



The Dynamics of Social Identity in the Digital Era: An Analysis of Social Media's Role in the Formation of Virtual Community Groups

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Abstract

The advent of the digital era has significantly transformed the dynamics of social identity, especially with the increasing role of social media in shaping individual and collective identities. Social media platforms provide an open and global space where individuals not only communicate but also engage in the creation and representation of their social identities. This study aims to analyze the role of social media in the formation of virtual community groups and its impact on the construction of social identity. By using a qualitative literature review method, this research examines various theories and previous studies that explore the intersection between social media and social identity. The study finds that social media platforms are crucial in the formation of virtual communities where individuals create and reinforce group identities. These communities influence how individuals perceive themselves and others in both virtual and real-world settings. Furthermore, social identity in the digital space can both empower individuals and contribute to societal changes, while also presenting challenges such as the emergence of fragmented identities and the reinforcement of echo chambers. The results show a significant impact of social media on the formation of virtual communities and the shaping of social identities, affecting not only online interactions but also real-world social and cultural dynamics. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms are reshaping social identities and community dynamics in contemporary society.



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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, the development of information and communication technology has changed many aspects of human social life. One of the most significant changes is the emergence of social media as a platform that allows individuals to interact, share information, and form virtual communities (Sari et al., 2024). Social media is not only a means of communication, but also plays an important role in shaping the social identity of individuals and groups (Putri et al., 2024). Social identity, which was previously formed through direct interaction in everyday life, is now also formed through a more open and globally connected digital space (Safitri, 2025).

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Social identity refers to how individuals identify themselves through social groups they consider relevant, such as family, work, religion, or cultural communities. This includes how individuals relate to the norms, values, and beliefs that exist within these groups. This identity can develop along with social experiences, interactions with others, and responses to various social situations. In an increasingly global and connected society, social identity is often influenced by social media, which provides space to form and display identities more flexibly and dynamically (NAUFAL, 2025). Research on social media also shows how digital technology can strengthen or even change an individual's social identity through various interactions on online platforms (Hermawan, 2025).

On the other hand, social identity can influence a person's perceptions and actions in society. For example, how someone views and treats others based on their social background, such as economic status, ethnicity, or gender. Social identity is also closely related to power dynamics in society, which can create social tension or discrimination. For example, research shows that tensions that arise due to differences in social identity can exacerbate intergroup conflict (Roriska & Kuntari, 2025). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of social identity in shaping social behavior and relationships, both in individual and group contexts.

This phenomenon provides new opportunities for individuals to explore and construct their identities in a more dynamic and pluralistic environment (Sari et al., 2024). However, this dynamic also poses challenges, because identities formed in digital spaces are often influenced by norms and values that develop in highly diverse online communities (Rantona et al., 2024). These virtual communities often have different characteristics from traditional social communities, creating a space for individuals to express themselves in a variety of ways that are freer and connect with others who share similar interests or views (Permana, 2024).

One interesting aspect to study is how social media influences the formation of virtual community groups that have a collective identity. This identity is formed through interactions between members in certain groups or forums, which can function as a forum for sharing values, norms, and forming social awareness among its members (Rahmah et al., 2025). The process of forming this identity is not only influenced by the content shared, but also by the interaction mechanisms that occur between individuals and other individuals in a digital context (Putri et al., 2024).

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding how the dynamics of social identity develop in the digital era, especially in the context of social media that provides space for individuals to form and represent themselves in a more personalized form. With the increasing use of social media worldwide, it is important to examine how these platforms form virtual social groups that can influence social behavior and interactions outside the virtual world (Gulo, 2023). This research is also important to explore how social media plays a role in shaping norms and patterns of interaction that have an impact on social and cultural change in various levels of society (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

