

## **The Role of Social Media in Identity Formation among the Teens Aged 13-19 Years of African Inland Church, Utawala Nairobi**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the role of social media in identity formation among the teens of AIC Utawala. The study is a clear indication that social media has an impact either positive or negative on identity formation among teens an idea that should be well understood by teen pastors and patrons to guide the teens in the right way at the time of identity crisis. The study is grounded on qualitative research method as through qualitative research, the researcher can test the hypothesis through the interview. The population of the study was 200 young people aged 13 to 19 years in the AIC Utawala Local Church. Data was analyzed thematically, and presentations were done in tables and diagrams. The study established that social media has influenced teenagers' identity formation. The study also established that social media causes the disaggregation of teenagers' identity and the formation of another identity, due to the fact that teenagers modified their appearances so that they attract more likes and comments. The study recommends that there is a need to closely guide teenagers on how to use social media highlighting the dangers of social media. The study therefore recommends that there is a need to regulate access and use of social media particularly among teenagers to protect them from identity distortion.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Identity Formation, Teens Aged 13-19 Years*

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### **1. Introduction**

The desire in this area of study came out of personal observation as a church elder at AIC Utawala when I interacted with the youths of this church as the youth patron. We handled homosexual cases and the teenagers who were most of the culprits confessed that they learnt the practice through the internet and other social media platforms. Due to the availability of computers, especially laptops, tablets, and mobile smart-phones, access to the internet and other social media platforms is not a challenge to the teenagers of AIC Utawala. Many parents complained to the Pastors and the church leaders about indecent behaviors among the teenagers. When we organize youth conferences, meetings and camps; questions on

homosexuality predominantly appear giving a reflection of the problem that persists among adolescents.

High School teachers in our congregation are raising the same issues since homosexuality is rampant in the schools that they are teaching. The teenagers are always on different social media sites even when the Pastor is preaching or teaching the word of God. When interrogated closely, the teenagers have confessed that they watch pornographic literature that arouses them. Every parent in the Church is overwhelmed by the behavior of the young people and this is our concern in this study. Could the literature that these teenagers are accessing through social media have an impact on their identity formation? This study is an examination of such implications to discover whether this question can be answered in the affirmative.

AIC Utawala is a denominational church that subscribes fully to the teaching and the final authority of the word of God. We believe that the Bible is infallible and authoritative for teaching, rebuking and correcting in all righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). This is a self-supporting church with four sister churches in the environs of Utawala since the Church is grounded on the foundations of the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The church is not grounded on political ideas, and she has no political affiliations. As per the teachings of the scriptures and the constitution of AIC Kenya 2018, the church has a leadership structure that comprises pastors and church elders who are elected based on qualifications outlined in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The responsibility of the pastors is to make sure that they steer the church towards their vision for the church through the different ministries of the church. The Church is vibrant and focused on the fulfillment of her mandate. The board of elders offers leadership to the church by making sure that the church meets her financial obligations as well as maintaining the integrity of the church so that she can continue making more disciples as the great commission demands. The negative impact of social media on identity formation among young people is not only limited to AIC Utawala but is a global problem that needs our attention<sup>1</sup>.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The emergence of social media is breaching the supposition that the self is a stable, predictable and unique entity that has been commonly recognized in social science for a long time. Social media enables faster exchange of information through virtual communities including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and TikTok among others and so allow youth to interact and connect by making profiles, uploading and sharing photos and updating their status. In the recent past, however, social media has changed from written communication to image-based communication, interaction, and identity formation other than through text-based interactions. Thus, the emergence of social media has changed the environment and conditions of identity formation. First, social media has been likened to a performance hall or studio for identity. The fixed and stable single identity of the offline world has been altered and now it is possible to form identity without physical constraints.<sup>2</sup> Some aspects of what an individual expresses on social media are accepted as reality. This is why it is possible to disestablish a particular individual's identity on social media and at the same time experience various forms

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<sup>1</sup> (Orji 2023, 11)

<sup>2</sup> (Reid 1991, 97)

of identity. They express themselves in a complex way by creating several virtual characters, or personas on social media.

Today the identity of the youth including the youth in the church is more complex and fluid, it continuously roams the offline and the online social media world. Youths today are using multiple identities on social media or are expressing themselves using multiple avatars with independent characteristics.<sup>3</sup> They use digital tools with infinite geometric transformations, such as language, numbers, images, or videos to customize their appearance. In the process of self-opening, self-expression, and impression management, he/she shapes, modifies, and transforms his/her identity establishing a new identity.<sup>4</sup> social media is where the teenagers are found. It is common-place to see even the teenagers in the church dress in a certain style, has a particular haircut among others. There are a lot of formations in the society where the behavior of young men and women is drifting away from Biblical teaching. The issue of irresponsibility is affecting many families where men are no longer the heads of their own families as instructed by Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:2. Likewise, women are also confused with many of them taking the roles of men and acting masculine. Thus, leading to the question of, and the problem of the role of social media in the formation of the teen's identity in the church? Few studies in Kenya have explored identity formation among young people, leaving a notable knowledge gap that this research aims to fill.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the impact of social media on identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church
- ii. To assess how social media has influenced identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

