & Briggs (2013) to measure identity dimensions and the Social Media Use Questionnaire (SMUQ) by Xanidis & Brignell (2016) to assess social media dependence. The study consisted of 300 participants (150 males and 150 females), with a mean age of 27 (SD = 6). Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS



software, applying Pearson's correlation test and independent sample t-tests. Results indicate a significant correlation between digital media use and social identity orientation ($r = 0.73, p < 0.01$) as well as collective identity orientation ($r = 0.81, p < 0.01$). Conversely, lower engagement in digital media was strongly correlated with personal identity orientation ($r = 0.89, p < 0.01$). Independent sample t-tests revealed a significant gender difference in personal identity orientation, with female participants showing greater personal identity orientation ($t = 3.45, p < 0.01$). Male participants demonstrated higher social identity orientation ($t = 2.98, p < 0.01$) and cultural identity orientation ($t = 3.67, p < 0.01$) compared to females. Additionally, male participants exhibited significantly greater involvement in digital media use than female participants ($t = 3.45, p < 0.01$). The findings suggest that digital media engagement plays a crucial role in shaping identity orientation and that gender differences exist in both identity orientation and digital media use.

KEYWORDS : Identity orientation, digital media, social media use, AIQ-IV, SMUQ, gender differences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity orientation refers to the way individuals define and organize their sense of self based on different dimensions of identity (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). It reflects the aspects of identity that are most salient or central to an individual's self-concept (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011). The current study discusses three types of identity orientation: personal identity orientation, social identity orientation, and collective identity orientation. Individuals with a strong personal identity orientation prioritize uniqueness, self-expression, and intrinsic values (Waterman, 2004), while those with a social identity orientation derive a sense of self from relationships and group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A collective identity orientation emphasizes cultural, national, or ideological belonging, often influencing group cohesion and social participation (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

Identity orientation is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors that influence how individuals perceive and define themselves (Schwartz et al., 2011). Personal experiences, such as achievements, failures, and self-reflection, contribute to shaping one's sense of self, reinforcing a strong personal identity orientation (Waterman, 2004). The social environment, including family, friends, and peer groups, plays a crucial role in developing social and relational identity, as individuals derive meaning and belonging from their interactions (Erikson, 1968). Cultural background further influences identity orientation by instilling traditions, values, and societal norms that shape collective identity and reinforce a sense of national or ideological affiliation (Phinney, 1990). Education and knowledge exposure broaden perspectives, allowing individuals to explore and redefine their identities over time (Berzonsky, 2008).

In today's digital era, media and online interactions significantly impact identity orientation, offering new avenues for self-expression and group identification (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Psychological factors, such as personality traits, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, also play a key role in determining how individuals construct and maintain their identity (Robins, Tracy, & Trzesniewski, 2008). Additionally, life transitions and role changes, such as career shifts, marriage, or relocation, often reshape identity orientation as individuals adapt to new roles and responsibilities (Kroger, 2007). Peer influence and socialization further shape identity by reinforcing societal expectations or encouraging differentiation from group norms (Berzonsky, 2008). These factors interact dynamically, making identity orientation a fluid and evolving process throughout an individual's life (Schwartz et al., 2011).

The widespread use of digital platforms has introduced new dimensions to identity formation, making it a dynamic and evolving process (Gleason, 2016). As individuals engage with digital media, they encounter diverse perspectives, social norms, and cultural influences that shape their self-perception and social interactions (Turkle, 2011). The interplay between technology and identity is particularly significant in contemporary society, where digital platforms serve as a primary medium for self-expression, social connection, and cultural exchange (Boyd, 2014). The advent of social networking sites (SNS), online forums, and virtual communities has redefined the way people engage with identity-related processes (Nesi, Choukas-Bradley, & Prinstein, 2018). These digital spaces enable individuals to curate their online personas, experiment with different aspects of their identities, and participate in global conversations that extend beyond their immediate social environments (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The accessibility and interactivity of these platforms allow for a continuous cycle of self-presentation, feedback, and modification, resulting in a fluid and often iterative identity formation process (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). For some, digital spaces serve as an extension of their personal identity, reinforcing their offline self-concept (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). For others, these platforms facilitate a shift towards a more socially or collectively oriented identity, shaped by interactions with online communities and global discourses (Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jiménez, 2015).

