



**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF SELF CONFIDENCES: FACEBOOK AND ITS SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON ITS TURKISH CYPRIOT USERS.**

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**Abstract**

Development of new communication technologies and emerged new media brought new discussions in various fields with itself; especially in the field of social sciences. Social psychology, as it is known, which "focuses on the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others" is one of the fields which has share of new negotiations based on social influences of new communication technologies (Smith, E. R. & Mackie, D. M. 2000:5). Understanding these processes, which social psychology involves leads us to figure out why people act the way they do, and it enables us to solve imperative social problems. Due to this, Facebook as one of the social communication networks and Facebook users as a new form of community should be investigated in order to understand the social-psychological influences of new communication technologies on young adults. For the purpose of the study 'whether Facebook leads its users to improve self-confidence or deteriorate' was questioned via online questionnaire that was conducted to 100 Turkish Cypriot Facebook users.

**Keywords:** New media, Self, Social communication

**Introduction**

Most of the studies in the field of communication begin with the etymological definition of the word "communication". However, we are not going to deal with classical definitions or traditional conceptualisations of the term. Instead, we will try to focus and clarify close relationship between the construction of self, social interaction, socialisation and the process of communication. Due to this it is essential to deal with its social and personal functions in order to understand articulated system which involves self construction and social interaction as well as socialisation process.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary of English Language (2000), lexical meaning of 'disembodiment' is being free from the body. Embodiment, which is the essence of most of the discussions on cognition, cannot be disregarded at the construction process of the self. As it is stated by Bailey (n. d);

*Work in embodied cognition, by contrast, asserts that cognition arises from—or perhaps is enacted by—real-time, goal-oriented bodily interactions with the world. From this point of view, the manner in which organisms are embodied constrains and perhaps determines their cognition; cognition is situated and possibly off-loaded onto the environment...*

Due to this definition, embodiment plays an important role at our interactions. However, by the development of new communication technologies, brought new arguments with itself; arguments about the necessity of embodied experiences at arise of cognition. As it is known, innovation of Internet as a mean of communication, brought new concepts with itself; such as virtualisation, virtual communication, virtual identity, cyber-culture etc.. These new concepts called for redefinition of already existed other terms and concepts as well. Discussions about being able to be isolated from embodied experiences and practicing 'uncontrollable' experiences arose by the Internet. Porter (1997) claimed that "one of the consequences of the disembodiment of Internet inhabitants is the potential construction of virtual identities" (p.271). Virtual identity can be defined as the representation of an identity in a virtual environment. However it is not possible to claim that virtual identities do map one-to-one with real identity. The main distinction between real identities and virtual identities, is the fact that embodiment plays an important role at the construction of real identities while virtual identities are freed from physical bodies. Due to this as Birch (2006) stated "a single virtual identity may be linked to a number of different real identities..." (p. 98). An entirely metaphysical differentiation between bodily and digital identity would represent the richer view of existential identity (Kokswijk, 2007) because of being isolated from physical presence in virtual environment.

As also cited in G. Riva and F. Davide's (2003) book called Communications Through Virtual Technology: Identity Community and Technology in the Internet Age, Steuer (1992) stated that "a real or simulated environment in which a perceiver experiences telepresence", where telepresence can be described as the "experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium" (pp.78-80).

Due to this, the present study dealt with the distinction between bodily and digital identities of Turkish Cypriot Facebook users as well as examining whether their virtual identities are reflection of their real identities or deception of them. Due to this, role of embodiment and spatial-temporal restrictions at the construction process of selves are explored. For the purpose of the study, close ended questionnaires conducted to the randomly selected 100 Turkish Cypriot Facebook users in virtual environment and role of spatial-temporal restrictions in their everyday lives are questioned.

**Socio-cultural impacts of new media age and social communication networks**

As it is mentioned above, by the development of new communication, the necessity of re-conceptualisation and redefinition of some terms also emerged. Communication, which is the one of the distinctive characteristic of human being as socio-cultural beings, can be defined as "the process of creating meaning between two or more people through the expression and interpretation of messages". Although it might be possible to insist that any other being may also communicate as well; the main difference between other being and human being's communication process would be explained as the ability of human being at interpreting the messages.

