Hyunsun Ohm

Integrative Seminar 2: Visual Culture

Alvarez, Anna

8 May 2017

<div align="center">The Impact of Social Media on the users' identities</div>

Are you a Facebook user? Surely, yes. Then, have you ever participated in any Facebook

challenge? In 2014, videos related to the ice bucket challenge to raise donation for as well as

awareness of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) were uploaded by more than 17 million

Facebook users, including celebrities like Justin Timberlake and Martha Stewart, watched by more

than 440 million people a total of 10 billion times, and, finally, 2.5 million people donated $115

million to the Association for research of the degenerative neurological disease.[1] Starting from Pete

Frates, a former Boston College baseball player who diagnosed with ALS in 2011, Facebook users

challenged their friends and celebrities to either donate $100 or upload a video of them dumping ice

buckets on their heads within the next 24 hours.[2] What was most amazing about this challenge was

that the result happened only after about two months which must have been impossible without the

social media Facebook. As the users expressed their thoughts through the social media challenge,

these days, people express their ideas and daily lives and their identities are impacted by the

influential platform day by day. Through researches on the related cases and cultural phenomena

related to impacts of social media on its users' identities, it will be argued that while social media

constructs people's identities by providing a space to build up and an opportunity to share their

---

[1] Amit Chowdhry, "Remember The Ice Bucket Challenge? Donations From The $220 Million Campaign Enhanced ALS Research," Forbes, August 26, 2015, accessed May 02, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2015/08/26/remember-the-ice-bucket-challenge-donations-from-the-220-million-campaign-advanced-als-research/#710ded893c6d.

[2] Josh Levin, "Who Invented the Ice Bucket Challenge? A Slate Investigation.," Slate Magazine, August 22, 2014, accessed May 01, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2014/08/who_invented_the_ice_bucket_challenge_a_slate_investigation.html.

identities, it also disrupts them by not developing a "real" but creating an "online" identity focusing on others' affirmation that make even the users confused with their "real" identities.

To begin with, social media forms and supports individuals' identities by providing a space to build a self-image as well as an opportunity to share them with those who can empathize with and encourage them. To begin with, social media contributes to shaping individuals' identities as a place to build up a visible record of and represent themselves.[3] One of the remarkable elements of social media is a username. Social media offers the users to decide their own usernames—unlike their real names for which they had no choice: only in the process of choosing them, they naturally ask themselves what are their core values, personal strengths, skills, and personal traits, what do they want to be known for, and what will make them stand out among others.[4] In addition, it provides a user's own space to gather visual posts about their identities: in the online space, what they post become who they are and what they do. Over 500 million active monthly users have shared over 40 billion photos to date and share an average of 95 million photos and videos per day[5], and, these days, it's "as though they are not a person unless they post everything that happens in their life" and "there is no meaning to their life if they are not connected in some way to the apps on their phone."[6] By choosing their usernames and posting their photos in great number on the online platform, people build up their identities with the social media. In addition, it lets them share their identities with other users who can support and encourage them. The participation in social media

---

[3] Simply Zesty, "Why social media is leading to a new era of identity," https://www.simplyzesty.com/blog/article/january-2012/why-social-media-is-leading-to-a-new-era-of-identity.

[4] Daniel Tolliday, "How to Use Social Media to Build Your Personal Brand : Social Media Examiner," Social Media Examiner main page, http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/use-social-media-to-build-your-personal-brand/.

[5] Sydney Parker, "A Long List of Instagram Statistics That Marketers Need to Know," Hootsuite Social Media Management, https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/.

[6] Imani Weeks, "Social Media and the New Sense of Identity," Science Leadership Academy, https://scienceleadership.org/blog/advance_essay_3--social_media_and_the_new_sense_of_identity.

lets individuals with similar interests to grow together by sharing information and emotion through likes, shares, and comments. According to the Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy, changing patterns of social relations are a product of the ways in which technologies have developed[7]: ever-evolving communications technologies allow us to stay in touch even when we are scattered across distant parts of the globe, rendering geographical boundaries increasingly less important[8]. Globalization enabled us to communicate with others not only people already know but also have not known either met and changed our social and cultural relations.[9] Social network sites, created to facilitate social interaction, developed amongst the most used sites on the web; it exploded online interactivity and user participation and became to greatly affect the linguistic and communicative practices in which people engage, as well as the social groupings and networks they create. For instance, Facebook transformed the ways in which people can interact by providing a number of notably different communicative dynamics and structures.