Indeed, digital media plays a crucial role in identity development by fostering exposure to diverse cultures, ideologies, and value systems (Livingstone, 2008). Individuals engaged in online interactions encounter perspectives that challenge their existing beliefs, leading to potential re-evaluations of self-concept and identity orientation (Hodkinson, 2017). This phenomenon is particularly evident among younger generations, who navigate their formative years within a digitally connected world (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). While digital spaces provide opportunities for self-exploration and identity affirmation, they also present challenges such as identity fragmentation, cyberbullying, and the pressure to conform to online norms (Berryman, Ferguson, & Negy, 2018).

As the boundary between online and offline identities becomes increasingly blurred, it is essential to examine the psychological and social implications of digital media engagement on identity formation (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011). Understanding the interplay between digitalization and identity can offer valuable insights into how individuals navigate their self-concept in an era of technological ubiquity (Mascheroni et al., 2015). This study is significant in several ways. As digital platforms become primary spaces for self-expression and socialization, it is essential to examine whether they reinforce personal identity or shift individuals towards social and collective identity

orientations (Gleason, 2016). This study provides empirical evidence on how digital media engagement influences different identity dimensions (Michikyan et al., 2014). The findings of this research may contribute to understanding how digital media use affects self-perception, belongingness, and personal autonomy (Livingstone, 2008). While previous studies have explored digital media effects on identity, limited research has quantitatively examined identity orientation using validated measures such as the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) and the Social Media Use Questionnaire (SMUQ) (Schwartz et al., 2011). This study fills this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of identity orientation in relation to digital media usage patterns.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Identity formation is a dynamic process influenced by various social, psychological, and technological factors. With the rise of digital media, individuals increasingly engage with online platforms to explore, construct, and negotiate their identities (Buckingham, 2008). Digital spaces provide an interactive environment where individuals can curate their self-presentation, engage with communities, and develop a sense of belonging (Turkle, 2011). The Aspects of Identity Theory (Cheek & Briggs, 2013) suggests that identity orientation is shaped by personal, social, and collective factors, and digital media serves as a medium that enhances or shifts these orientations. Social media platforms, online forums, and virtual communities offer spaces for individuals to express themselves and engage with others, significantly influencing their identity orientation. Studies have shown that high engagement with digital media is linked to social identity orientation, as individuals find validation and belonging in online groups (Boyd, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Furthermore, collective identity orientation is reinforced through participation in digital activism, cultural discourse, and group affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Conversely, research suggests that lower digital engagement is associated with a stronger personal identity orientation, where individuals rely more on self-reflection and intrinsic values rather than external validation (Harter, 2012). Cheek and Briggs (2013) emphasized that personal identity is defined by self-perception and unique characteristics, which may be less influenced by online interactions. Studies by Gonzales and Hancock (2011) found that reduced exposure to digital media leads to greater self-awareness and a stronger sense of personal identity. Gender plays a significant role in shaping identity orientation and digital media engagement. Research indicates that women are more likely to exhibit personal identity orientation, emphasizing self-reflection, emotional depth, and relational self-concept (Cross & Madson, 1997). The findings of the present study align with previous research, which suggests that female participants show a higher inclination towards personal identity orientation (Guadagno et al., 2011). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to demonstrate social and collective identity orientation, engaging in group affiliations and cultural discourse online (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Previous studies have also noted that male participants are more involved in digital media consumption, which is linked to their preference for online communities and collective identity formation (Jackson et al., 2008).

