

Changes of Identity Recognition in the Internet Age and Its Impact

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Abstract. In modern digital era, the Internet has transformed the way individuals perceive and construct their identities. This essay delves into the profound impact of the Internet on identity formation and interpersonal relationships, focusing on its "strangeness". The essay uses a case study, explaining the phenomenon of online identity experimentation among Chinese college students. The concept of "strangeness" online challenges traditional relationship dynamics. It empowers them to forge novel virtual identities, transcending geographical and social boundaries. However, this newfound freedom also gives rise to challenges, as division between online and offline personas can lead to societal conflicts. A pivotal study on Chinese college students sheds light on the intricate relationship between online identity experimentation and self-identity. The research highlights the influence of online social tendencies and compulsive Internet use on this connection. In summary, the Internet is offering opportunities for self-discovery and connection while posing challenges related to authenticity and the "strangeness" of online interactions. This essay reminds people that as the internet continues to evolve, it shapes our identities and relationships, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach in this digital age.

Keywords: Self-identity, Internet, decentralize.

1. Introduction

In the modern digital world, the advancement of internet has been changing the way people see and create who they are. The Internet, which features decentralized setup for being anonymous or semi-anonymous, creates a platform where people are able to develop online identities.

This essay delves into the profound impact of the internet on identity formation and interpersonal relationships. This essay will explore how the internet's "strangeness" challenges traditional notions of personal connections and societal boundaries [1]. Additionally, we'll examine a thought-provoking study that sheds light on the complex relationship between online identity experimentation and self-identity development among Chinese college students [2]. As we navigate this digital landscape, it becomes evident that the internet presents both opportunities and challenges, shaping the way we understand ourselves and connect with others in this brave new world.

2. Changes of Identity Recognition in the Internet Age and its Impact

2.1. Changes in Self Identity on the Internet

The decentralized nature of the internet, along with its characteristics of anonymity or semi-anonymity, affords individuals the opportunity to explore and create virtual identities. Primarily, the decentralized nature of the internet permits individuals to freely construct their identities in virtual spaces.

Identity formation constitutes a bidirectional interactive process where individuals are shaped through the ongoing interplay between personal subjectivity and societal expectations. Anthony Giddens interprets this process of identity formation as a contemporary reflexive extension into the core of the self, whereby the self assumes a reflexive projection [3].

In conventional society, an individual's identity is frequently circumscribed by social integration mechanisms, such as gender, race, and social class. Nevertheless, on the internet, the capacity to readily ascertain another person's "true" identity is circumscribed. This semi-anonymity affords

individuals a relatively unencumbered sphere in which to set aside their preexisting identities and fabricate entirely novel virtual identities [4, 5]. As an illustration, within the domain of social media platforms, individuals possess the option to preserve their anonymity or adopt pseudonyms, thus abstaining from revealing their authentic names and identity particulars. This cloak of anonymity empowers individuals to articulate their viewpoints, disseminate personal experiences, or engage in the pursuit of their interests, without trepidation concerning potential prejudices or discriminatory treatment that might be encountered in offline societal contexts. An ostensible manifestation of this phenomenon is evident on anonymous discussion forums, where individuals possess the freedom to partake in open dialogues concerning sensitive subjects, such as mental health matters or sexual orientation, all while safeguarding the concealment of their genuine personal identities.

Secondly, the decentralized nature of the internet extends the inclusivity of society, furnishing diverse groups with increased opportunities. In the online community, the constraints of geographical location or traditional social boundaries cease to be applicable. Nearly every conceivable group can discover its own niche on the internet, sharing common interests with like-minded individuals. Take, for instance, the LGBTQ+ community. Many LGBTQ+ individuals contend with biases and discrimination in conventional society [6]. However, on the internet, they can actively engage in social movements advocating for gender diversity and sexual orientation equality, establish support systems, and share personal narratives without apprehension regarding the disclosure of their true identities. The inclusiveness of online spaces has facilitated the growth of this community and its advocacy for equal rights [7].

Furthermore, internet identity construction is distinguished by its high tolerance for errors and relatively low cost. This implies that individuals can effortlessly create and reshape their virtual identities on the internet. They can choose to participate in various online communities and cultivate distinct online personas without the constraints associated with fixed identities in traditional society.

For instance, a liberal arts student in the tangible world may craft an entirely new identity as an e-sports enthusiast on the internet. Within this virtual identity, they can share gaming experiences and engage with e-sports communities without being confined by the societal expectations typically linked to their liberal arts background.

