

Abstract

In this study, responses of Black males with ages ranging from 18 to 25 to social media versus household environments on their developmental process of self identity were investigated. A general model for male identity formation is presented including the influence of cultural perspectives, dominant cultural norms, and specific circumstances.

Keywords: self identity, social media, influences and effects.

A questionnaire identifying 25 randomly chosen males whose ages range from 18 to 25 was administered. Results of this study suggest that at age 18 Black males report similar developmental processes of self identity as a result of social media but as they grow older their self identity is more materialized as a result of experience.

Cultural background surely plays a part in shaping identity, but it does not determine identity. It may well create differences that must be honored; it may occasion styles and orientations that must be understood; it may give rise to tastes, values, even prejudices that must be taken into account. (Greene, 1993, p. 16).

This paper describes how men from the same racial/ethnic groups relate to social media that is on the rise these days as opposed to what they have already implemented in them from their household environments.

First, the study presents a general model for male identity formation that includes the influence of social media and the household environment. Second, they summarize literature about the developmental process of self identity. Third, they describe and discuss the methodology and the results of the study and results of this study. Finally, the authors will draw some tentative conclusions about the different ways that men from same ethnic group react to social media and how it is manifested in their self identities. A hypothesis of this study is that social media will have an effect on young Black males in various ways depending on their household environment.

Self Identity for the Black Male

In the words of Walt Whitman "We contain multitudes" everyone struggles with finding out who he is, what he wants to be and with the image that he draws for himself.

This is especially evident in young people and it may continue and change through out a person's life.

With today's world swarming with media in general and specifically social media it is inevitable for young people today to be effected whether directly or indirectly

Dominant models for male behavior are promoted through a national media that include movies, television, radio, songs, and magazines.

"The media also help us to fill out our own identities, telling us about ourselves, or the selves we might like to be" (Hacker, 1992, p. 39).

Nowadays social media is playing this role, things shifted from being limited solely by location to being available world wide at any time of the day to people of all ages and races at relatively inexpensive fees.

As a part of his identity, each man develops certain concepts of self identity that prescribe how to think about life and how to respond to different circumstances that arise in life.

This identity influences a man's behavior and is refined as he responds to various circumstances throughout his life. Each man's gender identity contains a variety of different influences. A general overview for how black men form their self identities and are affected by social media such as My Space and Facebook is shown below. Household environment refers to the environment in which a male child is raised. How do his father and/or mother behave toward him? Is his father domineering? What is the son's role in the family? Considering the fact that Blacks have been a minority they always had to make more effort and according to a study more black males are unemployed and are faced with harsh decisions when it comes to their family. What behaviors do adult males within his environment exhibit?

The huge variety of these different circumstances help account for the rich diversity of the human species, so males with different household environments will be affected differently regarding social media. Some will show good behavior and having all this availability of sources will open their minds and make them drift from the path that most African Americans lead.

A new documentary entitled *The A Game* dedicated to the black community shows how black people who made it to the top faced various obstacles to get where they are and that all this glamorous life that these young males seek is not easy. It starts with how many black people drop out of school and never make it to college.

They think it will be easier on the streets and they can become a rapper or a movie star. While the conditions of all other groups (including women and recent immigrant) have improved in the past 25 years, 6 million young black, males age 15 to 24 are more likely than their counterparts to be unemployed, to be involved in the criminal justice system, and to commit suicide. (Marshall, 1988, p. xiii)

That is why some try to take advantage of this entire social media to create awareness and enhance the conditions of all the black community. In 1991 the African American teenage official unemployment rate (36.3%) was nearly twice the rate for all teenagers (18.6%); the Black unemployment rate was three times as high as in 1960, and both unemployment and labor force participation of young Black males had deteriorated dramatically. Almost half (45.9%) of African American persons under 18 years are in households below the poverty line; 54% live in female-headed households, more than two-thirds of which have below poverty incomes, a rate that was about 20 percentage points higher than for White children in similar households (Tidwell, Kuumba, Jones, & Watson, 1993).

A typical black male aged 18 to 25 has 200 so called friends with about 60 of them being close friends, the majorities do not know each other personally or were introduced on Facebook, My Space or Twitter.

The average time spent on these kinds of social media is five days a week and two hours per day.

Only twenty percent feel that this affects their school work, university etc...

The more time spent on such social media is linked to more depression; more internet addiction and less family support and they spend time less with their family.

Sixty percent of black males believe that these social media are safe and they put private and personal information on the mentioned social media.

