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Systematic Review



The Influence of Social Networks on the Formation of Identity and Self-Awareness among Adolescents in the Context of the Contemporary Digital Environment of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

Introduction. The contemporary information society requires the development of critical thinking, self-control, and value orientations. It is relevant to consider issues concerning the influence of technological factors, in particular social networks and media, on the formation of adolescents' identity and self-awareness. The purpose of this study is to examine theoretical approaches and aspects of the influence of social networks on adolescents' self-esteem and self-identification during their development in the context of Azerbaijan's contemporary digital environment, as well as to propose significant directions for future empirical and theoretical research.

Materials and Methods. The study is based on a combination of methods. Psychometric instruments, surveys, and content analysis are used for a comprehensive examination of the phenomena under study. Comparative analysis is applied, while the methodological basis is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that makes it possible to formulate fundamental and promising directions for research in this field.

Results. Based on an analysis of publications by international and Azerbaijani authors, the following conclusions were drawn: social networks have both positive effects (communication, learning, development of digital skills) and negative effects (cyber risks, anxiety, information overload); the level of adolescents' digital literacy is one of the main factors in the safe use of social networks, while parental control and family digital culture significantly influence the nature of Internet use. The most promising research directions are identified; these are simultaneously of high social significance for the Republic of Azerbaijan but remain insufficiently studied using local data.

Discussion and Conclusion. Contemporary researchers place the main emphasis not so much on limiting the amount of time spent using the Internet as on creating a safe digital environment, developing adolescents' digital literacy, preventing cyberbullying, and strengthening psychological support in Azerbaijani schools. This article lays the foundation for future research and emphasizes the importance of greater involvement by the state, parents, and educational institutions in supporting adolescents on their path toward becoming healthy, self-confident adults.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, adolescents, self-awareness, social networks, digital environment, family influence, digital media, identity

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Влияние социальных сетей на формирование идентичности и самосознания подростков в контексте современной цифровой среды Азербайджана

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Аннотация

Введение. Современное информационное общество требует развития критического мышления, самоконтроля и ценностных установок. Актуальным является рассмотрение вопросов, касаемых влияния технологических факторов, в частности, социальных сетей и медиа, на формирование идентичности и самосознания подростков. Цель данного исследования – изучить теоретические подходы и аспекты влияния социальных сетей на самооценку и самоидентификацию подростков в процессе их развития в контексте современной цифровой среды Азербайджана, а также предложить значимые направления для будущих эмпирических и теоретических исследований.

Материалы и методы. Исследование основано на комплексе методов. Используются психометрические инструменты, опросы, а также контент-анализ для комплексного изучения исследуемых явлений. Применяется сравнительный анализ, методологической основой является комплексный междисциплинарный подход, позволяющий сформулировать базовые и перспективные направления исследований в этой области.

Результаты исследования. На основе анализа публикаций зарубежных и азербайджанских авторов сделаны следующие выводы: социальные сети оказывают как положительное (коммуникация, обучение, развитие цифровых навыков), так и отрицательное влияние (киберриски, тревожность, информационная перегрузка); уровень цифровой грамотности подростков является одним из главных факторов безопасного использования социальных сетей, при этом родительский контроль и семейная цифровая культура существенно влияют на характер использования интернета. Обозначены наиболее перспективные направления исследований, которые одновременно имеют высокую общественную значимость для Азербайджанской Республики, но при этом недостаточно изучены на местном материале.

Обсуждение и заключение. Основной акцент современные исследователи делают не столько на ограничении времени использования интернета, сколько на создании безопасной цифровой среды, развитии цифровой грамотности подростков, профилактике кибербуллинга и укреплении психологической поддержки в школах Азербайджана. Данная статья закладывает основу для будущих исследований и подчеркивает, насколько важны повышенное участие государства, родителей и образовательных учреждений в поддержке подростков на пути к становлению здоровыми, уверенными в себе взрослыми.

