

# Theorizing Cultural Identity Negotiation in the Digital Playground: Social Media as Learning Spaces for Children Model

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## **Abstract:**

Since their emergence in 2004, Web 2.0 technologies have been recognized for their creative and transformative potential in education. Compared to traditional teaching and learning methods, these technologies offer new opportunities to create online learning environments and enhance interactivity, participation, and feedback among learners, their peers, and educators [33; 71]. With their multimedia features, combining sound, images, and audiovisual interaction, these networks foster collaboration among learners, both in formal and informal contexts [32]. However, as children increasingly integrate these digital platforms into their daily routines, learning, and leisure activities, a crucial question arises: **To what extent does the use of social networks as a learning tool influence the construction of their identity, particularly in terms of culture?** This question becomes even more complex as it also raises another essential dimension: **What role do parents play in this process of adoption by their children within these complex and potentially risky multicultural virtual spaces?** In this context, the present research aims to explore these questions by examining the effect of using social networks as a learning tool on the construction of children's cultural identity and the role parents may play in this relationship. In this regard, we seek to propose a theoretical model describing the impact of social networks as a learning tool on the construction of cultural identity, taking into account the role of parents as key moderating agents.

**Keywords:** Social networks, formal/informal learning, socialization, enculturation, risks on social networks.

## **1. Introduction**

Since their emergence in 2005, Web 2.0 technologies have been presented as potentially transformative in the field of education in general and foreign language learning in particular. Web 2.0 technologies offer new opportunities to develop diverse online learning environments and enhance interactivity, participation, and feedback among learners, their peer groups, and teachers [33; 71].

Through their multimedia aspects, which combine sound, image, and audiovisual interaction interfaces, they encourage collaboration among learners at both formal and informal levels [32; 24].

To this end, social networks have progressively expanded their function within the learning process, offering a dynamic platform, even among the youngest members of society. And yet, as children increasingly integrate these digital platforms into their daily lives and learning pursuits, a crucial question emerges: To what extent does the adoption of social networks as a learning tool influence the construction of their identity, particularly its cultural dimension? This complex question also raises another es-

sential dimension: What roles can parents play in this process of adoption by their children within these complex, risky, and multicultural virtual spaces?

This research aims to explore these questions by carefully examining the dynamics between the use of social networks as a tool for learning and knowledge acquisition, the construction of children's cultural identity, and parental involvement in this emerging context of digital learning.

Within this framework, we attempt to propose a theoretical model relating the effect of social networks as a learning tool on the construction of cultural identity, with the moderating variable being the role of parents as agents of socialization.

In fact, the advent of Web 2.0 technology in the early 2000s has fundamentally transformed the landscape of pedagogy. Since their emergence, these technologies have been recognised for their potential to provide more interactive, collaborative, and participatory learning experiences compared to traditional methods [56; 33; 71]. As a major component of this digital ecosystem, social networking sites, with their inherent multimedia capacities such as blending text, sound, image, and audiovisual interfaces, have created innovative spaces for knowledge sharing and co-creation [40]. They facilitate collaboration among learners, going beyond the limits of classic formal schooling to incorporate rich, interactive informal learning environments [32; 3; 24].

Consequently, social networks are more and more present in the learning process, becoming a dynamic educational platform, for different publics, even for the youngest members of society [44; 48]. Moreover, guided by their schools, their parents, or by themselves, kids and especially young people are increasingly integrating these virtual spaces not only into their social and entertainment activities but also into their educational process and informal learning [15]. However, this integration can present a complex duality. While these new learning environments offer extraordinary opportunities for learning, they also play the role of social and cultural arenas where identities are continuously constructed, performed, tested, and negotiated [72; 17].

This complex duality of learning and social interaction in online spaces suggests an important question: To what extent does the use of social networks as a learning tool affect the development of children's identity, particularly its cultural dimension?

