

# Identity Construction in Digital Age: A Study among College Students in Chennai

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## Abstract

The intervention of globalization, commercialization etc., in present day societies there is a loss of relevance to a traditional activity of socialization. People are increasingly tested to embrace their socialization by their own. To demonstrate the mental ability to deal with the requests of socialization, the people require to create the innovative capability of correspondence. The powers of interaction, empower the individual to pick out and mirror his/her own needs. Identity is considered as the acknowledgments of an individual ability of creating their true self and present it in various situations. Online informal organizations, for instance, Facebook gives spaces for communication, in which people can chip away from their identity in any point during their stay in online platform. The researcher looks into how youth use Facebook to create their identity.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Identity, Facebook, Self-presentation, Identity Construction

## Introduction

Digital consumers with internet connection share information's, exhibit their thoughts around a particular incident and where correspondence and feedback takes place continuously without any time and space constrain are defined as social media. In Social media, consumers get into contact with other users and are in regular correspondence. They are constantly in contact with other users of the platform, mutual help; solutions to problems are some of the usual activities of social media. Social media is one such medium where people experience intense communication.

The intersection of technology and digitization, has assisted in integrating traditional media to new media technologies, these technologies has included audio, information and media communication to an exclusive program. Internet on the other hand helps in mutual information sharing, which has paved the way for social media to emerge. These innovative technologies have evolved into a new era called information age. With digital platforms, phone communication instruments, in which the facilities of camera, video talk etc, the point to be noted here is that electronic communication and interactive communication have collaborated to form a new scope for people to put

across and get in contact Social media is an integral piece of everybody's life for most of the population. Facebook in specific, with the human action of active users is increasing beyond imagination, it is must "endure to" place to understand and enrich what their other mates of their peer group are doing at that period of time and even what kind of music they are listening and interested in<sup>1</sup>. More significantly, it is the largest social networking platform over more than 800 million active users<sup>1</sup>.

A program like Facebook offers its users a space to create a comprehensive profile that is their singular way of mapping them to their online audience<sup>2</sup>. The facts and details are included in the user profile on a voluntary basis, the users have the option to locate what to project about themselves and how to extend it using such platform<sup>3</sup>. The practice of culminating the profile can be linked to identity formation; once the profile is drafted, it automatically projects once personality<sup>3</sup>.

The scholars from different field have investigated SNSs to evaluate multiple features of social networking occurrences, which includes the process, culture and understanding of the sites<sup>4</sup> the youth are people who actively participate and spend most of the time on such social networking platforms,

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with the most active age group being 18-30 demographics<sup>1</sup>. In order to understand or to make conclusion about how and why a specific identity is created in a platform like Facebook. Ace wants to understand the basis of how this individuality is created and self-presented in Facebook.

## Review of the literature

Goffman's interpretation of self-presentation<sup>5</sup> is predominately used by researchers to assess how people communicate with one another in web spaces. Goffman's concept of 'front stage' where the activity takes place in front of the audience. In this stage, people are very conscious of what they want to project about themselves to the audience. In contrast the 'Back Stage' is a space where only the actor is present, without the audience, where one can be himself or can create his/her own personal identity. This representation goes well into the features of social media.

## Self and Identity Formation: Adolescence

Identity is cultivated by the individual, but it is accepted and assured by others. Adolescence is such period where young people attempt to create their own individuality. Identity is conceptualized as unique among individual persona and it cannot be the same among different people. It is more or less reliable over the time. As people possess different identity, description for oneself. Personal identity is also being differentiated in terms of social group, individual's identity is formed even with a specific gender, cultural and national identity.

## SNSs among Adolescence

The emotional wallop of the social media platform has been the most sort of topic in the academic study of communication works. Technology has transformed relationships; the economy, which affects one's personality and private life. Like Don Tap Scott's *Growing up digital: The rise of the Net Generation* explains the conflict between technology and youth. He further argues, "For these net generations using the most modern engineering science is equal to breathing". Boyd in his study analyzed how SNSs platforms are employed by the youth in their daily lives. Turkle<sup>6</sup> analyzed how this technology forms the self of individuals in all these works the core analysis was on how people used these technologies. It is clear that no one inhabits a different spirit, but with two different lives, one in front of technology other in front of the actual universe. It is understood that each one of consumer who use these online platforms use a mixture of different character of communication<sup>7</sup>.

## Online Identity

As technology brings in changes among the fundamental operations in one's day to day actions. It has brought in new

communication patterns and correspondence, and a new form of farming communities. This scenario provides new ways of identifying, by helping in shaping self. The basic review after the evolution of internet on online identity was conceptualized by Turkle in 1984, in her experiment to understand how youth represents themselves in offline and online identity. Author Dorian Wisniewski and Richard Coyne in the book *Building the virtual communities*, revealed a concept named "Masking" in online identity. They explain that when an individual wants to create social connection in web spaces, he emphasizes that individual try to mask their identity. Masking can be seen in the online platform in how they write the concept they want to emphasize and what they want to post. Another concept that is referred to the online identity formation is anonymity, where they utilize a really private space of correspondence to specify their identity. This position provides a dilemma about real or mistaken identity. Jungles<sup>8</sup> specifies that the preference of how individuals want to portray themselves on the online space has a huge impact on how they create their identity in material life.