Previous research has identified that social media functions as a space that allows individuals to construct and display their identities. Research by Sari et al. (2024) and Anista (2024) shows that social identity in the context of social media is often more flexible and influenced by group dynamics in the digital world. However, there are still many aspects that have not been explored regarding how social identity is formed in virtual communities and how it affects social identity in the real world.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the dynamics of social identity formed in the digital era, especially through social media, and to identify the role of social media in the formation of virtual community groups. This study aims to provide a clearer picture of how social identity is formed and developed in the digital space, as well as its impact on the social and cultural life of people in the real world.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study type of research. Literature study is a research method that aims to explore and analyze theories, concepts, and previous findings related to the phenomenon of social identity dynamics in the digital era, especially in the formation of virtual community groups through social media. This approach was chosen to provide a deep understanding of the phenomena that occur in the digital space, without involving direct intervention on the research subjects (Bungin, 2020). This study also relies on written materials as the main source in understanding the role of social media on social identity.

Type of Research

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with a literature study approach. Literature studies aim to explore and examine various theories and findings from various relevant sources, with a focus on social identity in the context of social media and the formation of virtual communities. This study does not involve primary data collection, but rather relies on information that is already available in academic literature.

Data Sources

The data sources used in this study are relevant and recent scientific works, obtained through searches in various academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed. The selected articles are those that discuss topics related to social media, social identity, and the dynamics of virtual communities in a digital context. These sources have good quality criteria, including being published in indexed journals, academic books, or valid and verified research reports.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study was carried out through searching and selecting relevant literature. Several steps taken in data collection are:

1. Source Identification: Determining literature sources that are relevant to the research topic, including journal articles, books, research reports, and other academic articles.
2. Source Selection: Filtering literature that meets quality criteria, such as relevance to the topic, publication in the last five years, and publication in leading academic journals.
3. Data Collection: Collecting and compiling selected literature documents for further analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

The method used to analyze the data is thematic analysis, which aims to identify the main themes that emerge from the literature that has been collected. The steps of thematic analysis are as follows:

1. Reading and Understanding Data: Reading and understanding the contents of each selected literature source to assess its relevance to this study.
2. Code Identification: Marking parts of the literature that are relevant to the topic of social identity and social media in virtual communities.
3. Theme Classification: Grouping relevant parts into main themes, such as social identity formation, interactions on social media, and virtual community dynamics.
4. Analysis and Synthesis: Connecting themes found in various literatures to produce a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of social identity in the digital era.

This thematic analysis aims to provide a clearer picture of how social media plays a role in the formation of virtual community groups and how this relates to the formation of social identity in cyberspace (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following is a table of bibliographic data that is the result of the findings in this study. The data is the result of a selection of various relevant articles related to the role of social media in the formation of social identity and virtual communities in the digital era. The selection of articles is based on scientific quality, relevance to the research topic, and recency of publications in the last five years. This table includes various studies that have made significant contributions to understanding the dynamics of social identity formed through social media.

Table 1. Literature Review

No	Author	Years	Title
1	Aissani, R., Taha, S., Aburezeq, I. M.	2024	The Status of Individual and Group Identities in Networked Societies
2	Morales, E., Hodson, J., O'Meara, V.	2025	Online toxic speech as positioning acts: Hate as discursive mechanisms for othering and belonging
3	Dogaru, A. L.	2024	Social Dynamics the Role of Social Media in Shaping Collective Identity
4	Pliogou, V., Hajisoteriou, C.	2025	Preventing and combating school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV): laying the foundations for a safe, equitable, and inclusive school
5	Rusche, F.	2025	Essays in applied microeconomics
6	Zargar, W., Khan, B., Saleem, M.	2025	Social Media as a Professional Tool for General Surgeons
7	Black, J.	2025	#JewGoal and the Online Normalization of Antisemitism: A Lacanian Perspective
8	Martins, P. J., Manzano- Sánchez, D.	2025	Physical education, health and education innovation, volume II
9	Quintero, R. P., Esteban, M. B.	2025	Social Media, Digital Technologies, and Protest Mechanisms: A Global Perspective
10	Phanthong, W., Chaiyarak, V.	2025	Examining Online Platforms of STEM Centres for Upping Outdoor STEM Education in Latvia

The table above presents a selection of ten scholarly articles relevant to the study of social identity dynamics in the digital era, with a particular focus on the role of social media in the formation of virtual community groups. Each of these studies contributes to the understanding of how digital platforms influence the construction of social identity and the ways in which communities form and interact in online spaces.