The immersive experiences and the globally-oriented nature of social media expose young learners, without filters, to the whole world's diversity of cultural narratives, values, and practices that may not align with their immediate familial or local community contexts [29; 36]. These questionings highlights a further dimension of the issue: What role can and should parents play as the first and the most important agent of their children's socialization process, within these complex, often risky, and multicultural online spaces? [42; 23].

In response to these research questions, our paper aims to critically examine the interactive dynamics between social networks as learning tools, the local child's cultural identity construction, and the moderating role of parents. Our research aims to go beyond a descriptive analysis through constructing a theoretical model. by constructing a comprehensive theoretical model. The proposed model stipulates the causal pathways through which social media, as a learning environment, impacts cultural identity construction, and conceptualizing parents as a moderating variable [6]. Throughout this conceptual framework, the present research aims to provide an ordered and structured framework for future empirical research and an increased understanding of the multifaceted implications of digital learning in the 21st century.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social Networks as a New Environment for Exchange and Learning

Defined as "social media that use mobile and Web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" [40, p. 241], social networks have revolutionized communication. The idea of connecting individuals who initially have no prior relationship has long been a subject of interest, particularly in sociology. In this regard, Karinthy theory (1929), dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, already postulated that individuals distributed randomly across the planet could be linked using a chain of common acquaintances, one after the other, of only six people.

This idea inspired and, to some extent, explained the precursors of modern social networks, such as "SixDegrees.com" or even older systems like the Bulletin Board System (BBS) launched in 1978, which allowed for the exchange of messages via modems and telephone lines.

In the context of building virtual social relationships, social media aimed from the outset to facilitate interpersonal exchanges at a distance via the Internet. This was possible with platforms existing as early as the 1960s. Sending emails, via CompuServe Information Services (CIS) and later AOL, marked the beginning of these exchanges.

To this end, social networks, notably "YouTube" created in 2005 by three former "PayPal" employees and "Facebook" created by Mark Zuckerberg and his Harvard University classmates in 2004 have positioned themselves as the new tools of choice for virtual social exchanges. These social networks now offer much more developed options and facilities, such as ease of access, free service, and openness to all web data, connectivity, collaboration, and social exchange. These characteristics have led various education and teaching specialists to consider them valuable pedagogical tools [27; 11; 53].

In this vein, Cain and Policastri [21] emphasize that the ease of access, high potential for interactivity, networking, collaboration, and creation of audiovisual content on social networks like YouTube and Facebook make them pedagogical tools for both teachers and learners, whether primary school pupils, secondary school students, or university students.

In the context of learning via social networks, a virtual learning space is defined as "a virtual space or virtual community aimed at learning and sharing knowledge" [27; 11; 53]. To this end, Facebook is considered a full-fledged learning environment, with pedagogical functions, technological tools, and a social organization of education. It also offers the possibility to communicate instantly or asynchronously via video calls and the sharing of multimedia content.

Within the framework of our research, we attempt to adopt the "Uses and Gratifications Theory," which posits that individuals use media to satisfy specific needs. Thus, based on their knowledge and motivations, the user can determine and fulfill their needs through their media choices [14; 63; 52; 51; 65].

This idea also implies that the adoption of a medium can influence behavior and identity within social networks as a learning environment. Thus, the different motivations for media use can influence individuals' learning behaviors in the presence of the group, which can lead to changes affecting their identity, relationships with the group, and the learning and comprehension process [14; 63].

In summary, Facebook, as a learning environment, offers numerous possibilities for users, allowing for a wide variety of uses in the learning process in response to specific needs. It also provides a space for the acquisition and expression of a variety of social identities depending on study groups and reference groups.

Furthermore, Facebook is indeed a virtual learning space. From a constructivist point of view, Wilson [76] defines a learning environment as a place or space where learners can work together and collaborate using a variety of tools and information resources to achieve their learning goals and problem-solving activities (p.4).