Ключевые слова: Азербайджан, подростки, самосознание, социальные сети, цифровая среда, влияние семьи, цифровые медиа, идентичность

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Introduction. Digital media have an enormous influence on the behavior, self-awareness, and mental well-being of people around the world. It is evident that adolescents, whose self-awareness is still developing, may experience both benefits and negative effects from the use of modern technologies. According to the general view of most specialists, adolescence is a critical stage of development characterized by significant changes in social, emotional, and cognitive processes. These changes are driven by both internal and external factors, including the influence of digital cultural narratives. Therefore, at this stage it is extremely important to understand the mechanisms and consequences of this influence.

Formal and informal systems that regulate behavior and maintain social norms are referred to as “social control”. These systems influence behavior and self-awareness and play a key role in maintaining social stability and cohesion. The purpose of this study is to examine theoretical approaches related to the influence of the digitalization of society and social networks encountered by adolescents in everyday life. The article offers a systematic review of research on this topic. The objective is to establish a foundation for future empirical research and to provide a theoretical analysis of this issue in the context of Azerbaijan’s contemporary digital environment. Data obtained from such studies will help shape attitudes and social policies aimed at addressing the identified problems and defining directions for further research in this field.

Materials and Methods. The proposed study is based on a combination of methods aimed at a comprehensive analysis of the issue. Psychometric instruments, surveys, and content analysis were used for a comprehensive examination

of the phenomena of interest. Comparative analysis is used to analyze scientific materials, while the methodological basis is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that makes it possible, drawing on cross-sectoral data and samples, to comprehensively identify the key aspects of the issue and formulate fundamental and promising directions for research in this field.

Results. Adolescents' self-awareness is formed under the influence of at least three interconnected factors: family dynamics, mechanisms of social control, and the digital environment. These factors do not operate in isolation but are in constant interaction, strengthening or weakening one another. Digital media create a new "environment of socialization" that competes with traditional institutions – the family and school – for influence over the formation of adolescent identity. Parental control and digital literacy are key protective factors that reduce the negative impact of the digital environment on self-esteem and self-perception.

Numerous factors, including peer interaction, parental influence, social expectations, and media exposure, are directly related to the development of adolescents' self-awareness and self-perception. Scholars such as Carl Rogers and Erik Erikson argued that puberty is critically important for the formation of identity and self-concept. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, this period is known as "identity versus role confusion," when young people try to understand who they are. At the same time, Rogers emphasizes the importance of congruence between the "real self" and the "ideal self", which is a key concept for understanding self-awareness in today's media-saturated world.

Another important feature of growing up is "self-education", which implies an adolescent's desire for self-improvement and conformity with moral norms. A key factor in this process is the adolescent's understanding of their responsibilities and place in society [1, p. 91]. According to Azerbaijani psychologist M. Hamzayev [2, p. 44], adolescents initially evaluate themselves through the evaluations of others before learning to evaluate themselves independently. The "ideal self" and the "real self" are dynamically balanced through this introspective process.

Kurt Lewin, a founder of social psychology, notes that the environments in which children live are more limited than those of adolescents. Comparing the living conditions of children and adolescents, Lewin emphasizes that adolescents gain broader opportunities and, together with them, more complex choices. These changes lead to internal contradictions that cannot be explained solely by structural changes. We argue that the cause of this discrepancy lies in large-scale cultural shifts accompanied by digital influences that transform ideas about identity and values. Adolescents have more opportunities, but the available choices also become more complex. The internal contradictions arising from these changes cannot be explained solely by structural factors.

One of the pressing issues in contemporary anthropology, social pedagogy, and psychology – and, more broadly, in education and culture as a whole – is the influence of the digital environment and content on adolescents' development, self-esteem, and socialization. These issues attract the attention of many international specialists. Researchers examine the relationship between screen time (including social media use) and the development of depressive symptoms among adolescents. The authors conclude that adolescents who spend more time on social media and in front of screens are more likely to show increasing symptoms of depression over time [3].