## Online profile creation on Facebook

Online programs like Facebook have been explored by today's young person as a space for self-presentation, through the sharing of their personal information in their profile pages. The users have the "luxury of time" (2) when trying to construct their online identity, the users are given the time and space to think, mull over and draft their self during their profile creation. In the current scenario the sharing of personal information in their specific profile is self-narratives, limited text, but a blend of information shared by the user (status update) timeline (activity on that platform), information provided by other users of the platform (liking, tagging, commenting etc....) and information provided by the program itself (activities report).

## Objectives of the study

The present study tries to enlarge the existing research on self-presentation into anonymous settings to examine identity construction on Facebook. In this respect, the profile information laid as one key component for identity formation. This helps the researcher to understand how college students of Chennai construct their identities on Facebook.

## Conceptual Framework

In specification to this research, the work of Zhao et al<sup>9</sup> is applied to understand identity construction. Zhao specifies the implicit identity announcement, which can initiate "given away" (Facebook Users). Another extreme end with debates about explicit identity announcement, which indicates portraying self-using narrative structure.

Also includes 'liking' in connection to what consumer post about their hobbies and interest on Facebook.

## Methods

This study is part of a doctoral research on identity construction and self-presentation strategies used by college students in Chennai. The research methodology is a combination of Facebook profile analysis followed by in-depth interview. Nevertheless, the present study will have emphasis only on quantitative content analysis. The current study is based on a sample of 63 students (Male-31, Female-32). The Facebook profile page is downloaded with the consent of the participants, coding sheet was made. With that, the data is converted into quantitative data.

## Findings and Discussion

This portion of the findings emphasize on three concepts such as usernames, language options, and profile images employed in college students Facebook profiles. This specifies that 32 female users and 27 male users use their original name. Imaginative variation in names was seen among 3 male users, where they have used their favorite actor/sports personality name, only one user has used tanglish (Tamil and English) to spell out their name. Female, did not experiment with their names. Only one male has used a false name in his profile, and none of the female has used fake names in their Facebook profile. Female wants to project their identity; they haven't experimented with creative names in their profile. It is the same with male, majority of them has used their original name, as they want others to acknowledge them by their name. An individual name is his/her first original identity in the societal scheme. Some other important factor is that, if their friends want to search them online they are crowded to use the real names. However, this is not true in case of email id they have posted on Facebook. In email id one cannot recur the same name. Facebook presents the users that facility that any routine of users can have the same name, even a surname.

**Table 1. Facebook usernames**

|                                      | Male | Female |
|--------------------------------------|------|--------|
| Real names                           | 27   | 32     |
| Imaginative variation of their names | 3    | 0      |
| Fake names                           | 1    | 0      |

All most 62 respondents have selected English as their preferred language, in spite of the language preferences given to them in their profile. Only one male user has used Tamil as his preferred terminology. He has used it in writing his real name. Most of the respondents have used English to fill their profile information; a sample of four respondents has used Tamil to describe them in the "about

me" column. English is a status symbol for the youth; they have the fear that their own friends might under estimate them, if they write in their mother tongue Tamil. Most of the respondents do not compose anything in their status because of the fear drafting a statement with mistakes. Youth fear that this will induce a bigger impact on their identity formation among their peer groups.

**Table 2. Profile Picture**

|                                      | Male | Female |
|--------------------------------------|------|--------|
| Real Picture (Alone)                 | 20   | 5      |
| Family Picture                       | 0    | 1      |
| Favourites personalities             | 1    | 3      |
| Selfie                               | 1    | 1      |
| Babies                               | 0    | 1      |
| Scenery                              | 1    | 1      |
| Figurative picture                   | 1    | 1      |
| Flowers                              | 0    | 1      |
| Real Picture with brand associations | 2    | 1      |
| No Picture                           | 1    | 2      |
| Real picture with friends            | 4    | 15     |

The profile pictures are changed on a regular basis by the users. The profile picture was analyzed and recorded during the data collection process. Most of the users are very careful and choosy about the picture they post and doubly careful about what profile picture they update. Female users prefer attaching pictures attached to their loved ones, male on the other hand, opt to use real photographs in their profile picture. Female users have tried out with updating their profile picture with family, actor, actress, icons, selfies, scenery, etc. Male user had not sought to experiment with their picture, But can see a set of brand associations that they want to watch in their pictures. For example, pictures with their favourite car, expensive travel points, hotels, health clubs etc.

## Conclusion

The study was taken to understand how youth in Chennai has tried to use Facebook as a medium of identity construction. In this process, Creating or updating their profile information becomes one of the key and first step into identity formation for these generations. The study helps to understand how text and visual representation on Facebook is directly and indirectly linked to peer group opinion, social environment, and popularity are found out by carefully chosen user name, language usage and profile pictures. Especially pictures play a really substantial role in their online identity formation. Gender, age group, socio- economic status might influence the findings of the study. The research indicates that the female is very

careful in drafting their online identity then man. They have the pressure of being misused or cyberbullying in the online platform. Most of the female has come across bullying at least in least possible strain. Future research can be extended to rural youth and to other parts of interior Tamilnadu.

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