Eighty percent of parents of different households believe that social media disrupts their children and the less time spent the better.

Fifty percent of the twenty five randomly chosen black males with ages ranging from eighteen to twenty five have administered positive behavior related to these social media.

Thirty percent are registered in groups that encourage the black community to unite together in terms of common causes.

Fifty percent are able to use the positive reinforcement from friends on the social media on matters regarding their personal lives or other issues that might be work related.

Forty percent administer a trust worthy attitude when it comes to dealing with social media.

Methodology

This article emerges from a study made in 2010 on the effects of social media on young men`s self identity.

Instrument

Questionnaires were distributed among twenty five young black males with ages ranging from eighteen to twenty five, questions included if they think today`s social media helps them or does more damage than help.

Another questionnaire was distributed to families asking them some questions about their opinion on different social media and how much they think it is beneficial or damaging.

The majority of black males responded that social media is beneficial in so many ways.

The most important being the ease of communication, stating that they are able to communicate with anyone in the world from the comfort of their own bedrooms or phones.

Most males stated that they can communicate with any girl and the shyness factor almost disappears if they are communicating online.

Almost fifty percent stated that the black community on these social media are able to communicate with one another, bonding and having united views and are able to show support to one another.

When asked if they saw these methods as a breach for their privacy or as a way of collecting information about individuals, their responses varied.

Some disregarded these facts and said that these are just made for entertainment and others showed interest in this theory stating that it might be possible.

When asked if relationships formed online or friendships can be trustworthy and reliable, some answered with positive others were negative about this issue.

Parents on the other hand demonstrated results that can be mainly viewed as negative when it comes to social media, stating that these are just a waste of time and that today's youth shouldn't be much attached to such communication methods, that they can be dangerous and unreliable.

Identity construction is a unique time in every young man's life. Theorist, Erik Erikson, has illustrated the importance of identity formation in youth lives, further asserting that the age old question of 'who am I' becomes salient around the ages of 12 to 18 because for the first time, adolescents are able to understand the importance of identity and that exploration is the primary means by which to achieve it (Schmitt, Dayanim, & Matthias, 2008).

Youth are able to use abstract thinking and place themselves into hypothetical situations to help them find the best 'fit' with regard to identities; they're great at using their imaginations to envision how others will see them upon the changes they enact. This is a transitioning period in life characterized by physiological, cognitive, biological, emotional, and hormonal changes are being made and figuring out who you are in the midst of all of this overhauling is a daunting task to say the least (Schmitt et al., 2008). It is also important to consider that this is a very active search for their identity and information about who they are. Lots of time and energy are invested on their part to reach this important goal as it goes the distance to fulfill their sense of belonging and accomplishment. Erikson stressed on society stating that this is an extremely mental and social process, with cultural background and house environment play an important role, opinions, observations, and reactions from friends and family into making the decision of which steps to take to find out who they are or in which direction to proceed (Schmitt et al., 2008). We look to others to find out about ourselves, this is a process that begins with some degree of intensity in adolescents and may continue on until the end of our days.

The internet has quickly become the most expeditious, central means of communication and access to information so it makes perfect sense that this trend in media would trickle down to impact the lives of youth everywhere. There are numerous reasons why the internet has become the chosen means by which adolescents discover their identity. Adolescents find that the internet and social personal web pages offer them a safe place to try on different 'hats' or try out new personalities without the fear of rejection or embarrassment and the normal risks associated with real life trials of the same magnitude (Schmitt et al., 2008).

The internet, especially sites like Facebook and Myspace offer prominent places for youth to put themselves out there in a textual/multimedia forum for others to see. Subsequently, adolescents are able to garner an audience of as many or as few as they feel comfortable with and also gain access to other teens with whom they would never regularly have any interaction with. They can also experience self disclosure effects via divulging personal information about themselves to others which can lead to deep interpersonal relationships forming online with varying degrees of intimacy,

which maybe they have not done yet in the real world because they don't feel comfortable (Schmitt et al., 2008).

Adolescent personal web pages are focused solely on self presentation, effectively allowing the adolescent to tell others who they are (and sometimes give cues about who they want to be) through the content on their page. The ambiguity and sense of decreased inhibition on the web allows youth to feel like they are less likely to experience inhibitions that one faces in the real world and more likely to experience the desirable sensation of being known by other people, which becomes increasingly important to youth during this stage in their development (Schmitt et al., 2008). The web has a feeling of safety and privacy for many adolescents, especially if they have access to a computer in their bedroom with unrestricted access so it makes for the perfect situation for them to explore themselves through online presentation. Ironically, the reasons behind adolescent use of social networking sites and personal web pages closely parallel the reasons why adults use the very same social media to delve deeper into their true, idealized, and various other selves (Schmitt et al., 2008).