Up to today, several communication theorists or scholars defined the concept of communication and proposed various models to explain the process of communication. As Cleary (2005) also mentioned, these numerous models had some certain common elements in spite of the facts that the interaction of these elements were defined or explained in different aspects. However the main point here is to put clear distinction between human communication technological communications. Machines may not have a mind or intellectual of their own and have been programmed to communicate by human being as also Cleary (2005) claimed, but people who own, control or manage them do have a mind and intellectualism. Therefore, the context, purpose and the definition of communication may, or should vary through the ownership and the technological infrastructure of the process. As well as context, the elements of the interaction would be restructured depending upon these variables.



As it is known, some of the traditional definitions of communication examine interaction process as a linear while some as cyclical. Even if it is accepted as cyclical way of interaction, the roles and the functions of elements which are involved in the process of communication may vary or change due to the technological structure. Thereof models, as well as elements and their functions, had changed by each innovation in the field of communication or the development of communication technologies.

*the mass society framework of the 1930s gave rise to a concern for 'effects analysis' which focused on 'stimulus' and 'response' and the influence that 'the media', deemed to be somehow external to the formation of a person's identity, comes to exert over that identity and culture in general. (Holmes, 2005: 21).*

Whether mass media reflects or affects society, culture and politics is not a new argument in the field. Therefore debates on social influences of mass media had never come to a conclusion or consensus, also because of technological change and advancement.

The concept of social communication, which refers to using the so-called social media, is emerged by the new media. Social media differ from traditional mass media with the characteristics that it has. Encouraging contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested is one of its most significant peculiarities as well as being open to feedback and participation.

Unlike traditional media social media is seen as a two-way conversation thus it eases and allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Due to this, its socio-cultural influences on societies or that is to say audiences would be completely different from the influences of traditional mass media.

It is also known that computer mediated communication and the internet have several impacts on social interaction and hence on identities, relationships and communities. As well as isolating its users from spatial-temporal restrictions, it enables people to experience disembodied social interaction and communication. Body can be accepted as one of the influential factors at both socialisation and self-construction, which is going to be dealt in more detail in the following sections.

Socialisation can be defined as lifelong process by which people learn how to cooperate with each other and become a member of a particular society. It helps us to learn language and practice it, thus to understand people as well as to be understood, while producing, exchanging and sharing cultural products, and enables us to understand ourselves as a social being or a "social self".

As Tyler et. al. (1999) stated, there are four ideas in the literature about the self- concept which illustrate the personality model. These four ideas as author also claimed appear frequently but are rarely questioned. Due to these ideas; the self-concept is a representation of personal identity of an individual, and it belongs to only one individual and cannot be shared with others. In addition to this, these ideas insist on the uniqueness perceiver's property as well as defining social self as a 'Looking Glass Self' and relatively lasting, long-standing cognitive structure. As Schuhmacher (n. d) also maintained, Mead handled 'self' separately from the 'body'. According to him, body is adapted to the environment and can operate ably without 'the self', even if it is not whole as our "bodily experiences are for us organised about a self" (Mead 1992:357, Schuhmacher, n.d: 1). On the other hand, Mead stated that unlike body, self is whole and develops before long after birth as a consequence of social interaction and added the fact that its development is based on social interaction and can be understood from a social and cultural context. This is the core aspect of construction of the self and social identity formation which provides an explanation of the bodily experience and engaging in social communication networks.

#### **Construction of "Self" and social identity in the age of computerization**

The 'self' is a process which is present in the state of consciousness referring to a state of knowing. This emphasises the state of subjectivity which is the core of all experiences. Attached to this concept is one of the core components of the self which is formulated from a very young age extending to adulthood; *self-confidence* also referred to as *self-esteem*. This important component of self construction is recognised and discussed by identity development theories which suggest that during the process of individuals grow into adolescent years, self-esteem begins to decrease (Taylor & Francis, 2010). The adolescent years are accompanied by a struggle of independence away from parental and societal restraints in an attempt to find the unique personal characteristics while also finding a place within the society to fulfil the sense of belongingness; which is one of the core important aspects of self-concept and identity formation.