We have several theories that can inform our study, but the researcher has narrowed this study to revolve around the Magic Bullet Theory or the hypodermic needle theory. Burtler and Hendricks who have done a study on this theory give us the concept behind this theory. They write, "The Magic Bullet Theory is based on the visual assumption that the content of the media is comparable to a bullet shot from the media gun into the head of the audience media member. The originator presumes that the message will be directly injected into the audience's brain".<sup>5</sup> This being one of the prominent theories of communication, the assumption is that "Communication intended for a certain person is directly received and completely accepted by the recipient".<sup>6</sup> The implication is that there are no intermediaries that influence the information after it is released until it reaches the target audience. For our study, social media is the gun while the bullet is the information that they pass across for example pornographic literature and the young people are the consumers. When the information which is the bullet is released from

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<sup>3</sup> Kim, S. 2004. Individual- level Factor and organizational performamnce in Government Organizations. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 15 245-261. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart>

<sup>5</sup>Burtler, Jude and Hendricks, Beth 2022. *Magic Bullet Theory of Mass Communication: Definition & Overview*. Pg. 92

<sup>6</sup> Burtler and Hendricks 2022. Pg. 99

the social media gun, it goes straight into the minds of the young people without any interference. When this happens, the information works effectively, and its effects can be seen in the change of behavior. While assessing the effect of this theory, Bultler and Hendricks confirm that “Using terms such as “bullet” and “needle” conveys the gravity of the messages’ impact on the listener and the creator’s authority”.<sup>7</sup> Gordon thus confirms to us that “The theory posits that messages can hit individuals directly and personally like a bullet penetrating a person’s body. After penetrating the body of a receiver, the message can cause immediate reactions”.<sup>8</sup> This means the theory is still relevant up to today and we cannot underrate its importance in this given study. The theory tells us why many young people are glued to the different social media platforms as well as their change of behavior.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

The most important question in this study is to understand how social media impacts the formation of the four identity types. A lot of studies have been done on this area especially from the Western world due to the identity confusion that the young people seem to embrace in their lives. Doble precisely argues that the question of who I am plays a key role in the developmental process of teens. This development process takes place in the lives of teens with a device in their hands.<sup>9</sup> Gee points out two forms of identity formation, one being relational and the other being activity-based.<sup>10</sup> Dole picks up this idea from Gee and he gives a vivid explanation of the two forms of identity formation as he writes, “Activity-based identities are defined free choice and reciprocal relationships between an individual and a social group; relational identities are described by commonalities or contrasts among people, such as age, gender, and culture. Both aspects exist on social media and an adolescent can be exploring multiple identities at once”.<sup>11</sup> The media gun shoots its bullet, and it enters effectively into the minds of the adolescents making a huge impact in the process of identity formation. We therefore concur with Doble that “Social media networking, virtual/gaming or both, play a prominent role in an adolescent’s existence too. This means it is important to view this period of youth development through a lens that includes social media and its influences on the individual and his or her personal ecological system”.<sup>12</sup> This means whatever identity type is formed in the lives of young people; social media has a role to play in it.

The advent of social media has provided adolescents with new opportunities for identity exploration. The study noted that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat allow users to experiment with different aspects of their identities by curating content, interacting with peers, and receiving feedback from online audiences.<sup>13</sup> This form of “performance” aligns with Goffman’s theory of self-presentation, where individuals manage the impressions, they give to

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<sup>7</sup>Burtler and Hendricks 2022. Pg. 105

<sup>8</sup>Gordon, Jason 2022. *The Business Professor: Hypodermic Needle Theory- Explained*. Pg. 11

<sup>9</sup>Doble, Kerri 2018. Social Media’s Influence on Adolescent Identity. *Lesley University Community of Scholars Day 17*. Pg. 55

<sup>10</sup> Gee, J.P. 2017. *Teaching, learning, literacy in our high-risk high-tech world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. Pg. 89)

<sup>11</sup> Doble 2018. Pg. 59-61

<sup>12</sup> Ibid,

<sup>13</sup>Boyd D. 2014. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press. Pg. 45

others.<sup>14</sup> On social media, adolescents can explore multiple identities, ranging from experimenting with different looks to adopting new personality traits, which in turn can affect how they perceive themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Research indicates that social media enables a continuous process of identity construction that is fluid and multifaceted.<sup>16</sup> This environment allows for both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, adolescents can connect with like-minded individuals, express themselves freely, and find communities that support their identity exploration (Livingstone, 2008). However, this constant exposure to others' curated identities can also lead to negative consequences, such as increased social comparison and the pressure to conform to idealized versions of self.<sup>17</sup>

Social comparison theory asserts that individuals evaluate themselves based on comparisons with others.<sup>18</sup> In the context of social media, adolescents are frequently exposed to the seemingly perfect lives of their peers, influencers, and celebrities. These idealized portrayals can create a sense of inadequacy and lead to lower self-esteem, particularly when adolescents feel that they do not measure up to these standards.<sup>19</sup> Research has shown that upward social comparisons on social media comparing oneself to individuals who appear more successful, attractive, or happy are associated with negative body image, lower self-esteem, and heightened anxiety.<sup>20</sup>

Conversely, some studies suggest that downward social comparisons comparing oneself to individuals perceived as less successful or fortunate can have a protective effect on self-esteem.<sup>21</sup> However, given the prevalence of idealized content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, adolescents are more likely to engage in upward comparisons, which pose a greater risk to their mental health.<sup>22</sup>

One significant feature of social media is the ability to receive immediate feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares. This feedback loop can become a key determinant of self-worth for many adolescents, as positive reactions to their posts may reinforce their self-esteem,

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<sup>14</sup>Goffman E. 1959. The presentation of self in everyday life. New York: Anchor Books. Pg. 71

<sup>15</sup> Valkenburg, P. M., and Peter, J. 2011. "Online communication among adolescents: An integrated model of its attraction, opportunities, and risks." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 48(2), 121-127.