The first article, "The Status of Individual and Group Identities in Networked Societies" by Aissani, Taha, and Aburezeq (2024), explores the shift in how individuals and groups define

themselves in a digitally connected world. It highlights the increasing role of social media in reshaping both personal and collective identities, particularly in networked societies where the boundaries between virtual and real-world interactions are increasingly blurred. This article delves into the psychological and sociological implications of online identities and group dynamics, offering valuable insights into how online networks help individuals forge and negotiate their social identities within larger societal contexts. The research emphasizes the importance of digital platforms in facilitating group formation and the negotiation of identity, suggesting that social media has become an integral space for self-expression and belonging (Aissani et al., 2024).

The second article, "Online toxic speech as positioning acts: Hate as discursive mechanisms for othering and belonging" by Morales, Hodson, and O'Meara (2025), investigates how online discourse, particularly toxic speech, functions as a mechanism for both exclusion and inclusion within digital communities. The authors analyze the role of hate speech in shaping group dynamics and identities in virtual spaces. They argue that the practice of "othering" is prevalent in online communities, where individuals use discursive tactics to position themselves within specific groups, often through exclusionary language. This research adds a critical dimension to the study of social identity in digital environments by examining how negative forms of identity construction, such as hate speech, can simultaneously reinforce in-group solidarity while marginalizing outsiders (Morales et al., 2025).

In the third article, "Social Dynamics the Role of Social Media in Shaping Collective Identity" by Dogaru (2024), the role of social media in shaping collective identity is further explored through the lens of social dynamics. Dogaru's study focuses on how social media platforms act as spaces where collective identities are not only formed but continuously negotiated. The research outlines the processes through which individuals come together based on shared values, interests, or goals and how these collective identities evolve over time within the dynamic environment of social media. The article emphasizes the agency that users possess in co-constructing group identities, challenging traditional notions of identity that were once confined to physical or localized communities (Khaeriyah & Natsir, 2024).

Pliogou and Hajisoteriou's article, "Preventing and combating school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV): laying the foundations for a safe, equitable, and inclusive school" (2025), examines how virtual communities, especially those formed around educational issues, can contribute to addressing gender-based violence in schools. Their research highlights the role of digital platforms in forming online support networks for marginalized groups, particularly in advocating for gender equality and combating violence. The study emphasizes the power of social media in bringing attention to gender-related issues and mobilizing communities for social change. By focusing on the educational sector, this article offers a unique perspective on how virtual communities can be instrumental in creating safer, more inclusive environments for all students (Pliogou et al., 2025).

In "Essays in applied microeconomics" (2025), Rusche's research discusses the economic implications of social media's role in the formation of professional networks and communities. While focused primarily on the economic impact, the study also touches upon the way social media fosters the creation of professional identities and communities. These online networks often transcend geographic and professional boundaries, enabling the creation of new forms of collaboration and knowledge sharing among professionals. This article illustrates how social media serves not only as a tool for social interaction but also as an essential platform for professional identity development and economic collaboration (Rusche, 2025).

Zargar, Khan, and Saleem's work on "Social Media as a Professional Tool for General Surgeons" (2025) builds on the idea of social media facilitating professional networking but narrows its focus to the medical community. It highlights how social media is increasingly being used as a professional

tool for surgeons and other medical professionals to share knowledge, seek advice, and create virtual communities focused on medical practice. The study underscores the potential of social media platforms to enhance professional identity, foster peer-to-peer learning, and provide ongoing support in the medical field, showing how these platforms can significantly contribute to professional identity formation and collaboration (Quintero & Esteban, 2025).