Nonetheless, while the decentralized nature of the internet bestows freedom upon individuals, it also poses challenges. Individuals may cultivate virtual identities on the internet that are markedly dissimilar from their offline identities, resulting in a binary opposition in societal attributes between online and offline personas. This can engender disparities in behavior and values between online and offline actions, potentially precipitating social conflicts. For instance, an individual may assume the role of a fervent political activist online, actively participating in radical political movements. Nevertheless, in the tangible world, they may present themselves as a conservative family-oriented person. This incongruity between virtual and real-world identities can give rise to societal conflicts, as individuals may manifest different values and behavior patterns in disparate social environments.

The decentralized nature of the internet and its attributes of anonymity or semi-anonymity present novel possibilities for individual identity formation and social interaction. These attributes enable individuals to construct identities with freedom, broaden the inclusivity of society, and reduce the expense associated with identity construction. Nonetheless, they can also lead to incongruities between virtual and real-world identities, potentially fomenting societal conflicts. In the internet era, individual identity has assumed a more intricate and diverse character, introducing fresh challenges and research avenues for sociologists and cultural scholars.

The Internet's feature of "strangeness" constitutes a distinctive attribute closely connected to anonymity but distinguished by unique facets.

Firstly, the anonymity feature of the internet engenders mutual unawareness among conversation participants, rendering it arduous for individuals to foster robust one-on-one emotional connections online. In traditional face-to-face interactions, profound emotional relationships evolve through mutual understanding and trust. However, on the internet, interactions often entail the exchange of mere text, images, or videos, which cannot fully unveil a person's inner world. Consequently, while

communication with individuals online is feasible, forging profound emotional bonds with them can be comparatively challenging.

Secondly, the Internet's characteristic of "strangeness" also reshapes the manner in which people socialize online. Conventional social interactions often hinge on spending extended durations together to cultivate a sense of intimacy and familiarity. However, in the internet age, individuals can navigate effortlessly through diverse online spaces and interact with strangers hailing from varied backgrounds. For instance, users on social media platforms can expand their social circles by following individuals of interest or joining specialized interest groups. This approach is no longer circumscribed by geographical location or conventional social circles, enabling individuals to connect with a broader array of strangers.

Furthermore, the internet alters the manner in which we engage with strangers. In conventional society, strangers are frequently perceived as "others" who diverge from ourselves, and they are relegated to a "difference" space, fostering isolation from them. Nevertheless, on the internet, virtually everyone participating in online communities assumes the role of a stranger. The internet effaces the binary dichotomy between "us" and "strangers," and individuals engage with strangers in a more unreserved and inclusive manner. For instance, on online forums, individuals can freely deliberate on assorted topics without being confined by geographical or social backgrounds. This open mode of communication assists in dismantling barriers and prejudices that persist in conventional society.

To explain the Internet's characteristic of "strangeness" in more concrete terms, let us contemplate online support groups as an exemplification. Prior to the advent of the internet, individuals in search of support or guidance for personal concerns often depended on their social circles or local support groups, comprising individuals they were intimately acquainted with or had met in person. Interactions occurred within the familiar and shared physical realms of the tangible world.

With the emergence of the internet, individuals confronting various challenges or seeking guidance can now partake in online communities. These communities frequently comprise individuals who have never encountered each other in person and may never do so. For instance, an individual grappling with a rare medical condition can identify fellow patients with the same ailment on an online forum. Though everyone is a stranger in the traditional sense, they share a common background of the ailment, and this virtual space facilitates their interaction and the provision of valuable support and insights.

Moreover, the internet's characteristic of "strangeness" extends beyond personal relationships to the consumption of content and information. On social media platforms like TikTok or YouTube, users frequently come across content creators who are essentially strangers. However, these creators form connections with their audience based on shared interests. Viewers may follow and engage with creators who produce content related to their hobbies, whether it's cooking, gaming, or art. In these cases, the internet facilitates connections among people who may never meet in person but share a sense of belonging to a virtual community of like-minded enthusiasts.

Additionally, the Internet's characteristic of "strangeness" affects not only the establishment of personal relationships but also the way society interacts with strangers. In traditional society, unfamiliarity often leads to prejudices and biases. However, on the internet, where almost everyone starts as a stranger, the potential for a more inclusive and empathetic society arises. People from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives can engage in constructive dialogues and collaborations, transcending the limitations of geography or societal boundaries.