<sup>16</sup>Turkle, S. 2011. *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. London. Basic Books. Pg. 142

<sup>17</sup>Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. 2015. "Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(8), 1427-1438.

<sup>18</sup> Festinger, L. 1954. "A theory of social comparison processes." *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117-140.

<sup>19</sup> (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014)

<sup>20</sup>(Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015)

<sup>21</sup>Valkenburg, P. M., Koutamanis, M., and Vossen, H. G. M. 2017. "The concurrent and longitudinal relationships between adolescents' use of social network sites and their social self-esteem." *Computers in Human Behavior*, 76, 35-41.

<sup>22</sup>Haferkamp, N., and Krämer, N. C. 2011. "Social comparison 2.0: Examining the effects of online profiles on social-networking sites." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(5), 309-314



while negative or lackluster responses may diminish it.<sup>23</sup> The validation-seeking behavior observed on social media platforms is especially concerning among adolescents, as they are more susceptible to the influence of peer feedback.<sup>24</sup>

Research suggests that the number of likes or comments received on a post can directly influence adolescents' mood and self-esteem, making social media a potent force in shaping their self-concept. Although there is extensive research on social media's influence on adolescents, most studies have focused on specific aspects, such as self-esteem or body image, without a comprehensive understanding of how social media affects overall identity formation.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, much of the research has been conducted in Western countries, with limited data on how adolescents in diverse cultural contexts experience social media. This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining not only the influence of social media on self-esteem but

Also, its broader role in identity development, taking into account the daily duration of use and the types of platforms most commonly engaged with.

Adolescents create their social media profiles and groups where the intended audiences receive or see the content they post. These photos, selfies, comments, and statuses are updated, edited, and modified to make some impression on social media platforms. Through the feedback they receive such as "likes", and comments, adolescents evaluate what others say about them, and through their self-assessment, they edit their content based on the feedback and adjust to the desired self-image.<sup>26</sup> Self-presentation requires some adjustment and shaping of behavior to achieve a certain public image, meaning many active impression management responses are self-regulatory.<sup>27</sup>

It is through social media platform interactions that adolescents perceive who they are and evaluate themselves with the feedback they receive. It has been emphasized that most people have a certain ideal image of the person they would like to be. It is not enough merely to act like that person or to convince oneself that one resembles that person. Identity requires social validation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Burrow, A. L., and Rainone, N. 2017. "How many likes did I get? Purpose moderates links between positive social media feedback and self-esteem." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 69, 232-236.

<sup>24</sup> Steinberg, L., and Morris, A. S. 2001. Adolescent development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 83-110.

<sup>25</sup> Nesi, J., and Prinstein, M. J. 2015. Using social media for social comparison and feedback-Seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(8), 1427-1438.

<sup>26</sup> Ho, S. S., E.W.J. Lee, E. W. J. and Liao, Y. 2016. Social network sites, friends, and celebrities: The roles of social comparison and celebrity involvement in adolescents' body image dissatisfaction *Social Media + Society*. Pg. 22

<sup>27</sup> Vohs K.D., Baumeister R.F., and Ciarocco N. 2005. Self-regulation and self-presentation: Regulatory resource depletion impairs impression management and effortful self-presentation depletes regulatory resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 632-657.

<sup>28</sup> Baumeister R.F., Bratslavsky E., Muraven M., Tice D.M. 1998. "Ego depletion: Is the active self a limited resource?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1252-1265.

Adolescents may use the feedback to evaluate themselves positively or negatively. Longitudinal research was conducted among 217 adolescents aged 14-17 years to check on the impact of positive self-presentation and the number of friends on Facebook. They noted that adolescents' positive self-presentation and several friends were associated with positive feedback.<sup>29</sup> Research done surveyed 218 university first-year students to explore changes in their online self-presentation. The study also examined the link between online self-presentation and student's self-esteem and self-concept clarity. They noted in the findings that broad, deep, positive, and authentic Facebook self-presentation was positively associated with perceived support from the audience, which contributed to higher self-esteem.<sup>30</sup>

On the contrary, self-presentation may be affected negatively if the feedback received is not interpreted positively. For instance, failure to get the expected "likes" or comments on the posts may lead to a poor view of self-image. Social comparison may also affect adolescents' views of their self-image. A study done on the effects of manipulated Instagram photos amongst 144 girls aged 14-18 years old on girls' body image, asserted that exposure to controlled Instagram photos led to low body image, more so, girls inclined to too much social comparison were negatively affected.<sup>31</sup>

Deliberate Facebook self-presentation makes students reflect inwardly, which can be linked to lower self-concept clarity.<sup>32</sup> Although positive feedback may affect self-presentation positively, it can lead to addictive behavior like excessive usage of social media.<sup>33</sup> That desire to make positive impressions is part of what makes adolescents spend a lot of time on social media platforms. They spend much of their time changing pictures and information about themselves on social media platforms to present to others their most appealing self. When adolescents use social media platforms to try to define who they are, they become very selective with the content they expose to others.<sup>34</sup> Adolescents are encouraged to edit their self-images when their presentation aids in gaining rewards and creating identities.<sup>35</sup>

A study examined the association of self-presentation to the use of Facebook and social support among 202 university students. The result showed that the frequency of Facebook usage was statistically significant and positively related to three types of self-presentation (ingratiation, supplication, and enhancement), additionally, Facebook usage as interaction with friends was statistically significant with self-presentation.<sup>36</sup> Further, it examined the "relationship between

