

Identity Formation in the Digital Age

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The issue "identity formation in the digital age" has been investigated mainly on the process of presentation of self and recognition through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Presentation of self in the digital world is to express one's own personality (whether it is real or fake) with writing and/or photograph, and then recognition or criticism by others (for example with like-button of Facebook) works as a positive or negative sanction. Self-identity in the digital world is formed through this interaction. Many investigations have been already made on the identity formation of recent young people who have been familiar with social media from their infancy.

On the other hand, identity formation seems to be influenced by digital media in a quite different aspect. It is the aspect of body and health. Various digital devices (an activity tracker, a smartwatch, a body composition analyzer, etc.) are developed and they have made easier to track, measure and record body and health condition (steps, distance, heart rate, calorie burn, sleep, various workouts' record, etc.). Now we can monitor our body and health condition every day and ask whether our daily activity pattern promotes and improves our health or harms and injures it. It means that we can now form our physical identity reflexively with digital devices.

People who love and exercise sports (walking, running, bike riding, swimming, weight training, yoga, etc.) almost every day often use those digital devices, especially wearable devices. They are not necessarily proper athletes, but use digital devices to monitor their workouts' record for verification and improvement of their performance. Other people use digital devices for the prevention of lifestyle diseases and improvement of body and health condition. They do not necessarily sports lovers, but use digital devices to monitor their body condition and activities in everyday life for maintenance and improvement of their health.

These people can be regarded as those who form their identity through active lifestyle presenting high capacity for body and health management and showing a healthy body as a successful result. On the other hand, however, they may be regarded as those who are passively forced to achieve healthy physical condition according to standard numerical values. These values are digital in a double sense because they can be easily measured with digital devices and also draw a digital (not analog) distinction of healthy/unhealthy.

Social media often make a distinction of real/fictional or authentic/fake ambiguous and obscure, and have brought about the possibility of more strategic presentation of self than off-line communication on the one hand and the possibility to cause an unanticipated reaction of others (flaming, severe criticism) on the other hand. One can manage one's impression to make one look better using strategic self-presentation (Most popular case is digital processing of one's portrait photo with Photoshop or more simple applications to make one look prettier, thinner, or even whiter). But one can also turn a serious self-presentation into a joke by disclosing this digital technique by oneself or by using digital applications exaggeratingly (making one's eyes unnaturally large or decorating one's face like a cartoon character).

Compared to this, physical identity construction with digital devices reflects the real and correct conditions of one's body and health. The body has become a mooring for one's firm and authentic identity in the digitalized world with an ambiguous border of real/fictional or authentic/fake. Goals to be achieved are clear and distinct with regard to physical conditions, and moreover, these goals are often constructed and forced socially. Body and health records are used not only for self-monitoring but also for health management and control by others (by an individual agent like a doctor, a nutritionist, or even by an institution like Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare). In this sense, physical identity formation is directly connected with so-called bio-politics through digital technology.