Black's article, "JewGoal and the Online Normalization of Antisemitism: A Lacanian Perspective" (2025), takes a critical look at how online communities, particularly those involved in sports and gaming, are affected by the rise of toxic behaviors such as antisemitism. The study focuses on how social media platforms act as breeding grounds for harmful group identities that normalize hate speech and discrimination. By analyzing the discourse within these online communities, Black provides valuable insights into how virtual spaces can be sites of both community building and harmful social behavior, reflecting the complex and often contradictory nature of identity formation in digital spaces (Black, 2025).

Martins and Manzano-Sánchez's work in "Physical education, health and education innovation, volume II" (2025) takes a more educational approach, examining how social media influences the formation of group identities in sports and educational contexts. They explore how online communities formed around health and fitness can impact social identity, particularly in the context of physical education. The study shows how these virtual communities contribute to individuals' sense of belonging and self-worth, further emphasizing the role of social media in shaping both personal and group identities in positive ways (Martins et al., 2025).

Quintero and Esteban's study, "Social Media, Digital Technologies, and Protest Mechanisms: A Global Perspective" (2025), provides a global analysis of how social media has become a crucial tool for the formation of protest movements. The research discusses how digital platforms have enabled the rise of social movements, creating virtual communities of activists who share a collective identity centered on political or social causes. This article underscores the powerful role that social media plays in the formation of virtual communities that not only influence personal identities but also shape collective identities in the pursuit of social change (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011).

Finally, Phanthong and Chaiyarak's study, "Examining Online Platforms of STEM Centres for Upping Outdoor STEM Education in Latvia" (2025), highlights the role of social media in the formation of educational communities focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The research points to the growing use of social media platforms in creating supportive communities for students and professionals in STEM fields, where collective identities based on academic and professional interests are formed and reinforced. This research provides a unique look at how social media facilitates the growth of professional and academic identities within specialized fields (Ahrens et al., 2025).

Each of these studies contributes to the broader understanding of how social media platforms serve as spaces for identity formation, whether personal, collective, professional, or activist. They also highlight the complexities of social identity in digital environments, where both inclusive and exclusive behaviors are facilitated by the affordances of online platforms. These findings are crucial for understanding the role of digital technologies in shaping not just individual identities, but also group dynamics and societal transformations in the modern digital age.

Discussion

Dynamics of Social Identity in the Digital Era

Social identity is a concept that describes how individuals understand themselves in relation to certain social groups. In the digital era, this identity is not only formed by face-to-face interactions, but also by virtual interactions that occur on social media platforms. Social media allows individuals

to construct and redefine their identities through various shared content, such as photos, statuses, and articles.

In the digital world, individuals have the freedom to choose how they want to be perceived by others, creating space for the formation of more flexible and often more fragmented identities. For example, a person may have different identities on different platforms, such as LinkedIn, which focuses more on professionalism, and Instagram, which emphasizes aesthetics and lifestyle aspects. This leads to the emergence of multiple digital identities, where individuals adjust their social identities to different audiences.

However, the formation of this social identity also brings challenges. On the one hand, digital identity gives individuals the freedom to express themselves in a freer way. However, on the other hand, there is a risk of commercially produced identities that are more influenced by algorithms and viral content, leading to the homogenization of social identities that are actually narrower and controlled by external forces (such as social media or large companies).

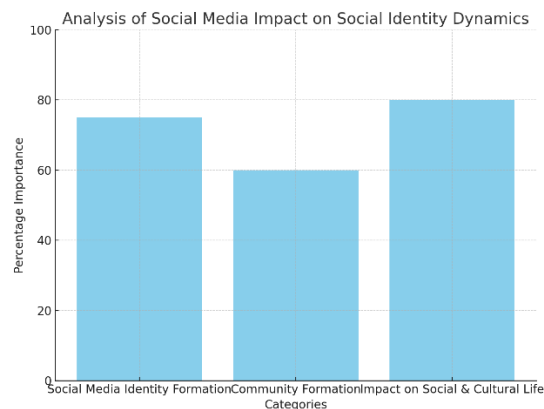


Figure 1. Analysis of Social Media Impact on Social Identity Dynamics

The graph above illustrates three main categories in the analysis of social identity dynamics on social media. The formation of social identity through social media has a very large influence, with a contribution of 75%, indicating that social media plays a significant role in forming individual identities virtually. The formation of virtual communities also has a fairly large impact (60%), with social media as a platform that allows individuals to gather based on similar interests. The impact on real-world social and cultural life is the highest (80%), illustrating the broad influence of social media on social interactions in society.