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<sup>29</sup> Metzler, A., and Scheithauer, H. 2015. "Adolescent self-presentation on Facebook and its impact on self-esteem." *International Journal of Developmental Science*, 9, 135-145

<sup>30</sup> Yang, C. and Brown, B. B. 2014. *Facebook audience feedback and college freshmen's sense of self*. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of Society for Research on Adolescence, Austin, TX. Pg. 119

<sup>31</sup> Kleenmans, Dalmans, Carbaat, and Anschutz (2018, 98)

<sup>32</sup> Yang Brown 2014. Pg. 132

<sup>33</sup> Meshi, D., Morawetz, C., and Heekeren, H. R. 2013. "Nucleus accumbency response to gains in reputation for the self relative to gains for others predicts social media use." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7, 439.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriel, F. 2014. "Sexting, selfies and self-harm: Young people, social media and the performance of self-development." *Media International Australia*, 151(1), 104- 112

<sup>35</sup> Yang & Brown 2016 Pg. 23

<sup>36</sup> Wong (2012, 187-199)

self-presentation and social support received on Facebook; results showed that three types of self-presentation were related to social support sought or received by students on Facebook”.<sup>37</sup>The researcher will be seeking to understand the impact of social media on identity formation among adolescents. The findings will help in giving recommendations to youth pastors and patrons so that they can guide the young people at times of identity crisis when the social media gun has fired its bullet. Since this study is relevant in the church today, apart from social media, adolescents should be challenged to focus on Jesus as the ideal source of identity.

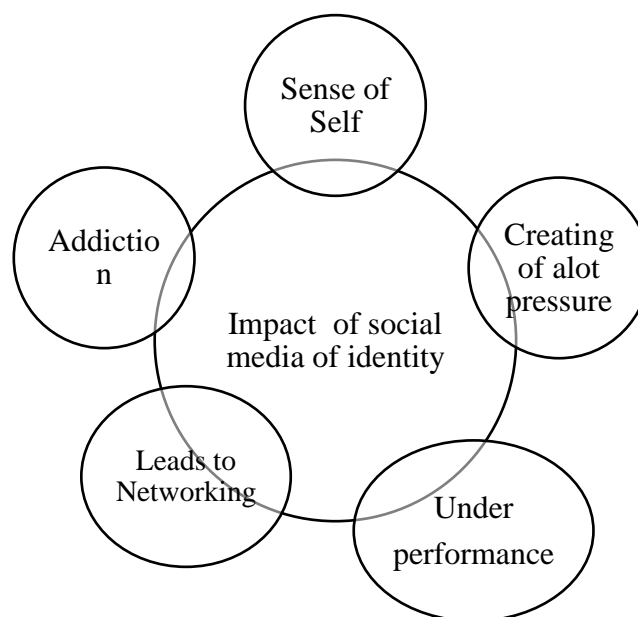
### 3. Methodology

The study is grounded on qualitative research method as through qualitative research, the researcher can test the hypothesis through the interview. The population of the study was 200 young people aged 13 to 19 years in the AIC Utawala Local Church. The researcher selected 50 teens which represent 25% of the population. Prior to the actual data collection, the researcher did a pilot test of the instruments to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. Data was analyzed thematically, and presentations were done in tables and diagrams. The results of this study were dependent on the views of the teenagers on their experiences with social media and how social media has influenced their identities.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Impact of social media on identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church

When the researcher sorted out the data to determine the impact of social media affects teens' identity formation in this part. Therefore, the researcher interviewed the teens at AIC Utawala to learn more about the effects of social media on teenagers. The participants, teens are under pressure from social media because of how others perceive and respond to them.



<sup>37</sup> Wong (2012, 211 213)



### *Addiction*

Teens who use social media reported that they had experienced pressure in their lives. It is observed that those who use social media may find this occurrence to be very normal. The teenagers were utilizing their phones or parents, no matter the time or place. "I'm focused on building my identity, so I spend a lot of time on social media." The positive stories I find there impact me, and I want to keep engaging with them."<sup>38</sup> "Truly sometimes I get home very late and still I must do my homework which we were given to do over the holiday, by the time I get to social media it is usually late in the night. I usually try to squeeze the little time at least post something on social media but that is after I am done with my homework for the day. I have never thought of not using social media. I cannot live without the social media."<sup>39</sup> I think I am addicted to social media. I am on social media most of the time, I even sneak out of class to go and upload a photo or post something. I like taking photos and uploading them. It could be a selfie, a background, or even food, provided it is pretty, I posted it. I also post what am thinking."<sup>40</sup>

Another respondent said "I am always with my smartphone all the time everywhere and therefore am always on social media. I think I am on social media for more than 10 hours and I don't seem to stop because I always have the smartphone with me. I have developed a habit. Even when I am eating, I cannot resist the temptation of social media. It has become part and parcel of me."<sup>41</sup>

"While I'm studying or even when I'm in church, I constantly check the number of comments I receive on my posts or photos. I'm worried about how others will react, and I'm also curious about what other people are sharing. Because of this, I find it hard to put my smartphone down." "I regularly use social media, especially Facebook. When I upload pictures, I anxiously wait for responses. If a friend doesn't react."<sup>42</sup>

### *Sense of Self*

This had a significant impact on the teens' sense of self. They post identity-appropriate content so that others can react. Identity encompasses both the person and the act of being with other people. They might be seen as implying that the identities they envision and the identities they create with others are legitimate. As a result, by examining their virtual and actual worlds, the youngsters demonstrate their innovative and active methods of producing something new.