Cain and Policastri [21] state that, in the case of Facebook, open access, the possibility of collaboration, and the ability to create content, combined with multimedia interactivity, have made this medium a highly coveted tool, particularly among learners, including pre-adolescent children. To this end, Perkins [58] and Goldman, Pellegrino, and Bransford [30] stated that technology is a great catalyst for the construction and development of this type of community, allowing for greater connectivity and more significant interaction.

Thus, Barajas [5] considers that social networks, as virtual learning environments, fulfil all the interdisciplinary bases of a classic learning environment as presented by Pulkkinen et al. [62], namely:

- Pedagogical functions: a pedagogical scenario, learning situations, tutoring, and evaluation.
- Appropriate tools and required technology.
- A social organization of education: time, space, and community.

## 2.2. Risks for Children Using Social Networks

Through social experiences and interpersonal interactions, the individual acquires multiple identities [68]. These multiple identities are arranged in a hierarchical structure, by order of preference or salience [19; 20; 67].

However, using social networks is not without risk. Indeed, various studies have shown the following risks, particularly among the child population:

### 2.2.1. Risks of Undesirable Content:

- Nearly 57% of users report having been in contact with pornographic content [13]. Contact with pornographic content occurs accidentally in 36% of cases [13].
- In 2014, risks worsened with the emergence of the concept of "cyber bullying" in 12% of cases [45].

### 2.2.2. Risks of Online Communication:

Parents underestimate children's negative experiences on the internet. Nearly half of children report having disclosed personal information to individuals met online. A risk and safety survey conducted as a part of the EU Kids Online project revealed that though 12% kids aged 9-16 were bothered and upset about something online, just 7% of parents were aware of it, meaning there was a considerable tendency toward underestimation [43].

### 2.2.3. The Parents and the Presence of Risk: Home Internet Regulation:

Parents often seek to mediate their children's internet experience. To prevent internet risks, they try different strategies to supervise their children's online experience; this activity is labelled "parental mediation" [42; 66]. Moreover, parents lack the means and techniques to control their navigation better. This fact also shows a significant gap between parents' and children's knowledge of internet use techniques, which is framed as a digital divide [45]. Helpser [35] argues that this gap is not generational but an expertise gap related to IT and new technologies. These facts constitute additional challenges for the parental mediation role, notably for beginner children [61].

## 2.3. Social Networks and the Dynamics of Cultural Identity

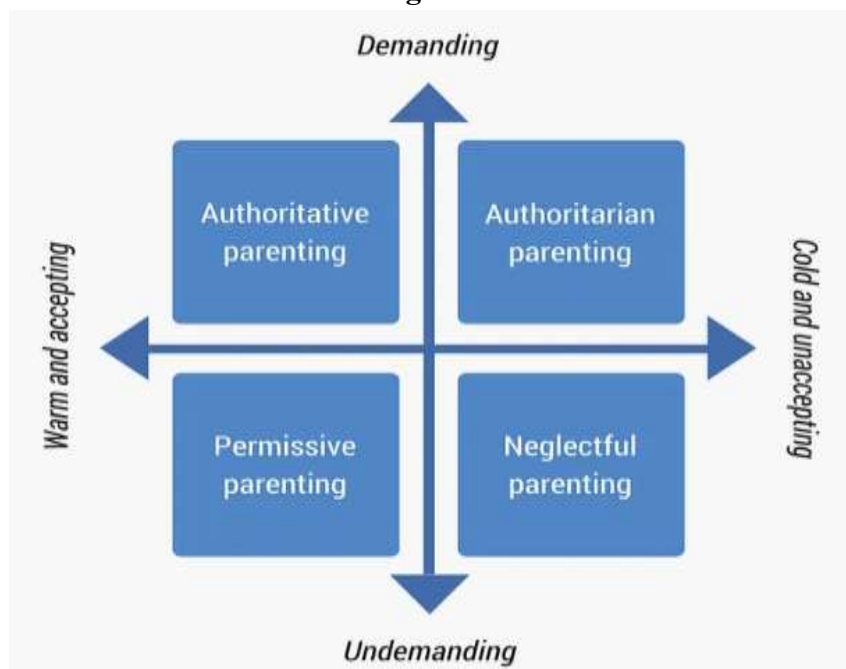
For North and Kotzé [54], ethnic or cultural identity is transmitted in the form of a heritage composed of

values, norms, traditions, and cultural beliefs, through the process of socialization. One of the primary sources of socialization is undoubtedly parents, who are the first agents of socialization [28].