Belongingness comes with acceptance and consistency with the 'Self' and the 'Other'. This is a process of separation-individuation which emphasises process of differentiating themselves from the internalised individual (generally the parent during childhood and developmental period and later peers or conceived networks). This process and stages are demonstrated in *Figure 1* (Kroger J., 2004).

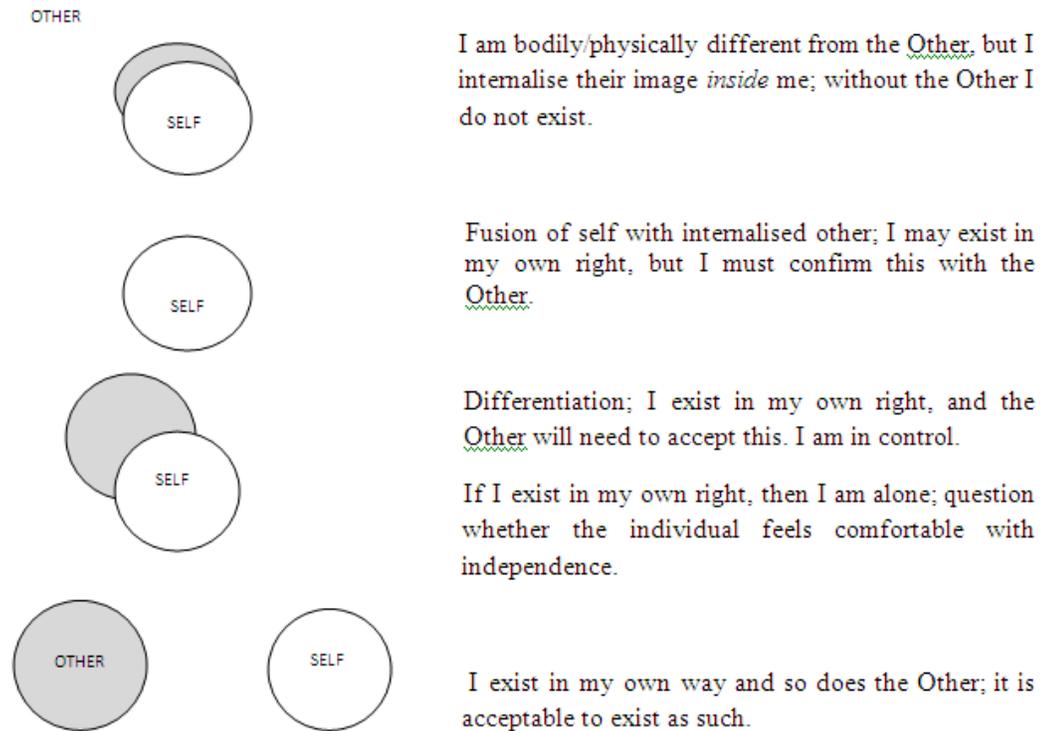


Figure 1: Sub-stages of adolescents' separation-individuation

As portrayed in Figure 1, a consistency needs to be formed between Self-Other. Whether this process is incomplete and inconsistent, this would cause low self-confidence. Adolescents search for this completeness in virtual environments where they are able to select the Other and the social experience within which they place themselves into. This sense of control enhances self-construction of the self because the individual is freely investigating with different realities before coinciding with the environment which allows them to be free from restrictions and express their real identities.

With this said, computerised society aids construction of the self by allowing individuals to be freed from their internalised parental and social restrictions and form free interpersonal communications. The interpersonal communication involves number of individuals exchanging messages. 'This way communication strategies are shaped by relational goals of individuals involved...in a manner of exchanging ideas of politics, style and other cultural issues'(Papacharissi Z. 2011). Although this interaction is actively constructed by the communicators, it takes place in 'isolation of one another'(Papacharissi Z. 2011), and a major research question within this field is examining how messages are mediated and affect audiences which are in-fact from different space of time and place and hence isolated. These properties of virtual environment also provide an exploration of identity in new exciting ways, directing focus from physical identities to the self-representations and perspectives on embodiment in the virtual environment; *with the virtual identity is the creation of an online identity.*( Peachey A. & Childs M., 2011) .