If people like my pictures or leave a lot of heart, it makes me feel good. "When commenting on my online friends' posts, I try to be kind and polite. I also expect the same from them. I believe I am the same on social media as I am in real life. An introverted person will behave introverted on social media, while an outgoing person will express their outgoing nature online."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> (15, boy).

<sup>39</sup> (17, girl)

<sup>40</sup> (17, girl).

<sup>41</sup> (18, boy).

<sup>42</sup> (16, girl)

<sup>43</sup> (16, girl).

### *Creating a lot of Pressure*

When I created my social media account, it was meant for my personal use, allowing me to express my feelings and share my photos. However, I've come to realize that my posts, uploads, and comments are subject to public scrutiny, which creates a lot of pressure whenever I share something."<sup>44</sup> "When I consider uploading a post, I try to select a nice picture from my smartphone. However, if the reactions are low, I worry that I might lose my connection with my friends."<sup>45</sup> "Sometimes, I feel that I do not upload enough as my friends. They upload a lot, including everything they do or go. Social media is full of their postings. This makes me feel I have not done enough, I feel I want to do more"<sup>46</sup>

### *Leads to Networking*

It is clear from the interview above that social media users frequently use their regular interpersonal connections to participate in social media activities. One of the most significant reasons for adopting social media was this. Social media was a vital tool for keeping in touch with friends, and if they didn't use it, they experienced social pressure and were afraid of being excluded because it would be hard to keep up their friendships. WhatsApp and TikTok. Social media helps me feel closer to my friends by allowing me to connect with their posts and share their happiness"<sup>47</sup> in support, primarily for emotional connections within their social communities.

### *Underperformance*

According to the responses presented above, the study discovered that social media use had an impact on students' academic performance, particularly their ability to do their homework, as well as their sleep patterns. The study discovered that individuals' increased use of social media affected how long they slept.

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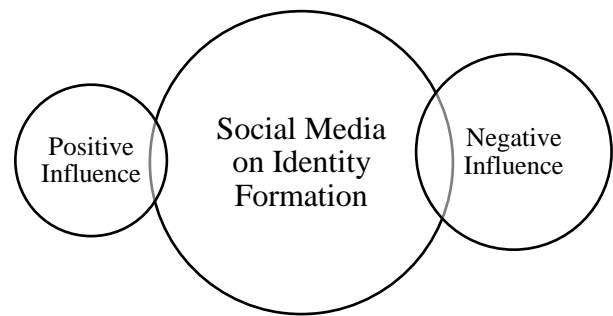
<sup>44</sup> (17, boy)

<sup>45</sup> (15, girl)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid,

<sup>47</sup> (16, girl)

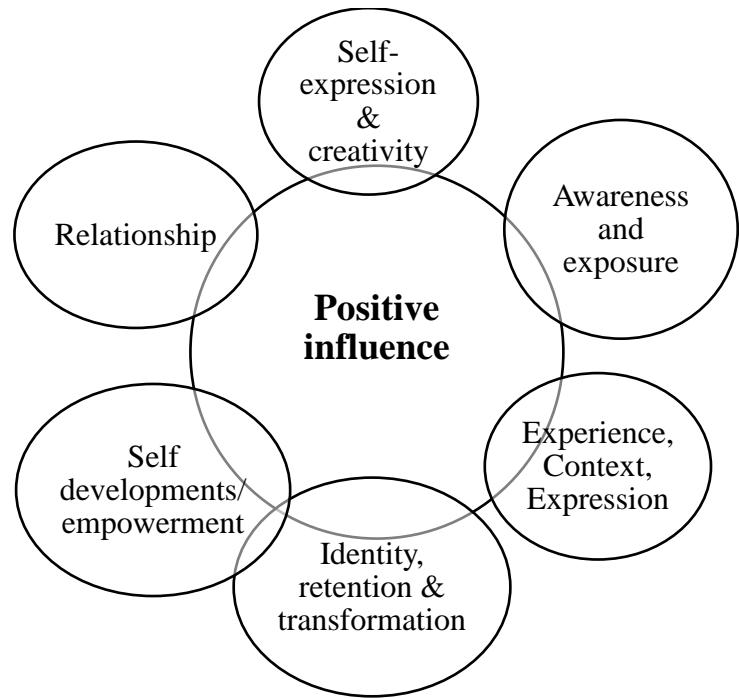
4.2 Social media influence identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church



The study found that 23 of 50 participants were likely to maintain their identity. Their social media usage time significantly influenced this, and higher motivation to use social media positively impacted identity maintenance. This section explores the relationship between social media and identity formation among teenagers at AIC Utawala. These teenagers actively use social media, frequently updating their profile pictures and sharing images from their experiences. They strive to make friends and build connections while increasingly exploring identities that reflect their values.

Positive Influence

The positive responses from the participants on social media influence identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church. It gave rise to the eight main themes.



### *Self-expression and Creativity*

Social media allows teenagers to share their thoughts, talents, and passions, helping them develop a sense of individuality. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram encourage creative expression through videos, art, and writing. The survey also gathered responses about how teens' use of social media influences their identity formation through self-expression. Overall, the findings revealed that 19 out of 50 participants recognized the difference between social media and offline environments. In addition, 21 out of the 50 teens felt that impression management and self-expression were somewhat free on social media. The following interviews are representative cases in which impression management is somewhat free on social media.