The process of constructing cultural identity is called ethno-cultural socialization, which begins in early childhood and extends into adulthood. This continuity of socialization allows each age to have the necessary cultural references in terms of values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors to manifest. These attitudes and behaviours are specific and vary depending on different events and social situations [73].

Within this framework, parents, and the mother in particular, are the first actors in the socialization process of any individual. It begins from the first months after birth and continues until the age of 6 to 7 years [59; 4; 60]. During this period, parents thus assist their children in the process of enculturation, which encompasses the assimilation of gestures and their meanings, and attitudes according to social situations, all within the context of the family's cultural identity [26]. Moreover, parents have different parenting styles with which they play their socialization role; these parenting styles vary according to the level of supervision, closeness, and affection towards the children. As a result, four parenting styles emerge, originally proposed by Diana Baumrind [10] and later expanded by Maccoby & Martin [47].

**Figure 1**



Source: Lessard, Isabel: “How Does your Parenting Style Influence your Children?”, <https://www.kaleido.ca/en/blog/how-does-your-parenting-style-influence-your-children/>

This figure shows four classic parenting styles, which result from the combination of two dimensions: responsiveness (warmth and acceptance) and demandingness, or control. Parents presenting high levels in both demandingness and responsiveness have an “authoritative” style, which is associated with positive child development outcomes according to Baumrind [9; 10]. On the other side, authoritarian parents present a high level of demandingness but low in warmth and tend to use strict rules and seek obedience. Permissive parents are warm and somewhat non-directive.

Maccoby and Martin extended [47] the model in 1983 by adding the fourth and worst style to which is the neglectful parenting style, which expressed low warmth and low control. The four combinations

serve to explain how children's behaviors and development change due to individual adjustment of their expectations versus emotional support.

Moreover, within the framework of their role in the construction of cultural identity, parents, along with the group, implement two processes [1]:

- Differentiation: Which gives the child the means to differentiate their cultural group from other groups, through specific cultural traits based on history and characteristics constituting factors of pride?
- Integration or Inclusion: This process allows for social integration within the group and the weaving of social relationships based notably on identification.

Building on the work of Gordon [31] and O'Guinn and Faber [55], various studies have adopted the following dimensions [41; 57]:

- Identification and involvement in the socio-cultural group.
- Adoption of beliefs.
- Adoption of the language.
- And the adoption of specific food products.

To this end, thanks to parents, the individual assimilates the main aspects of their ethnic heritage, notably: their mother tongue, traditions, the social roles of parents and family members, and the rules of interaction and integration with their ethnic group [64; 39; 69; 60; 1].