Past are the days of old when teens spent hours alone in their rooms or with close friends dancing in front of the mirror and practicing personalities in test-run format; trying on different personas in person is out, the web deletes the middle man. Personal web pages give teens the control to present themselves in whatever way they choose to an actual audience that's also controllable and far less intimidating than showing up in person to try out a new possible identity (Schmitt et al., 2008).

Self identity is constructed with the fusion of various elements and communication is one of them. It is one of the major components of construction of identity. An example from the online social networking world is the news story that police have used the video sharing service YouTube to solve crimes (e.g., Maxcer, 2007). Apparently, police in Canada and U.S. have posted surveillance footage of crimes as videos on YouTube, encouraging users to identify the alleged criminals. The police using social networking sites during criminal investigations is an example of leaky containers, since public and private, official and social, mix in completely new ways. Social communication becomes a tool for the police, and criminal investigation becomes part of social interaction.

Social communication can often lead to more negative outcomes, the constant and changing status that shows where people are, what they are doing and the different applications that encourage people to use it. One of these applications is Facebook's Places, this application allows you to check in to places that you go to and letting people know where you are. It also allows friends to discover moments when they are in the same place at the same time. Some people of the older generation are bothered by the openness of communication and the lack of privacy. Many dangers lurk in this type of communication; most people share their everyday photos, vacation photos and even addresses and most people's profile is available to everyone.

This might cause the circulation of intimate photos of people or the use of a Photoshop to put together different scenarios of a person doing a certain activity. In some scenarios a person's integrity and honor might be at stake.

Participants

The questionnaire was distributed among twenty five young black males with ages ranging from eighteen to twenty five; the majority were college and university students. Seventy percent lived away from their homes either in dorms or apartments. Most parents who answered the questionnaire were uneducated or didn't reach college level. Most of them owned a computer or had some sort of smart phone through which they are able to communicate with their online communities.

The results that emerged from this study were expected, young males are in favor of social media in all its forms, they consider it a form of self expression and a way of breaking barriers. The attitude that nothing is impossible is reinforced by the fact that today's youth are able to do anything within the comfort of their homes. People are more outgoing and less timid if they are communicating through social networks.

Social media has opened the door for many talented individuals that are able to showcase their talent with the help of social media. YouTube is an example of this, it always people to video blog and with only a click of the button a person's video can reach millions of people from different backgrounds and walks of life and even speaking different languages. The world is constantly changing and individuals are in a continuous search of novelties and intriguing ideas. The similarity of views concerning social media is expected when it comes to young people who see it as an opportunity for communication and interaction.

The household environment was a factor in this study but the result demonstrated that even though there may be

different people from different backgrounds the outcome was one. Self identity is one of the most important factors that distinguish one individual from the other and one of the most important values one can have as a human being. David LaPlante a speaker, who knew fame due to his views on this subject, expressed the importance of social media on self identity. He stated that when you get in and the water in the tub starts rocking back and forth, water will go high to one side of the tub, then back again to the other. If you are the person who first started with an idea or thought, it doesn't matter if no one follows you at the moment, you head with your idea to where ever it takes you to the other side of the tub. Afterwards, all the water will come rushing your way and the people who were present there will be at the peak of the wave receiving the greatest success and monetary value. Once everyone follows that person the wave gets less and less. The ones who pushed the idea away who were either scared of new innovation or deny that this was going to happen, will be at the smaller end of the wave and will not be on the winner's side. But then there is the one guy who doesn't follow the crowd and will head toward the other end of the tub. This person who may have different innovative and original ideas and stands for what he believes in will be standing at the other end. Everyone on the other side of the tub judge him for first standing there naked all by himself, then they get angry with him, then they make fun of him, then question him. All of a sudden, the bath water comes rushing toward the other side of the tub and the one who reeks the most benefits is the one naked guy already at the other end awaiting the wave.

You should think of what you decisions, actions and interactions do in life for example as bath water and these new waves are the social media.