Y. Kelly, together with other authors, analyzes the impact of the duration of social media use on the mental health of British adolescents. The study shows that using social media for more than three hours per day is associated with an increased risk of depression, lower self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and cyberbullying, particularly among girls [4].

Another article also examines the relationships between time spent on social media and adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems. The authors identify a pattern: the more time adolescents spend on social media, the greater the likelihood of anxiety, depressive experiences, aggressive behavior, and other emotional difficulties [5].

Research examining how adolescents themselves and their parents assess the impact of social media on psychological well-being is also relevant. Specialists note that frequent social media use and the fear of missing important events are associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression. At the same time, moderate use of social media may help maintain communication and social connections [6]. International studies show that adolescents worldwide demonstrate problematic media use, which is associated with risks of psychological disorders and sleep problems [7, p. 25].

Thus, many scholars emphasize that social networks do not necessarily have a negative impact in themselves; however, excessive and uncontrolled use is associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, lower self-esteem, and other psychological problems among adolescents. At the same time, researchers note that moderate use of social networks may also have positive effects, for example by supporting communication and a sense of social belonging.

This issue concerning young people is relevant worldwide. There are still relatively few publications by Azerbaijani researchers working at Azerbaijani universities, especially empirical studies specifically focused on adolescents aged 12–17. Most of them address digital literacy; Internet safety; social media dependence; the digital behavior of young people and students; and the role of the family in the use of digital technologies.

A 2023 FED.az survey shows that more than 40% of social media users use them for up to 1 hour per day [FED.az, 2023], 38.9% for 1 to 3 hours, 9.6% for 3 to 5 hours, and 8.6% for more than 5 hours per day. These figures are higher among

users aged 18–35. Data are available on the growth in the number of social media users in Azerbaijan over the past five years; however, specific statistics for adolescents (12–17 years old) are limited. Overall, according to the available information, social media use is increasing among the population as a whole and across different age groups, and there is a high probability that this trend is also occurring among adolescents.

There is ongoing discussion regarding the increase in attention, socialization, and behavioral problems among adolescents. According to N. Karimova's "Social Media's Psychological Effects on Adolescents," the rate of social media use among adolescents and young people is higher than among adults [8].

A. Javadov, N. Aliyeva, and others show that active social media use, frequent sharing of personal information, and insufficient digital literacy increase adolescents' risk of encountering cyberbullying, fraud, personal-data leaks, and other online threats. The authors conclude that digital safety and media literacy should be incorporated into school curricula [9].

The works of S. Savadova show that children's use of digital media in Azerbaijan is largely shaped by family and cultural norms. Fathers more often establish rules for the use of devices, while mothers monitor compliance with those rules. The effectiveness of digital parenting depends not only on the amount of time spent online but also on the quality of parental guidance. Although the study focuses on younger children, its conclusions are also applicable to adolescence [10].

Other authors note that social networks have become one of the most important spaces for the socialization of Azerbaijani youth. They contribute to the development of digital skills and broaden access to education and information, but at the same time they increase information overload, the influence of online norms, and the risks of psychological pressure. The authors recommend developing critical thinking and digital literacy [11].

Based on the above, the following general conclusions can be drawn:

- social networks have both positive effects (communication, learning, development of digital skills) and negative effects (cyber risks, anxiety, information overload);
- the level of adolescents' digital literacy is one of the main factors in the safe use of social networks;
- parental control and family digital culture significantly influence the nature of Internet use;
- schools should include instruction in digital safety, media literacy, and critical thinking in their educational programs.

These conclusions are consistent both with the work of Azerbaijani researchers and with major international projects.