Some people by the increased usage of internet live their everyday lives in virtualized environments (Kien, 2009). Rather than usual face to face communication, the communication in virtual environment, as Kein (2009) claimed, have an effect on the individuals via enabling them to behave more self-centered and less socially regulated. As cited in Akter (2011), Parks & Floyd (1996) claimed that computer-mediated communication (CMC) gives disembodied position to the individuals. However, although they criticized CMC for being more limited in the exchange of the information in comparison to face-to-face communication because of the disembodiment, they pointed out that sometimes relations in CMC environment would be more intense. According to Akter (2011), the body of an individual is the representation of identity in the real environment while it is different in the virtual environment that is the shared information is the representation of identity. Social identity is a set of identities expressed in the social environment. However, social identity can be maintained in the process of interaction with others. There are several interaction models in the 'real environment', yet with the onset of the age of computerization, the interaction models also changed.

#### **New form of socialisation, social identity and self-confidence: Facebook and its social-psychological influences on Turkish Cypriot users.**

Socialisation process, as mentioned above is a wide-ranging and endless process, which continues throughout the life of an individual. In other words it is possible to claim that it is a process of confessing, embracing and teaching an individual step by step in the family, then community and finally in the society that they belongs to.

With the expansion of Internet and virtual communication environment, new spheres also began to evolve for the socialisation and for being socialized. Yet it is not possible to control the process of socialisation with the limitations that space and time put forward, the term as well as the process itself should be re-conceptualized. Due to this, during the present study Facebook as one of the social communication networks and Facebook users as a new form of community is investigated in order to understand the new form of



socialisation which we call e-socialisation process, as well as social-psychological influences of new communication technologies on respondents' self-confidences.

For the purpose of the study 100 Northern Cypriot Facebook users were randomly selected and were required to complete an online questionnaire composing of 22 close-ended questions to investigate whether there is a correlation between self-confidence and using social communication networks in a virtual environment.

#### **Gender as an independent variable at formation of self-confidences in e-socialisation process**

According to the findings of the research that was conducted, there is no gender difference amongst participants belief about the impact society has on them. Majority of both of the males and females believed the way society influences individuals are very important.

Female participants in the study reported to be less influenced by their 'environment' on how they should live and shape their lives, compared to males who reported the 'environment' to have an impact on how they shape their lives and experiences. This question was directly linked to the following question which measured how much societal suppression experiences in childhood and adolescence had an impact on future experiences. Both genders reported societal suppression in childhood and adolescent years to be influential in experience; however female participants reported societal suppression experiences to be more influential. This somewhat contradicts the previous finding suggesting that females in Northern Cyprus experience a form of early suppression which as a result leads to a form of resistance. This resistance is projected onto the virtual environment where there are no forms of suppression or boundaries of experience. Individual is free to express and even create via disconnecting from the perceived self developed as a result of suppression.

Moreover, both of the female and male respondents reported the belief that if living in another society they would be able to be different individuals to what they are now...This can also legitimate the reason of using virtual environment for socialisation. Internet users or that is to say both senders and receivers in virtual environment are disembodied and thus they are isolated from the restrictions of social-cultural limitations of the existed system.

#### **Age as an independent variable at formation of self-confidences in e-socialisation process**

Consistent with the findings of the research which is conducted; participants aged 27 years and over reported importance of societal perceptions. In addition, participants aged 26 and under reported much more environmental influences on selection of friends compared to participants aged 27 and above. For this reason, it is possible to claim that use of Facebook for individuals aged 26 and below can be strongly associated with societal perception evaluation of these individuals.