Human identity is a complex and multilayered web. We acquire identity through interaction with our fellow humans; a person enacts different roles depending on the various situations he is present in. The same person could be an assertive and high ranking executive and a caring mother and a helping friend. It all depends on the context, time and place. Before the social media emerged all

communication and interaction and all social groups were kept separate. Today with all this interaction with the use of social media like Linked, Facebook etc... a person's social, personal and public life merge together.

Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism explains how the identity and the self are acquired through social interaction. Young males who use these social media exhibit the same ideas and beliefs and as diverse as their identities might be, it is shown that social media has its effect on them. Whether positively or negatively one cannot deny the fact that social media plays a role in our everyday lives and it surely has a bigger impact on the youth of today. Black males that have been asked to explain whether the different social media present these days have negative or positive impact on the formation of self identity. A high percentage has demonstrated that social media has a positive influence on their social and personal lives and that it brings every type of social group together in one place. The relatively low cost for using these social networks makes it possible for people of every class and walk of life to interact and bring forward their experiences and opinions. An underestimated factor when it comes to social media is that it very important business wise, it has become a market for anyone who has a product or a business. Advertisements, messages and different marketing techniques are used on these social networks that allow a person to reach a huge number of people. This method could also be an interactive one whereby a person is able to know whether the targeted audience likes or dislikes a certain product. Results in the study also pointed towards the fact that today's youth are in favor of social media due to the intermingled web of connections it presents. You are friends with people who have other friends and you might become friends with these people thereby connecting yourself with more people that might have different positions and ranks and in turn might be able to help you in getting a job.

With numerous advantages there has to be some disadvantages that might be disregarded by some individuals.

All social networks and media require you to sign up and complete your profile and to do this you are supposed to present facts about yourself, including your name, age, location etc...

There is a potential for failure of security in both personal and business context. While many sites apply certain

measures to keep any of these cases of harassment, cyber-stalking, online scams, and identity theft to an

absolute minimum, there are cases of harassment and online scams that have taken place and had unpleasant outcomes. Another factor discussed by many would be the fact that the social media is perceived by many as a waste of time and effort and the more time spent chatting and blogging the more you waste time. The key to social networking is that it is supposed to be fun, whether you are just doing it for entertainment or clicking around for business purposes. That should be reasonable enough for anyone, but there are those people who don't see the point. It can be a disadvantage though for them.

Now there's something to really think about. Nothing is without pros and cons, but those of social networking are not really much of a concern regarding your safety if you know how to present your information.

Conclusion

This study shows the conformity of young males when it comes to their views and ideas on social media with the knowledge that these young males come from different household environments but are of the same ethnic group.

A household environment has an impact on the construction of self identity, how a person is raised and how his parents treated him will definitely have an effect on the outcome of his whole personality.

A caring and supporting household will in theory result in the construction of healthy and ideal individuals but in practice that is never the case because other than the household factor other factors take effect.

There are external social factors that play a role as well as personal understanding.

Social identity theory suggests that group identity development is a cognitive process that uses social categories to define self (Turner, 1982).

Categories can be based on nationality, skin color, common history and oppression, and ancestry.

Individuals vary in the degree to which they identify with a group.

Consequently, variance exists in the commitment to roles and behaviors associated with that identity.

Some groups on the mentioned social media use group identity to reach the targeted audience to connect with them about things that matter to them and thereby gaining their trust.

The more we lay dormant in our present state; being receivers of whatever they invent for us fewer leaders will immerge and less people will be willing to make changes in this world and make a difference.

The self is best seen as a reflexive core, monitoring our actions and giving us reasons for action. It tends to operate not at the unconscious level, but more at a more practical 'non-conscious' level... Practical reason is easily disrupted, as Garfunkel has indicated. This kind of insecurity has had a much greater impact than the formal questioning of foundations described in our post-modern state: it is actually lived; it gives a sense of 'dread'. Self-identity also needs to be maintained. Mead's conception of the 'I/me' relation is too simple, because there is a linguistic relation within the individual.

The social media industry is an ever growing industry with millions of dollars in return. In Web 2.0 terms, this would be a website that doesn't just give you information, but interacts with you while giving you that information. This interaction can be as simple as asking for your comments or letting you vote on an article, or it can be as complex as Netflix recommending movies to you based on the ratings of other people with similar interests. Normal media, a one way interactive mean seized to be satisfactory, people are more interested in media that they are able to interact with, where they are

able to give their views and opinions. Social media represents the type of interaction that can be viewed as a two way street.

To be part of this social mixture is something very easy and can be done with the click of a button, the disadvantage of all this can not be seen directly.

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