According to the interview's findings, teenagers deal with social media self-expression by taking into account what other people may think and feeling free to control their impression anyway they see fit. Furthermore, the interviews reveal that one of the idealized notions of teens is their attitude toward self-presentation. This self-presentation is influenced by the individual's ability to communicate. In terms of managing the impression displayed to others, the results suggest that the participants mould the information about themselves as positively as possible before they deliver it to others. Teenagers seek to present themselves in a way that is socially acceptable because they want to appear capable, appealing, and truthful overall.

### *Awareness and Exposure*

Social media exposes teenagers to diverse perspectives, cultures, and social issues, broadening their worldviews and fostering personal growth. "I enjoy following Facebook pages for new book releases and an Instagram account that shares daily quotes from bestsellers. Without social media, I could easily just stay in my room and access this information."<sup>48</sup> "There's a lot to learn from social media, depending on your interests. I often search for political books and articles, and I find plenty of political updates and stories on Twitter." "I use social media mainly for information, which I find very useful in my daily life. I enjoy sharing insights with others and believe that knowledge is power."<sup>49</sup> "Social media, especially Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, is rich in information. I love exploring the teachings on various topics, which is why I can spend hours on these platforms."<sup>50</sup>

### *Experience, Contexts, and Expressions*

The results of the study show that teens' identities are shaped by their social experiences, which were found to be freshly developed by the different roles and modes of expression. The researcher separated the identity formation reactions into three categories: expressions, situations, and experiences. First, the researcher used the experience to offer the responses on identity creation. 19 of the 50 participants thought of social media as a socialization tool. Based on their comments, the participants tried to socialize and embrace digital encounters as a part of their lives by accumulating both offline and online experiences. The results indicate that teenagers are more influenced by social media experiences than by offline interactions when forming their identities. As teenagers spend more time on social media, its impact on their identity development increases. Consequently, the page owner often overestimates the interests

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<sup>48</sup> (17, boy)

<sup>49</sup> (17-year-old girl)

<sup>50</sup> (16, girl).

of others and becomes overly sensitive to minor criticisms. Teenagers are especially susceptible to peer pressure and the views of others, fueled by their vivid imaginations. The imagined audience on social media transcends mere illusion; it actively shapes their reality and plays a significant role in the development of their identities.

#### *Identity Retention and Transformation*

The study found that participants liked expressing their identity by controlling their focus and awareness. This was influenced by how much time they spent on social media and their reasons for using it. The researcher examined two aspects: identity retention and transformation.

“I write well on social media so that I may look good, particularly on Facebook. I write comments well and try to participate in a lot of social events. I want to socialize even on social media” (16, girl). Our identities and social media can be quite different. We often change how we present ourselves online to showcase our best sides. For example, I have a friend who is usually quiet at school but is very active on Facebook. This shows that our identities can vary significantly between real life and social media.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Self-development or empowerment*

I like reading other people’s posts and writing mine for others to read; it is fun. If I have a few seconds, I use it to at least upload something. I must always post something, and sometimes I upload more. This is usually dependent on what I want to do. I am on social media most of the time, say more than 10 hours a day.”<sup>52</sup> “I use social media to learn about beauty tips, cooking recipes, and dance trends. It keeps me updated on makeup styles, and I love cooking for my family. It’s fun and helpful! “I enjoy seeking information on various topics, and social media is a great tool for that. I especially like YouTube for its wealth of knowledge and practical insights. Teenagers particularly appreciate sharing school-related information and accessing helpful articles, enhancing their satisfaction. The real-time nature of social media, closely tied to smartphone features, plays a significant role in this experience. The study shows that people use social media mainly for its convenience in connecting with friends. It also offers opportunities to learn about celebrities, gather information, play games, be entertained, and express themselves.

I can relate to the video below when I view it. The good news is that social media gives you a lot of firsthand experiences. Although I would prefer to have a wide variety of experiences myself, I am now quite happy with the knowledge I am gaining from YouTube.<sup>53</sup> “Social media provides a lot of information. I often find content about Europe on Instagram, where many accounts share photos. I’m making a list of places I want to visit on my next trip. “I read a lot of science articles on Twitter, which gives me helpful new information. People share insights on various scientific topics, and I find this access to information quite powerful. “Lately, I’ve been visiting trendy cafes to take better pictures for my posts.”

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<sup>51</sup> (15, Girl)

<sup>52</sup>(16, boy).

<sup>53</sup> (15, girl).



I like to record my daily activities. Instead of using a paper diary, I now use social media, which I find more comfortable. However, the reactions from others can be overwhelming, so I often treat social media like a diary.<sup>54</sup>

"Social media offers answers to many questions. When I wanted to decorate my room, I watched numerous YouTube videos to find the best ideas. I also enjoy sharing new information and events I come across on social media."<sup>55</sup> "I got the role of a dancer in the school play, and I found lots of helpful dance videos on social media. Although I was worried since I had never danced before, I learned the basic movements gradually, and the performance turned out amazing!" (16, Boy). "I discover activities and roles through social media and apply them in real life. I've participated in campaigns for environmental protection and cultural exchange, which are fun and a great way to meet new people. Social media is useful for this information."<sup>56</sup>

### *Relationship*

The results indicate that a key role of social media is the formation of human relationships. By connecting users, social media facilitates the sharing of emotional experiences like intimacy and belonging. Participants voluntarily join groups, resulting in shared cultural and emotional connections. One major benefit of social media-based communication is its mobility, which makes it simple to connect and share content at any time. Through the usage of cell phones, participants were not constrained by time or location in the social media realm; as a result, meetings and relationship maintenance were active. Teens were utilizing social media to build, preserve, strengthen, and broaden social networks to establish and preserve relationships through social interactions.