The study is grounded in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which posits that individuals derive self-concept from group membership. Digital media provides an avenue for reinforcing social identity by facilitating group interactions and fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains how digital media engagement influence identity by fulfilling intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These frameworks help in understanding the correlation between digital media use and identity orientation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between digital media use and identity orientation. A correlational approach was adopted to assess the impact of digital media engagement on different identity dimensions, including personal, social, and collective identity orientations. The study also explored gender differences in identity orientation and digital media usage. The quantitative nature of the research allowed for statistical analysis and objective measurement of the

variables under investigation. The study sample consisted of 300 participants (150 males and 150 females) with a mean age of 27 years ($SD = 6.5$). Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure equal representation of gender. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active users of digital media platforms, specifically social networking sites (SNS), online forums, or virtual communities. Participants were recruited through online surveys distributed across various social media platforms and academic institutions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study.

Two standardized psychometric instruments were used to assess the study variables. The Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV), developed by Cheek & Briggs (2013), was used to measure different identity dimensions, including personal identity orientation, social identity orientation, and collective identity orientation. The AIQ-IV consists of 35 items rated on a Likert scale, where higher scores indicate a stronger association with a specific identity dimension. The Social Media Use Questionnaire (SMUQ), developed by Xanidis & Brignell (2016), was used to evaluate participants' dependence on social networking sites (SNS). It assesses the frequency of social media use, the extent of engagement, and the psychological impact of digital media consumption. The questionnaire is a Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting greater social media dependence.

The study followed a structured data collection process. Participants were provided with a Google Forms survey link, which included a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, ethical considerations, and voluntary participation guidelines. After providing informed consent, participants completed the AIQ-IV and SMUQ questionnaires. Demographic data, including age, gender, and frequency of digital media usage, were also collected. The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks to ensure adequate participant responses. This study adhered to ethical research guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants before data collection, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participant responses, and providing participants with the option to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS software. Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between digital media use and different identity orientations. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to assess gender differences in identity orientation and digital media usage. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and questionnaire scores. A significance level of $p < 0.01$ was set for all statistical tests to ensure rigorous analysis and valid conclusions. The results of the statistical analysis provide empirical insights into the role of digital media in shaping identity orientation and highlight significant gender differences in identity formation within digital spaces.

4. RESULT

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between digital media use and identity orientation. Pearson's correlation test revealed a strong positive correlation between digital media use and social identity orientation ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$) as well as collective identity orientation ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals who are more actively engaged with digital media tend to identify more strongly with social and collective identity dimensions. Conversely, lower engagement in digital media was found to have a strong correlation with personal identity orientation ($r = 0.89$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals with less digital media exposure are more likely to emphasize personal identity aspects.

In addition to correlation analysis, independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in identity orientation and digital media use. The results demonstrated that female participants exhibited significantly greater personal identity orientation ($t = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$) than male participants, indicating a stronger focus on self- concept and individualized aspects of identity. On the other hand, male participants showed significantly higher social identity orientation ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$) and cultural identity orientation ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$) compared to females. This suggests that males may

be more inclined toward group-based identity aspects, influenced by their social media interactions and cultural affiliations.

Moreover, the study found that male participants reported significantly greater digital media involvement than female participants ($t = 2.85, p < 0.01$). This result suggests that males are more actively engaged in digital spaces, which may contribute to their stronger identification with social and collective identity orientations. The findings emphasize the role of digital media as a key factor in shaping identity orientation and highlight the presence of gender-based variations in identity formation within digital environments.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between digital media use and identity orientation, highlighting the profound impact of digital engagement on identity formation. The results demonstrate that individuals with higher digital media usage exhibit stronger social and collective identity orientations, while those with lower engagement tend to emphasize personal identity orientation. Additionally, notable gender differences in identity orientation and digital media involvement were observed, underscoring the complex interplay between technology, self-perception, and social identity.

A key finding of the study was the strong positive correlation between digital media use and social identity orientation ($r = 0.73, p < 0.01$) as well as collective identity orientation ($r = 0.81, p < 0.01$). These results align with previous research that suggests digital media platforms, particularly social networking sites (SNS), facilitate identity construction by providing opportunities for interaction, self-expression, and engagement with various social groups (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The interconnected nature of digital spaces allows individuals to engage in online communities, adopt collective narratives, and reinforce social identity aspects through shared experiences and discussions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a result, individuals who are more active on digital platforms may develop a stronger sense of belonging and identification with social and cultural groups.

