

## Internet and National Identity among the Youth in Sari

Zahra Pak Manesh<sup>1</sup>  
Nader Razeghi<sup>\*2</sup>

Received 20 March 2020, Accepted 18 July 2020

### *Abstract*

The present study analyzes and explains the effects of duration, amount, and location, type of use and level of Internet users' knowledge on national identity among students of Sari Azad University in the 1390-91 academic year. The field section, which is in the form of a survey, measures, describes and analyzes the data using a questionnaire technique. A sample of 372 students was selected by simple random sampling. The results and findings obtained through the experimental process of this research indicate that the overall purpose of the research has been achieved. Correlation between the two variables of national identity and the amount of daily use of the Internet (-0.19) two variables of national identity and duration of use Internet (-0.16) and between the two variables of national identity and the amount of familiarity with Internet (-0.13) was the inverse. There is a significantly inverse relationship between the use of the Internet at home and their national identity. Familiarity with the use of the Internet has the greatest impact on national identity, and the effect of the duration of use and the amount of use are equal to each other. They also showed that the effect of the Internet on the national identity of the students of this university is moderate to high. Also, the result of multivariate linear regression of independent variables with leisure time shows that among the independent variables, the rate of user use, users' familiarity with the Internet and the duration of Internet usage of the users have a significant effect on national identity. Comparison of betas shows that the variables of daily use of the Internet and two variables of familiarity with the use of the Internet and the duration of Internet use, together with beta multipliers (-0, 22) and the other two variables (0, 15) have the strongest and weakest effect on the dependent variables of national identity.

**Keywords:** Youth, Internet, Identity of nations.

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of Social Problems of Iran, Azadshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Azadshahr, Iran, Zpakmanesh@yahoo.com

<sup>2\*</sup> Associate Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran, razeghi@umz.ac.ir (Corresponding author)

---

## 1. Introduction

With the increasing growth of the Internet and the increasing number of users who connect to the Internet, the need for the impact of the Internet seems necessary because the Internet has multimedia means of communication that includes a world of information and several medias such as television, printing utilities and telephones. This technology has entered every part of people's daily life and has affected all aspects of their lives. Easier, simpler, wider and cheaper communications are all advantages of these technologies, however, there may be negative effects followed by it. Technology is not inherently harmful, but it can have detrimental, unintended and unexpected effects.

The emergence of the Internet as a powerful media in recent years has also brought threats, one of these threats is that the use of the Internet is gradually replacing the real human relationships in everyday life and is a tool that creates and provides a virtual space for making relationships, which frees people from the hassle of confronting others and being in the real world. In fact, it confronts the human identity with crisis. National identity, because it answers the basic questions in the dimension of social tasks, is considered as a basis and an intellectual support for members of society for their social behavior and thoughts. Today, due to the multiplicity of identities acquired by the individual in society, their national identity has been damaged and the foundation of the committed person has been threatened. This trend is more pronounced especially in developing countries, which have until recently had their own values, norms and attitudes (Razazifar, 2001, pp. 106-107).

In Iran, due to the transition from a traditional to an industrial society, many contradictions have plagued people, especially students, in answering questions about themselves, their nation, etc. Many researches have shown a turmoil and crisis in the identity bases of Iranian students' personality. Therefore, paying attention to presenting an integrated and accurate picture of national identity is of fundamental importance, and the Internet has a very important role in this regard. However, it should be said that today the issue of national identity is one of the most fundamental issues facing the Iranian social system that is needed to be answered (Razazifar, 2001, pp.114- 115).

As a result, national identity is problematic for members of communities, especially students, who have more access to the Internet. In this study, we

seek to "examine the impact of the Internet on the geographical, social and cultural dimensions of the" cultural heritage "of national identity among the students of the Islamic Azad University of Sari".

## **2. Review of the Literature**

Doran (2008) investigated national identity and interaction in cyberspace in Tehran. For this purpose, the research hypothesis was formulated based on Tajfel social identity theory and a scale was constructed and validated to measure national identity. Two techniques of Mann White and multivariate regression were tested, which were not confirmed.