My friend has an Australian friend they met on social media. I'm open to making friends online since you never know who might invite you abroad. I also learn a lot from posts in my networks".<sup>57</sup> "Currently, I am a student, and therefore, I must study hard in school. However, online, I have to communicate with my friends. I've got to talk and interact more actively. Naturally, I am timid and find it difficult to get along well. But I want to look like a cool person on social media, then I will grow my popularity more and more."<sup>58</sup> "I enjoy meeting and talking to my friends on social media. Social media is a fast and convenient means of communication as I can talk right away and then text them using my cell phone. It is easier to chat with friends on social media, particularly Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. With this, I have managed to strengthen my friendships. I always feel to be with my friends."<sup>59</sup> "When I get back home from school, I am always very tired. But if I don't access social media, it seems like I am the only one who is separated from my friends. I think all my friends play a big part in my life. It's too big to keep up with other friends to stay connected. I think using social media tends to maintain good communication with friends because I can talk through the comments, and it's

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid,

<sup>55</sup> (17, girl).

<sup>56</sup> (18, Boy)

<sup>57</sup> (15, boy)

<sup>58</sup> (17, boy)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid,

much easier than talking to them face to face. So, I try to use social media as much as I can.”<sup>60</sup> “I have lost touch with a lot of my friends, but now, with social media, I can get in touch with them using Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, among others. I want to keep my friends, and I think social media will help me do this easily.”<sup>61</sup> “I am very grateful because of social media; I can communicate with my friends on any matter including schoolwork, particularly during the school holidays. I use social media to reach out to my friends just to get to know what is going on. We just talk about everything.”<sup>62</sup> “If I know someone or have heard of them, I’ll add them as a friend. I don’t accept requests from strangers; I just ignore or refuse them. I enjoy talking with people on social media, but I prefer to interact only with those I know.”<sup>63</sup> “I enjoy making new friends on Facebook and sharing my hobbies with them. Talking to positive influences is fun, but I realize that spending too much time on social media takes away from my family time.”<sup>64</sup> “I don’t want strangers to see my private stories or information on Facebook. It worries me to think that someone I don’t know could access my details. I prefer not to connect with people on social media.”<sup>65</sup> “When I talk to my friends on social media, I feel like I express myself differently. I’m cautious in person, but online, I use more wild language. It feels like I’m wearing a mask, and I don’t know why.”<sup>66</sup> “I connect with friends through emoticons on social media, which helps express emotions. It would be great to use these expressions in the real world too.”<sup>67</sup>

I have a friend I’m not very close to, but we interact on social media by liking and sharing each other’s content. While our relationship isn’t strong offline, I’m happy to see it improving online and believe it can continue to grow through social media.”<sup>68</sup> “Social media communication may seem similar, but it feels different. I struggle to express my honest opinions online, so I try to be polite.”<sup>69</sup> “I’m not comfortable talking to strangers, but I enjoy making new friends and learning from them. Before accepting friend requests, I check profiles, and if I don’t like what I see, I just ignore them.”<sup>70</sup>

“Talking with my friends on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media makes me feel like I’m with them all day. I share secrets and feelings that I can’t talk about at school, which helps me get closer to them.”<sup>71</sup> social media makes me feel less alone. I can engage with others through comments and likes on my photos. When I get a lot of likes, it feels great to be popular. I love meeting my classmates on weekends, but it can be hard with everyone’s plans. Instead,

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<sup>60</sup> (18, girl).

<sup>61</sup> (17, girl).

<sup>62</sup> (17, girl)

<sup>63</sup> (15, boy)

<sup>64</sup> (17, girl)

<sup>65</sup> (15, girl)

<sup>66</sup> (14, boy)

<sup>67</sup> (16 girls)

<sup>68</sup> (15, girl).

<sup>69</sup> (17, boy).

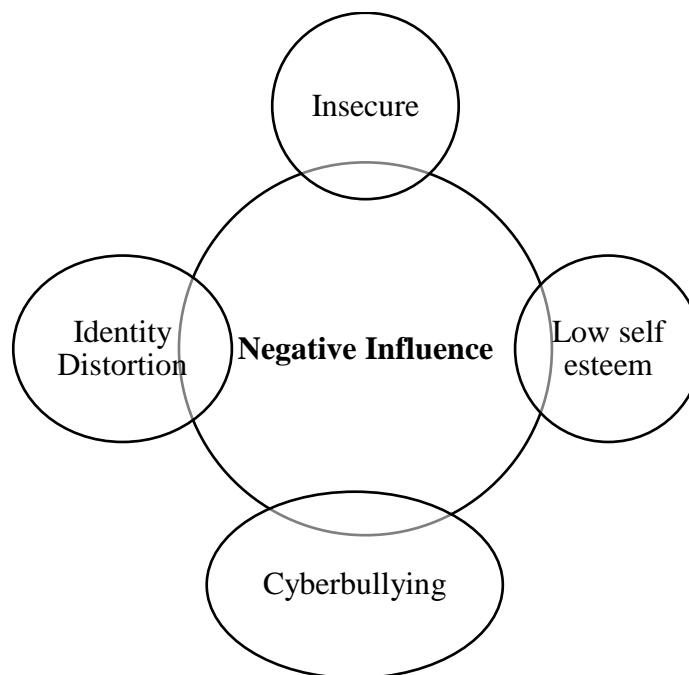
<sup>70</sup> (16, girl).