However, the identities formed by social medias are different from our "real" identity; it is rather an another identity raised by others' affirmation and feeding on the number of views, thumbs ups, comments, and likes as essential nutrients. As a result, it disrupts the users' real identities by changing not only how others perceive them but how they perceive themselves, and creating pressure to be more like the idealized digital versions. When people upload selfies or pictures of their daily lives, they often fabricate them to look better; to fit the desired body and appearance, people either be on an unhealthy diet or photoshop their pictures —according to the online survey conducted by Harris interactive on behalf of The Renfrew Center Foundation from January 17th to 21st, among 85 percent of 1,710 U.S. adults ages 18 and above who print or post pictures of

---

[7] Philip Seargeant, and Caroline Tagg, The language of social media: identity and community on the Internet, 3-15.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

themselves on social media account, half of them edit their pictures before putting them on social media networks,[10] trying to hide their real identity—, and this results in their obsession with perfect body size and lifestyle. For instance, an actress Zendaya uploaded her "real" and "photoshopped" pictures side by side, stating that she "was shocked when [she] found [her] 19 year old hips and torso quite manipulated" (Figure 1)[11]. Through social media, they develop their identity that may not be completely true to themselves but "likable" by the outside world. The problem is that even the users themselves start to believe in the lies they make up and lose their real sense of reality. In addition, social media often leads to a comparison of self with others resulting negative feelings towards self identity. Thus, they eventually become to be afraid that their "real" appearance to be revealed on online: according to the survey called Children, Teens, Media, and

Figure 1. The photoshopped and original version of a picture of Zendaya, Photograph, October 20, 2015, Instagram of Zendaya

Body Image, "35 percent of people worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos, 27 percent feel stressed about how they look in posted photos, and 22 percent felt bad about themselves if their photos were ignored."[12] Furthermore, the users' priority—not themselves but others—a result of the social media culture, changed the way they approach identity: they do not find it worthy anymore to look their best in an outfit, eat the tastiest meal or look at the most beautiful sunset if they can't share that moment with their online friends.[13] Therefore, people are

---

10

[11] The photoshopped and original version of a picture of Zendaya, October 20, 2015, Photograph, Available from: Instagram of Zendaya, https://www.instagram.com/p/9FV2sdJmOk/

12

[13] Simply Zesty, "Why social media is leading to a new era of identity," https://www.simplyzesty.com/blog/article/january-2012/why-social-media-is-leading-to-a-new-era-of-identity.

rather constructing facades based on the answers to these questions, "How will others look at me?" and "How can I ensure that others view me positively?"[14] "The goal for many now in their use of social media becomes how they can curry acceptance, popularity, status, and, by extension, self-esteem through their profiles and postings."[15] People actively and repeatedly co-construct and negotiate their identity and present themselves in different ways depending on the particular contextual circumstances in which they are operating. While identity constructed through self tends not to be damaged by others, that constructed through other was, is, and will always be fragile and be controlled by others. People yield their control over identity to people in social media.

The use of social media as a means of communication is interesting in this respect for two reasons; firstly, because the circumstances in which people perform identity online, and the resources they have with which to do this, are in many respects different from offline situations; and, secondly, because the novelty and distinctiveness of online interaction bring to the fore many of these contemporary constructivist ideas about the nature of identity. With comments and likes quantifying influence and success on social media, aspiring to gain affirmation is built into the platforms. It's not a law that you have to post a selfie before, during, and after every activity. But for kids, it's pretty much mandatory. The resulting likes, thumbs-ups, and other ratings all get tallied, both in the stark arithmetic of the Internet and in kids' own minds. For some -- especially girls -- what starts as a fun way to document and share experiences can turn into an obsession about approval that can wreak havoc on self-image. That kids have been comparing themselves to popular images in traditional media -- and coming up short -- is a well-researched phenomenon. But new studies are just beginning to determine the effects of social media -- which is arguably more immediate and intimate -- on the way kids view themselves. Approval-seeking and self-doubt continue to plague

---

14 Jim Taylor, "Technology: Is Technology Stealing Our (Self) Identities?" Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-prime/201107/technology-is-technology-stealing-our-self-identities.

15 Ibid.

people both privately and publicly.. Thus, maintaining a social media presence can be entertaining

yet stressful.

Were you one of the users described in the paper? How has your identity changed since you

downloaded the various social media apps? As the social and cultural impact of social media

increases, the proper perception of one's identity became increasingly important. While people are

now developing their identity in the space called social media and supporting each other's by

providing comments and affirmation, the developing identity is not our "real" but "online" identity.