In conclusion, the Internet's characteristic of "strangeness" is closely linked to anonymity, reshaping the dynamics of personal interactions and challenging traditional notions of "us" and "others." As the internet continues to evolve, it presents both opportunities and challenges for fostering connections among strangers, both on an individual and societal level.

2.2. Impact of Changes

After analyzing the characteristics of online identity, whether online identity experimentation positively or negatively influence self-identity development is still unclear. A noteworthy study conducted by Chinese scholars embarked on this journey to unravel the mysteries of online identity experimentation and its effects on the self-identity of Chinese college students. This research also aimed to uncover the underlying factors at play in shaping these effects [3].

To analyze this phenomenon, the research team administered a battery of surveys and scales to a group of 275 college students. These included instruments like the Online Identity Experiments Scale, Self-identity Scale, Internet Behaviors Questionnaire, and Compulsive Internet Use Scale.

The outcomes of this scholarly expedition reveal several key revelations: Firstly, the intricate interplay between online identity experimentation and self-identity proved to be heavily influenced by an individual's online social tendencies. For those whose real-life friendships overshadowed their online connections, venturing into online identity experiments left a marked negative impact on their self-identity. Conversely, individuals with a stronger presence in the virtual world found that while excessive online identity experimentation still had drawbacks, a moderate degree of exploration actually promotes positive outcomes for their self-identity.

Secondly, the study underscored the pivotal role played by compulsive Internet use in mediating the relationship between online identity experimentation and self-identity. This implies that the extent of an individual's compulsive internet use significantly shapes how online identity experimentation molds their self-identity.

In essence, this academic exploration suggests a nuanced narrative. It shows that, in the grand scheme of things, online identity experimentation could potentially hinder the development of self-identity among college students. However, it also shines a light on the complexity of this relationship, indicating that moderate levels of online identity experimentation may, in fact, contribute positively to self-identity development. But this positive impact is contingent on an individual's online social tendencies and their degree of compulsive Internet use.

Notably, it's essential to recognize that the concept of online identity experimentation has evolved over time, mainly due to the rapid evolution of the internet landscape. The conventional computer-mediated communication (CMC) environments were once characterized by anonymity and a lack of personal cues [8]. However, the latest generation of CMC environments, notably social networking sites (SNSs), has ushered in a new era with its distinct dynamics.

SNSs primarily serve as hubs for nurturing existing interpersonal relationships, often encouraging users to reveal authentic aspects of themselves [9, 10]. Consequently, many individuals leverage SNSs as platforms for exploring and showcasing their genuine selves, as opposed to assuming fabricated online personas. Researchers have consequently shifted their focus towards investigating whether self-presentation on social network sites holds sway over the self-identity of Chinese individuals.

3. Conclusion

In today's digital age, the internet has reshaped how we craft and understand our identities. Its decentralized nature, coupled with the option of anonymity, has allowed individuals to explore and create virtual personas, challenging conventional notions of identity and fostering new forms of connection. This essay has explored the profound impact of the internet on identity formation and interpersonal relationships, shedding light on its "strangeness" and its implications for individuals, society, and culture.

The internet offers a unique platform for identity construction, providing the freedom to shape virtual personas that may differ significantly from one's offline self. This opportunity allows individuals to experiment, discover new facets of their identity, and connect with like-minded people globally. It extends inclusivity by breaking down geographical and social barriers, enabling diverse groups to find their place and advocate for their interests.

However, this newfound freedom also comes with challenges. Discrepancies between online and offline identities can lead to social conflicts and raise questions about authenticity. The "strangeness" of online interactions, characterized by partial anonymity, alters the dynamics of personal connections. While it fosters inclusivity and the breakdown of barriers, it can also hinder the development of deep emotional bonds.

The study on Chinese college students reveals that the relationship between online identity experimentation and self-identity is complex. It depends on factors like the amount of time spent online and compulsive internet use. Striking the right balance is key, as some level of online identity exploration can be beneficial for self-identity when done in moderation.

Moreover, the nature of online interactions has evolved over time, shifting from anonymous communication to more authentic self-expression on social networking sites. This transformation has led researchers to investigate how these changes impact self-identity among different cultures, such as in China.

In conclusion, the Internet's influence on identity formation and interpersonal relationships is multifaceted. It offers opportunities for self-discovery and connection while presenting challenges related to authenticity and the "strangeness" of online interactions. As we navigate this digital landscape, it becomes clear that the internet has reshaped how we perceive ourselves and relate to others, particularly among college students in China. It reminds us that while the internet is a powerful tool for self-expression and connection, finding the right balance in our online and offline lives is essential for a healthy sense of self.

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