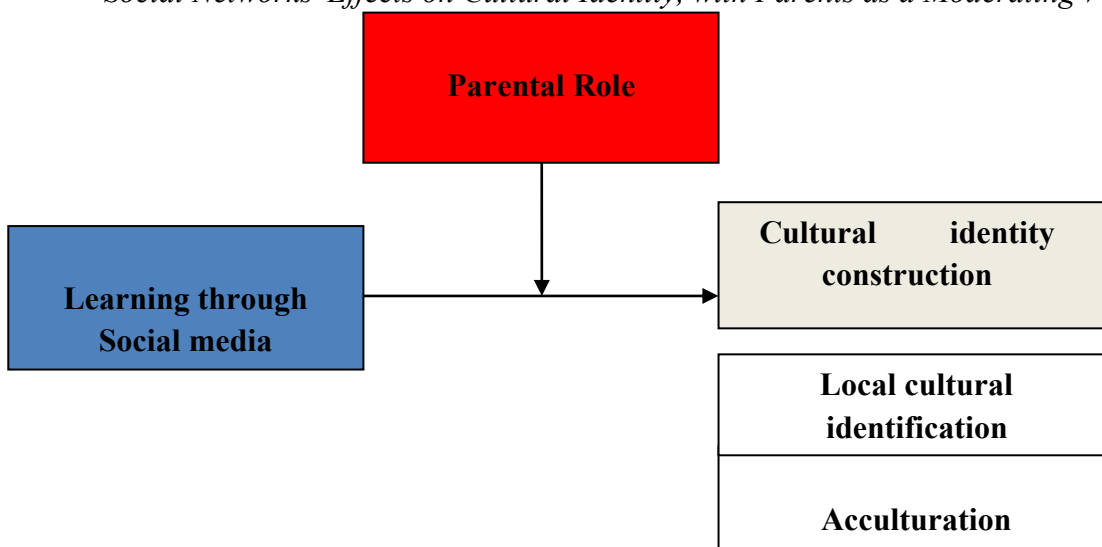
Furthermore, social networks, due to their global reach and the multicultural nature of the identity models they propose, can influence the identity construction of users, particularly the youngest among them. To this end, we put forward the following hypotheses:

**H1:** The orientation of social networks influences the nature of cultural affiliation in children.

**H2:** Parents play a moderating role by controlling their children's media choices, which helps frame the process of identity construction in the child.

**Figure 2: The Proposed Theoretical Model**

*Social Networks' Effects on Cultural Identity, with Parents as a Moderating Variable*



Within the framework of this research, our objective is to construct a theoretical model that can describe the influence that the use of social networks as a learning tool can have on children's developing identi-

ty. To this end, we have focused on the cultural aspect of identity and the role that parents can play as moderators in managing their children's relationship with this tool.

### 3. Conclusion

Regarding the relationship between the use of social networks and their impact on children's lives, we have found highly interesting results in the literature review. Indeed, media choice constitutes a phenomenon that is very involving for the user, insofar as this output constitutes, in a way, an influencer and an extension of the identity they are constructing [46].

Thus, social networks allow users to:

- Construct an identity model.
- Create profiles according to their own identity model.
- Create a network of acquaintances who share the same interests.
- Share content that reinforces social and cultural identity orientations within the framework of virtual or real groups [16; 75].

Within the framework of using social networks as a learning tool, we have reached the following results:

1. Social networks, as virtual learning environments, possess the following attributes:
  - Pedagogical functions: a pedagogical scenario, learning situations, tutoring, and evaluation.
  - Appropriate tools and required technology.
  - A social organization of education: time, space, and community.
2. Social networks have other more pertinent characteristics, such as the possibility of communicating instantly or asynchronously via audiovisual means through video calls and sharing [5; 34; 7].

Finally, thanks to parents, the individual assimilates the main aspects of their ethnic heritage, notably: their mother tongue, traditions, the social roles of parents and family members, and the rules of interaction and integration with their ethnic group [64; 39; 69; 60]. It is within this framework that the role of parents as moderators in this relationship is situated.

Thus, they can ensure that the identity construction process is risk-free in the presence of social networks. Indeed, according to Aboud and Christian [1], the construction of cultural identity is based on two distinct processes:

- Differentiation: Which gives the child the means to differentiate their cultural group from other groups, through specific cultural traits based on history and characteristics constituting factors of pride?
- Integration or Inclusion: This process allows for social integration within the group and the weaving of social relationships based notably on identification.

Like most scientific research, our research and methodological choices may suffer from certain limitations as follows:

- The theoretical research may suffer from the multidisciplinary coverage of references, given that the concept of learning in online communities is quite complex.
- Social networks as a tool and environment for learning is a delicate issue insofar as it interests more than one scientific discipline at once, ranging from psychology to sociology, including anthropology.

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