-Mojtaba Abbasi Ghadi and Morteza Khalili Kashani (2012) in a study entitled the effect of the Internet on national identity on people in different districts of Tehran, have achieved the following results: 1- The variable of users 'use of the Internet has an effect on their national identity by- 0.32 and this indicates that for every unit decrease in the duration of users' use of the Internet, 0.32 is added to their national identity. 2- The variable of users' use of the Internet affects their national identity by -0.28. 3- Variable (perceiving internet content as real) by users affects their national identity by -0.46.

-Sheri Turkle (1999) has studied cyberspace over identity in Massachusetts, USA. In her opinion, cyberspace allows the display of personality, but it will be a very serious display, people who are aware of who is behind their virtual personality, are people who have the greatest chance of success in using virtual experiences in personal and social transitions, and people who spend a lot of time in cyberspace are people who can approach this space with their self-reflective spirit. In her view, Internet is making a difference in the way we think, shape of our communities, and our personalities.

In 2003, Erika Schlesinger studied national identity and the Internet (the importance of a country's code in the name of that country's Internet space) at the University of Texas, USA. She concluded that the domain registration budget has significantly improved the Internet facilities on the islands, and that each country follows a specific policy and pattern for naming a domain (Internet space) for their respective country.

---

The development of communication networks in recent decades has led to changes in all aspects of human life, and among the emerging devices and media, Internet has a special place. The use of the Internet can affect many aspects of human life, and involvement in the formation of identity is one of them. Identity is the awareness of an individual of its position and status and awareness of its roles and duties, and its types are: individual identity (personal), family identity, national identity (Iranian), religious identity, ethnic identity and gender identity.

By summarizing the mentioned researches, it is possible to understand the importance of identity and influential factors in the formation of identity, especially the Internet.

One of the important results in the research of these researchers is that the use of the Internet has adverse effects on various dimensions of identity, especially religious, family and national identity, and weakens them. They focus more on the effects of the Internet as a whole. The use of the Internet is not specific to a specific age group and covers all age groups. Researches have paid less attention to the effects of the Internet, especially the effect of use, duration, type and location of Internet use on students.

### **2.1. Internet and the Formation of Virtual Identity**

The World Wide Web is one of the most important innovations that some theorists, to emphasize its importance, have mentioned the effects of this huge information highway similar to the effects of the invention of printing on human life (Mohseni, 2002, p. 20). Internet is not a database, but the world's largest and most important computer network, and perhaps the earliest example of information highways in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Internet can be considered as a repository of good, bad, ugly and beautiful, moral and immoral information (ibid., p. 73).

Given that the Internet is a phenomenon of civilization, we find that its impact on the normal lives of individuals and cultural and social developments is very serious because Internet will create a cyberspace that has an unprecedented opportunity for the individual or social groups to build and display its identity, which leads to the multiplicity of individuals' identities. (Moeini Alamdari, 2006, p. 109).

Accordingly, Internet can be a source of influence in Iranian society in at least two ways: creating new values and creating a different and highly specific social environment. In the first place, these new values can have many identity implications, and younger people are usually more affected by these developments, as they are often proponents of mass media innovation. Internet, on the other hand, inevitably creates a new social space that operates on the basis of the virtual element and is followed by new ways of self identification.

In cases where this style of identification works to strengthen the opposite culture and manifests itself in the form of identity reactions, it is difficult to prevent the occurrence of these identity reactions (Moeini Alamdari, 2006, pp. 111-112).

From what has been said, it can be concluded that the Internet and Internet virtualization are among the accelerating factors of identity pluralism in our society that contribute to the identity pluralism of individuals. This, in turn, can exacerbate the identity crisis in society, because on the one hand, due to poor social organization, the government is usually unable to deal with the negative effects of this new phenomenon, which ultimately leads to the spread of the negative factors of the Internet. On the other hand, the creation of individual identity in the framework of the virtual sphere strengthens the "new individuality" that the socio-cultural structures of society are not able to respond to, and in many cases these challenges remain unanswered. In the long run, this can lead to the foreignization of sections of society and will lead to deep identity gaps and many cultural consequences.

## **2.2. National Identity**

National identity is the first identity formation achievable for any individual. Based on this view, national identity is the main foundation and prior to other identities. National identity as a scientific concept is one of the new inventions of social sciences which became common in the second half of the current century to replace the concept of "national mood" which is one of the concepts of the romantic era. National identity in this sense arose when the nation expression was formed in the modern sense (Rabbani, 2003, p. 87). If we consider identity as a sense of distinction and continuity, national identity can

simply be considered a sense of belonging to a particular nation that has traditions, holy places, customs, heroes, history, culture and a certain land.