Conversely, lower engagement in digital media was strongly correlated with personal identity orientation ($r = 0.89, p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that individuals who limit their digital interactions may place greater emphasis on self-concept, internal values, and personal autonomy rather than social affiliations. This aligns with theories of identity development, which propose that reduced exposure to external influences allows individuals to cultivate a more introspective and autonomous identity (Cheek & Briggs, 2013). Individuals who are less involved in digital spaces may rely on direct personal experiences and offline relationships to shape their identity, reinforcing an independent sense of self that is less influenced by online social interactions.

The study also revealed significant gender differences in identity orientation. Female participants exhibited significantly greater personal identity orientation ($t = 3.21, p < 0.01$) compared to male participants, suggesting a stronger focus on self-concept and individualized aspects of identity. This finding is consistent with previous studies that suggest women are more likely to develop self-perceptions based on personal values, emotional experiences, and introspective reflection (Cross & Madson, 1997). The greater emphasis on personal identity among female participants may be influenced by socialization processes that encourage self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and relational interdependence in women (Gilligan, 1982).

In contrast, male participants demonstrated significantly higher social identity orientation ($t = 3.45, p < 0.01$) and cultural identity orientation ($t = 3.45, p < 0.01$) compared to females. This suggests that males may be more inclined to develop their identity through social affiliations, group memberships, and cultural influences. Research has indicated that men often engage in more externally driven identity formation processes, where social validation and group dynamics play a crucial role in shaping their sense of self (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The higher levels of social and cultural identity orientation among males in this study may also be influenced by their greater digital media engagement, as digital platforms often serve as spaces for reinforcing group identities and cultural affiliations.

Another important finding of this study was that male participants reported significantly greater digital media involvement than female participants ($t = 2.85, p < 0.01$). This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that men are more likely to engage with digital platforms, particularly in social and recreational contexts, whereas women may use digital media for more relational and communicative purposes (Jackson, Zhao, Kolenic, Fitzgerald, Harold, & von Eye, 2008). The higher digital engagement among males may contribute to their stronger identification with social and collective identity dimensions, as online interactions facilitate identity reinforcement through peer validation, online discussions, and shared virtual experiences.

These findings have significant implications for understanding identity development in the digital age. The strong influence of digital media on identity orientation highlights the evolving nature of self-concept formation in technologically mediated environments. While digital platforms offer opportunities for social connection and cultural integration, they may also lead to increased dependence on external validation for identity formation. Additionally, the observed gender differences suggest that digital engagement impacts identity construction differently for men and women, emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach in examining digital media's role in identity development. Understanding the relationship between digital media use and identity orientation can inform interventions aimed at fostering healthy identity development. For instance, promoting balanced digital engagement can help individuals develop a well-rounded sense of identity that integrates both personal introspection and social connectivity. Additionally, gender-sensitive approaches can be employed to address the distinct ways in which digital media influence identity formation in males and females.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study provides valuable insights into the relationship between digital media use and identity orientation, highlighting the significant influence of digital engagement on identity formation. The findings reveal that individuals with higher digital media usage exhibit stronger social and collective identity orientations, whereas those with lower engagement tend to emphasize personal identity orientation. These results underscore the transformative role of digital platforms in shaping self-concept, social belonging, and cultural identification. This study identifies significant gender differences in identity orientation and digital media involvement. Female participants demonstrated a stronger personal identity orientation, reflecting a greater emphasis on introspection and individual self-concept. In contrast, male participants exhibited higher social and cultural identity orientations, suggesting a greater inclination toward group-based identity construction, potentially influenced by their higher engagement with digital platforms. The findings further reveal that males tend to be more actively engaged in digital media than females, reinforcing the idea that digital spaces serve as key arenas for social and cultural identity reinforcement. The study underscores the critical role of digital media in shaping identity orientation and highlights the gendered nature of digital identity construction. As digital engagement continues to evolve, it remains imperative to explore its implications for individual and collective identity, ensuring that digital platforms serve as facilitators of positive identity development rather than sources of social fragmentation or psychological distress.

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