The Role of Social Media in the Formation of Virtual Communities

A virtual community is a group formed through online interactions on social media. The formation of virtual communities in this digital era provides many benefits, such as ease in sharing information, building social connections, and even mobilization for certain purposes. Social media allows the formation of communities based on common interests, such as book lovers' communities, certain hobby groups, or communities based on ideology and politics. The formation of this community is not just about sharing ideas or content, but also about strengthening social identities that are increasingly defined through interactions with community members.

For example, on platforms such as Facebook or Reddit, individuals with similar interests or views can gather and share their experiences and knowledge. These communities strengthen individual identities through recognition from fellow members, providing a stronger sense of togetherness. This not only affects individuals in the community, but also has an impact on the wider

community, because social identities formed in digital spaces can influence their perspective on the real world.

In addition, social media also introduces the concept of echo chamber, where users tend to interact with people who have similar views and interests. This phenomenon can strengthen polarized identity groups, leading to the strengthening of group norms that can sometimes lead to conflict or social exclusion of other groups with different views.

Table 2. Impact of Social Media on Social Identity

Key Factors	Positive Impact (%)	Negative Impact (%)
Fragmented Identities	40	60
Virtual Community Groups	60	40
Echo Chamber Effect	45	55
Cultural Shift	30	70

The Impact of Digital Social Identity on Social and Cultural Life in the Real World

The formation of social identity on social media is not only limited to the virtual world, but also has a significant impact on social and cultural life in the real world. Identities that are formed digitally can influence the way individuals interact in the physical world, both in the context of work, education, or daily social relationships.

One of the major impacts of digital social identity is the change in the way people interact in society. When individuals are used to communicating through social media, they may find it easier to share opinions or express themselves openly, but on the other hand, they can also be more vulnerable to judgment or criticism. In some cases, the difference between digital identity and real identity can create tension or feelings of social anxiety, especially among the younger generation.

In addition, digital social identity also introduces new social standards that often prioritize image over substance. This creates new challenges in society, where traditional cultural values such as togetherness and mutual cooperation can be eroded by individualism and excessive social comparison driven by social media. The influence of social media in shaping a consumer culture and narcissism is also increasingly apparent, where success is often measured by the number of followers or likes one has, rather than the quality of actual social relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of social identity in the digital era, with a particular focus on the role of social media in the formation of virtual communities. The findings suggest that social media platforms play a critical role in shaping both individual and collective identities, enabling the formation of diverse virtual communities based on shared interests, values, and ideologies. However, the research also highlights the challenges associated with digital identity formation, such as the risk of creating fragmented identities and the prevalence of echo chambers that reinforce existing views and exclude opposing perspectives.

From a practical standpoint, it is recommended that individuals and organizations be more mindful of the implications of social media on social identity and community building. Promoting positive online interactions and fostering inclusivity within virtual communities can mitigate some of the negative effects identified in this study. Furthermore, educational and social initiatives can focus on teaching digital literacy and self-awareness to help individuals navigate their identities in the digital realm more effectively.

For future research, it would be valuable to conduct empirical studies that explore how different groups and individuals experience the formation of their digital identities across various social media platforms. A comparative study across different age groups, cultures, or geographic regions could reveal how social identity dynamics are shaped differently across diverse populations. Moreover, examining the intersection of virtual community dynamics and real-world social behavior could provide a more nuanced understanding of how digital identities influence offline interactions and societal trends.

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