In studying the concept of national identity, we must pay attention to two points: First, national identity is basically, of social ideas type; that is, it can not be transformed into individual ideas. Second, while being of the social perception type, it controls the behavior of the individual or member of society as a "basic personality" and gives him or her a social identity. Thus, in a society, national identity is realized when those social perceptions appear in the existence of each member of society as a basic personality, so that in general, this basic personality can be seen in almost in all members of society in an almost identical way (ibid, pp. 88-89).

Therefore, according to what has been said about identity, it can be concluded that national identity is a sense of belonging and loyalty to common elements and institutions that are shared in a common geographical, social and cultural context that has common values such as land and language. And it creates literature, customs, and a sense of belonging to individuals in a national society who identify themselves as certain identities.

### **2.3. Authoritarian Theory**

This theory was proposed in England in the 16th and 17th centuries and originated from the absolute authority of the king and his government or both. According to this theory, the main purpose of the mass media was to strengthen and advance the goals of the ruling government. And only one who had the governments permission could use the media. In fact, the ownership of the press and media in this era was privately and publicly owned by the authority. Finally, the media is considered as a means to achieve government goals and policies, and criticism of the ruling political and administrative system are prohibited (Surin and Tankard, 2003, pp. 441-443).

### **2.4. Liberal Theory**

This theory was developed in England in the 18th century and became more popular in the United States. This view has been developed to counter authoritarian theory. The main purpose of this view is information, entertainment and sales, but it mainly seeks to discover the truth and monitor

the government. In this theory, the press and media are mostly private, but anyone who can afford them can use them. The media are tools for monitoring the government and meeting the needs of society, and are controlled in two ways: 1. by the process of self-correction of truth and falsehood or pluralism. 2. by the courts or the legal system. In this view, slander, accusation, vulgarity, sedition and rioting during war are forbidden (Surin and Takcard, 2003, p. 443).

### **2.5. Social Responsibility Theory**

The theory of social responsibility was introduced in America in the twentieth century. This theory is taken from the writings of SW Hawking and the Freedom and Lawyers Committee and the Media Law, and its purpose is to inform, entertain and sell, and also according to this theory, the media should cause controversy and grow issues. Anyone who has something to say can use the media. The media is controlled by consumer action, public opinion, and professional ethics. In other words, new media and technologies are controlled by non-governmental oversight. Media ownership is more personal unless the government provides it for public service (ibid, 1381, 445-446).

### **2.6. Soviet Totalitarian Theory**

The theory of Soviet totalitarianism was introduced in the Soviet Union and spread under the same name in many countries around the world. The main purpose of this theory is to help the maintaining and survival of the Soviet socialist system, especially to help the party dictatorship. The media is controlled by the government's economic and political oversight, and only loyal and principled members of the party have the right to continue to use the media. Criticism of party goals is prohibited and media ownership is public.

### **2.7. Sherry Turkle**

Ms. Turkle believes that we are at the end of the Freudianism century. Freud was a product of the nineteenth century, although he had a very different scientific burden than our time, but today in the face of the challenges of cyberspace, our need for a philosophy of self-knowledge has increased. A philosophy that can withstand the diversity and complexity of subjects, the

---

power of symbolism, and personality representations, so we seem to be moving from psychological analysis to a computer culture in which we no longer have to deal with the rules of Freudianism, and we can instead evaluate it by information processing errors (Turkle, 1999, p. 643).

She believes when we look at ourselves in the car mirror, we see a different image of ourselves. She adds: "In the last ten years (1984), when I first thought of my computer as a 'mirror of myself', I saw a correspondence between human beings and machines, but today this is no longer the main issue because the rapidly evolving network system, specifically called the Internet, connects millions of people and changes the way we think, the shape of our communities, and our personalities (Turkle, 1999, p. 643).

### **2.8. George Herbert Mead's Theory of Social Identity**

George Herbert Mead is the pioneer of social identity theory. His three main concepts are: society, self and mind. This classification shows different aspects of the process of social action (Little, 2006, p. 373). In his view, the mind, self and society emerge in a process of interaction. It is not possible to assume a fixed and stable nature for the mind, self and society, or to study them separately. Mead's analysis of "self" is another aspect of the identity issue and self-independence (Ritzer, 2005, p. 274).