In other words, being freed from environmental (societal) restrictions can result in subsiding with virtual environments such as usage of Facebook. Individuals aged 26 or below are also believed to be more lenient to experiencing disembodiment. These results in forming a back-up via the virtual environment to fulfil the self-confidence which has been restricted in real life experiences through having control of the individual's environment and preference of experience. This is more experienced by individuals aged 16 and below who are found to be more under social restriction and individuals whose educational level is below university level. This can be because individuals with university level or above has more consciousness of the 'self' and the restrictions which are trying to be introjected into them meaning they experience on more 'realness' level

#### **Educational factors as an independent variable at formation of self-confidences in e-socialisation process**

Society perception of them is important factor for the participants whose educational status were university or above. In addition to this, there is a belief that if present in another society their experiences and lives could be shaped differently.

However they also claimed that their environment does not have an impact on how they live their lives, their choice of friendships, political stance or on sexual choice.

Explanations might be the idea that they already regulate their lives through the cultural and social system that surround them. In addition to this, we may assume that individuals with educational status value their positions in a society however do not allow the society to interfere with their experiences. Evidently, there is another form of resistance to society pressure in an attempt to solve the conflict of societal formed self and the trueness of being and the conscious identity which plays an enormous role on self-confidence.

The conflict of internalizing society values, which is reflected by the importance individuals give to the way they are viewed within their society and the conscious self, are at conflict. This conflict can be argued to, somewhat, be reduced in engagement in the virtual environment.

Participants, whose educational status were university or above, reported that their families do not influence their political choice, friendship choice and religious choice. Therefore, regardless of number of these individuals believe their family and environment do not have an impact on their own attitudes, individuals with university level or above education believe they could be different individuals if they were in another society.

For this reason, it can be suggested that these individuals are in an attempt to experience different social structures in the virtual environment.

#### **Self Confidence in e-socialisation process**

Participants who noted 'if I was living in another society I would be a different me' also values how they are viewed by others in the society. This shows there is a correlation between individuals' concept of self and they believe they are influenced by their society.

Approximately half the participants who believed social impact in their childhood and adolescent years were very important, also stated that if they lived in another society this influence would have been shaped differently. This demonstrates that once again that there is a perceived influence and pressure from society which individuals are aware exists and has an impact on their shaping of being.

Participants believing that social structure is important for their family also hold the belief that this would be possible to change if existing in another society. This states that individuals believe attitudes can be changed but it depends on the society within which one exists.

Participants whose family economic status is rated as middle class or high class put emphasize on how their society conceives them. This is directly linked to the self-confidence aspect since it can be argued that individuals who already have a certain position in a society are expected to maintain characteristics and values associated with that societal class. In addition to this finding, participants who stated the economic status of their family as middle class or above also take cognizance of societal structure more than rest of the respondents.



### Conclusion and Further Suggestions

Due to the research which is conducted and the literature is reviewed, it became easier to assume that virtual environment or 'new age media' enabled people to experience different social experiences as well as finding opportunity to form their self-confidences even if they are not able to do in the 'real' society that they already exist in.

One of the main differences between 'new age media' and 'traditional mass media' is the position or the statue of the senders as well as receivers. Depending up on the stable statuses, the roles that need to be played are also determined during the communication process that is provided by 'centred traditional media'. These statuses of senders and receivers are much more stable at 'centred communication systems' then 'new age media'. Instability of the statutes of senders and receivers in virtual communication as a mean of new age media, also leads every single individual's active participation and interaction, thus provide more democratic space for communication.

Due to the results of the research which is conducted; feeling safe, interactive, being able to be 'real' self, gaining self-confidence in virtual reality (VR) seem as easier than in the 'real' world that people do exist. It is more possible to talk about liberium arbitrum, freedom of expression, free will, and freedom of choosing the social system to be belonging to. To sum up, Virtual Reality which is reality in virtual environment enables its participants to be 'participant' rather than passive members or users; thus enable them to gain their self-confidences even if they are not able to gain in 'real' reality.

For further study it might be useful to conduct a self-confidence scale in order to measure the actual level of esteem of the individuals in the virtual environment. This would provide a clearer definition of the relationship between self-confidence and engagement in the virtual environment as well as touching on the concept of identity construction; since significant correlation has been suggested by the present research.

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