It is evident that in the information age, adolescents' lives are increasingly shaped by the digital world. This world presents both risks and opportunities for cultural exchange, learning, and social interaction. Social networks idealize beauty standards and cause body dissatisfaction, especially among girls [7, p. 368]. These problems are exacerbated by peer comparison and cyberbullying, which undermine psychological stability and self-esteem [1, p. 632]. Adolescents who lack digital literacy are more likely to encounter harmful content, underscoring the need for educational and parental supervision.

The role of parents, their attention, and an appropriate approach to the child are extremely important today. The duration of time spent using media devices is itself a risk factor. In this context, parents should tactfully limit excessive use of media devices, especially during study time, before sleep, and after waking. Parents should also be informed and maintain a dialogue with their children about the potential negative consequences of prolonged media-device use [7, p. 18].

The family and immediate social environment have an enormous influence on the formation of an adolescent's habits and attitudes. Moreover, family and cultural traditions may be among the factors influencing the regulation of social networks in different countries, but they operate in combination with political, legal, and technological factors. Therefore, the degree and nature of regulation vary significantly from country to country.

In recent years, the Azerbaijani authorities have paid particular attention to protecting minors from harmful content, developing digital literacy and parental controls, and introducing age restrictions on social networks. These measures are officially justified by child safety and the responsible use of the digital environment.

When considering this aspect, it is more accurate to say that family and cultural values primarily influence child-protection policy and norms of public morality, whereas large-scale regulation of social networks is more closely connected with state governance of the information space, legislation, and security issues, rather than solely with cultural and religious traditions.

Given the current agenda in Azerbaijan (discussion of regulating children's use of social networks, digital safety, and digital literacy), the following areas of scientific research are particularly promising.

The influence of social networks on adolescents' mental health. This is one of the most sought-after areas in the international scientific literature, but data for Azerbaijan remain limited. Relevant questions include: the relationship between time spent using TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms and anxiety and depressive symptoms; the impact of social networks on self-esteem; the formation of body image among adolescents; and levels of loneliness and social support.

The issue of the influence of social networks and the Internet on school performance also remains significant. In particular, this concerns the impact of daily screen time on school grades; the use of social networks for learning; and the

relationship between digital habits and academic motivation. This topic is especially relevant because the integration of digital technologies into education is being actively discussed in the country.

A highly relevant research direction concerns *cyberbullying among adolescents in Azerbaijan*, particularly the prevalence of cyberbullying; its psychological consequences; protection strategies; and the role of schools and parents. The practical value of this type of research is especially high for the development of prevention programs.

The issue of adolescents' *digital literacy* should be highlighted separately. This research direction includes such questions as the ability to recognize fake information; information-verification skills; understanding digital safety; protection of personal data; and critical thinking. This direction corresponds to state initiatives aimed at developing digital literacy.

Issues related to *parental control* and the use of social networks are promising and consistently in demand. This group of studies may include comparisons of authoritarian and democratic parenting styles; the influence of parental control on adolescent behavior; adolescents' attitudes toward restrictions; and parents' digital competence. Of particular interest is an analysis of families' attitudes toward the proposed age restrictions on social media use.

Another research direction is directly related to *the formation of adolescent identity*, for example, the influence of bloggers; the influence of influencers on life values; and language preferences in the digital environment.

For Azerbaijan, all these areas have specific cultural characteristics and require empirical and theoretical research.

Discussion and Conclusion. The digitalization of society requires the development of critical thinking, self-control, and moral judgment among adolescents. To improve parental and educational practices that contribute to adolescent well-being, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these processes. This conceptual work has both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, it systematizes existing research in the context of Azerbaijan's contemporary digital environment. From a practical perspective, it offers specific recommendations: educators should include digital-literacy courses in curricula; parents should make more active use of parental-control tools and maintain an open dialogue with their children; policymakers should develop state digital-safety programs for young people. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that, for the first time, it examines the relationship between mechanisms of social control and digital media in the Azerbaijani context, proposing an integrated conceptual model of the formation of adolescents' self-awareness.

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