In the generation of social media, more people are getting dual identities and constructing the

"online" identity. Thus, it became increasingly significant to differentiate their two identities and

enjoy the advantages of the new one as well as keep in mind that others are having same situation

so that they do not find their real identity despondent by comparing it to others' fake identity. In a

society that places crushing standards and social norms like people's own-standards and norms that

people all regretfully admit have affected ourselves- ideas about how you have to think, how you

have to act, and how you have to live are planted in your head on a daily basis. We also live in an

era where conformity is universally ubiquitous. It penetrates almost as a key element in all different

generations, backgrounds, and cultures and thus holds a firm, unique identity of impacting virtually

everyone regardless of race, gender, or age. Under the rapid development of technology, we now

live in an era full of communication. An era, one in which information torrents into our heads with a

single touch of a button. The invention of SNS have entangled us with the obligation to both report

and receive what we are doing, what we are eating, and what we are wearing on a daily -or maybe

even hourly- basis.

Bibliography

Bromwich, Jonah. "A Celebrity Struggle: Staying Off Twitter, for Good." The New York Times.

September 30, 2015. Accessed April 17, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/01/us/a-

celebrity-struggle-staying-off-twitter-for-good.html?_r=1.

Bromwich, Jonah. "Essena O'Neill, Instagram Star, Recaptions Her Life." The New York Times.

November 03, 2015. Accessed April 17, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/

fashion/essena-oneill-instagram-star-recaptions-her-life.html?smprod=nytcore-

iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share&_r=0.

Chang Follow, Daniel. "How Social Media Affects Our Self-Identity." LinkedIn SlideShare. June

04, 2016. Accessed April 21, 2017. https://www.slideshare.net/DanielChang39/how-social-

media-affects-our-selfidentity.

Chowdhry, Amit. "Remember The Ice Bucket Challenge? Donations From The $220 Million

Campaign Enhanced ALS Research." Forbes. August 26, 2015. Accessed May 02, 2017.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2015/08/26/remember-the-ice-bucket-

challenge-donations-from-the-220-million-campaign-advanced-als-research/

#710ded893c6d.

Crisis Instagram Stress. March 27, 2017. Accessed April 20, 2017. http://www.refinery29.com/

2017/03/146733/identity-crisis-causes-social-media-fake-world.

Daniel. "How to Use Social Media to Build Your Personal Brand : Social Media Examiner." Social

Media Examiner main page. July 21, 2015. Accessed May 3, 2017. http://

www.socialmediaexaminer.com/use-social-media-to-build-your-personal-brand/.

Duggan, Maeve, Nicole B. Ellison, Cliff Lampe, Amanda Lenhart, and Mary Madden.

"Demographics of Key Social Networking Platforms." Pew Research Center: Internet,

Science & Tech. January 09, 2015. Accessed April 18, 2017. http://www.pewinternet.org/

2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2/.

Kietzmann, Jan H., Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. Mccarthy, and Bruno S. Silvestre. "Social media?

Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media." Business

Horizons 54, no. 3 (May & june 2011): 241-51. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005.

Levin, Josh. "Who Invented the Ice Bucket Challenge? A Slate Investigation." Slate Magazine.

August 22, 2014. Accessed May 01, 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/

technology/2014/08/who_invented_the_ice_bucket_challenge_a_slate_investigation.html.

Lindley, Emma. "Is social networking redefining identity? - RSA." RSA 21st century

enlightenment. January 24, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2017. https://www.thersa.org/discover/

publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2013/01/is-social-networking-redefining-identity.

Parker, Sydney. "A Long List of Instagram Statistics That Marketers Need to Know." Hoot suite

Social Media Management. December 13, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2017. https://

blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/.

Seargeant, Philip, and Caroline Tagg. The language of social media: identity and community on the

Internet. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Taylor, Jim. "Technology: Is Technology Stealing Our (Self) Identities?" Psychology Today. July

27, 2011. Accessed April 16, 2017. https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-

prime/201107/technology-is-technology-stealing-our-self-identities.

Website design and website development by Simply Zesty. "Why social media is leading to a new

era of identity." Simply Zesty. January 10, 2012. Accessed April 18, 2017. https://

www.simplyzesty.com/blog/article/january-2012/why-social-media-is-leading-to-a-new-era-

of-identity.

Weeks, Imani. "Social Media and the New Sense of Identity." Science Leadership Academy.

January 18, 2016. Accessed May 2, 2017. https://scienceleadership.org/blog/

advance_essay-3--social_media_and_the_new_sense_of_identity.