<sup>71</sup> (13, girl).

we chat in real-time on social media, share information, and upload photos. It's nice to stay connected even when we can't be physically together.

### Negative Influence

**The negative responses from the participants on social media influence identity formation among the teenagers of AIC Utawala Local Church. It gave rise to the eight main themes.**



#### *Insecure*

Sometimes I feel insecure about posting some information on social media even though I want to post it for my friends to see. Some people who do not know me see my photos and posts and they ask me to be their friend. Even though they do not do anything bad to me, I feel this is unpleasant. But there is a lot of pressure to want to do what everyone else or my friends are doing.”<sup>72</sup>

#### *Low Self-Esteem*

The curated nature of social media often leads to unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyle portrayals, causing some teenagers to compare themselves negatively to peers and influencers. This can contribute to low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. "I'm active and outgoing on social media, frequently liking and commenting on posts. But when I take off my Facebook mask, I feel ashamed. I wish I could be as confident and outgoing as a person"<sup>73</sup>

#### *Cyberbullying and Identity Distortion*

Negative online interactions, such as cyberbullying and harassment, can severely impact self-perception and mental well-being. I feel I am alone, and my friends are bullying me in some ways. I love YouTube because from there I get a lot of stories and videos.”<sup>74</sup> Additionally, some

<sup>72</sup> (16, boy).

<sup>73</sup> (13, Girl).

<sup>74</sup> (15, girl)

teens may create exaggerated or false identities online, leading to confusion between their real and digital selves.

#### 4.3 Discussion

According to the study's findings, teenagers who use social media excessively have trouble sleeping and performing well in doing their homework, even though technology has made it easy and quick for them to communicate information. Due to its user-friendly interface, smartphones have made it easier for users to interact with social media. These findings support the theories put forth by Griffiths (2005) and Andreassen and Pallesen (2014), according to which the more time spent on social media, the worse the quality of sleep is and the more difficult it is to wake up in the morning. Additionally, the use of image-oriented information is rapidly increasing, and the amount of text on social media has decreased because of the proliferation of smart devices.<sup>75</sup> The expansion of interpersonal exchanges that are not time or location-limited is also accelerating the social divide, and the use of mobile devices by teenagers can be used to confirm the enormous impact of social media.

The number of friends a user has can significantly affect how social media influences their self-motivation and interactive motivation. As teens spend more time on these platforms, social media increasingly impacts their socialization and re-socialization.<sup>76</sup> Through social media, teenagers gain knowledge and engage in essential socialization processes, such as forming relationships, understanding social norms, and internalizing cultural values. These findings align with Elkind (1967), who observed that young people share their daily lives on social media, anticipating reactions such as likes and comments. Further, it also allows for the easy maintenance of existing relationships and the expansion of new ones through shared interests. However, concerns exist that social media may replace authentic relationships with family and neighbors, potentially leading to social isolation and distrust.<sup>77</sup> Creating a social media profile resembles performing for an imaginary audience; although some may engage with comments, most will simply observe, and many may remain unaware of the page's existence. Social media impacts users' emotions, opinions, and ideas, enabling deep interpersonal relationships based on common experiences. As a result, users' identity formation is influenced by their relationships and interactions with others. According to the responses above, participants want to keep the relationships linked to lasting relationships, to feel a sense of belonging, express of participation group, space for emotional exchange, formation of a new community, and convenience of decision making" throughout their communication.

#### 5. Conclusion

The study established that social media has influenced teenagers' identity formation. The study found that the boundaries between virtual and real space were blurred for teenagers due to emergence of the social media. The teenagers to some extent maintained their identity as the appearance of online and offline identities is somewhat similar. The study however established that teenagers when using social media their expressions could transform their attitude toward self-expression which could transform and reconstruct their identity. There was however no

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<sup>75</sup> (Biolcati & Passini, 2018; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Smith, 2013).

<sup>76</sup> (Giddens, 1998; Park, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Turkle, S. 2011. *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. London. Basic Books.

differentiation in the expression of the identity and self-identity online and offline. The study further found that social media has influenced identity formation through social media context and expression. The teenagers' daily life and activities are achieved through social interaction. As social beings, teenagers form identities through interaction with others, establish their viewpoints of the world, and acquire necessary information and knowledge. In this sense, behaviors, and interaction through social media are basic conditions for identity formation. As the time and period of social media usage increase along with the proportion of personal life that involves social media, the newly formed identity on social media has a huge impact on the whole life of the individual. As a result, identity was transformed into an unstable entity that was constantly being restructured through interaction between the 'original self' (offline self) and the 'surrogate self of social media.

The study established that social media causes the disaggregation of teenagers' identity and the formation of another identity, due to the fact that teenagers modified their appearances so that they attract more likes and comments. Teenagers communicate with their peers and friends through cyberspace and experience various interpersonal relationships. Teenagers can develop numerous identities when they feel how others value them and derive their emotions and attitudes from them.

## 6. Recommendations

The study established that social media influenced teenagers' identity formation. The researcher thus recommends that there is a need to closely guide teenagers on how to use social media highlighting the dangers of social media.

The study further established that social media impacted teenagers in that youth had multi-identities. This may cause confusion, which may be dangerous to teenagers and society. The study therefore recommends that there is a need to regulate access and use of social media particularly among teenagers to protect them from identity distortion.

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