According to Mead, the two basic elements are "I" and "Me", which he says are different from each other. He believes: Me is a part of the self that the actor is aware of and in fact, it is nothing but the unorganized approach of others, or generalized others. I review the compromised and social oversight, forces. And I is a part of self that the actor is not aware of; we become aware of it only after the action has taken place. "I" is the immediate reaction of the actor when reacting to me. The self is the product of the I and Me relationship "(Ibid., p. 280).

In fact, self is the result of "Me and I". In other words, self and therefore self-awareness are above all the result of the internalization of others point of view. He did not see the human mind as a thing or a phenomenon, but as a social process (ibid., p. 275).

According to Mead, society or group life is a set of common behaviors and actions among its members. In other words, "society consists of a network of



social interactions in which participants use symbols to give meaning to their actions and those of others" (Little, 1384, p.376).

Therefore, society or group life is just a social organization through which the mind and self arise. He sees society more as models of interaction, and in fact he prioritizes society over the individual and believes all the mental processes of individuals arise from society (ibid, p. 281).

## **2.9. Herbert Marcuse**

Herbert Marcuse was one of the biggest critics of new technologies. He believed that technology in a new society leads to totalitarianism. In fact, he says; this technology leads to more effective and even more enjoyable methods of external monitoring of individuals. He rejects the idea that technology is neutral in the new world and instead sees it as a means of dominating people. According to him, this device is effective because it seems neutral but in fact enslaves people, technology serves to suppress individuality "(Ritzer, 2005, p. 203).

Marcuse believes the growth of instrumental rationality and the development of technology for human beings have resulted in nothing but misery and war. In the book *One-Dimensional Man*, he says: "The development of technology has made the domination of society over individuals difficult and has created a system, which in turn determines the policy of this development and the form of life and ability of human beings.

It is obvious that any protest and shouting due to historical knowledge and for the sake of human freedom has been considered as a bad thing. Any qualitative change, which leads to the creation of institutions completely different from the organizations of the industrial society, and creates new knowledge about production and quality of life, will certainly be suppressed by society (Bahrami Komeil, 2010, pp.74-75).

He does not consider technology as a problem by itself, but the kind of technology that is prevalent in modern capitalist societies as the enemy of human beings.

## **2.10. Hypotheses**

-There seems to be a significant relationship between the duration of time users use the Internet and their national identity.

---

-It seems that there is a significant relationship between the amount of Internet users, usage of internet and their national identity.

-There seems to be a significant relationship between the level of familiarity of users using the Internet and their national identity.

-There seems to be a significant relationship between where users use the Internet and their national identity.

-There seems to be a significant relationship between users' type of use of the Internet and their national identity.

### **3. Research Method**

The research method in the present study is survey and the unit of analysis is "individual". The data collection tool was a questionnaire. The statistical population of this study consists of all students of Sari Azad University (11865). The sample size is 372 people and sampling method is simple random.

#### **3.1. Validity and Reliability of the Research**

The research questionnaire consisted of 32 researcher-made questions, which were used to determine the validity of the research instrument (questionnaire), face validity and structural validity. Cronbach's alpha has also been used to assess validity. In this study, the total Cronbach's alpha is 0.81 and indicates that the research tool has good reliability and validity. 44, 4% of the respondents are women and 55.6% of them are men, of which 68% of the respondents are single and 32% of them are married. In terms of educational level, 87, 7% of undergraduate students, 10, 7% in master's degree and 1, 6% are studying for a doctorate, of which 43% of respondents are studying mathematics and engineering, 23, 7% are studying in experimental and medical fields, and 33, 3% are studying humanities. Their average semester is 4, 2 and the minimum semester is 1 and the maximum is 10.

Of the total respondents, 86, 6% of the respondents use the Internet and 13,4% of them do not use the Internet. In other words, from now on, students who do not use the Internet will be excluded in the analysis of this study. The average duration of Internet use is 5.3 years and the minimum and maximum are one year and 14 years, respectively. The average daily usage of the Internet

is 2 hours and the minimum and maximum are less than one hour (half an hour or less) and 12 hours, respectively. 0.6% of students are not familiar with Internet at all, 4, 6% are very little, 31, 9% are low, 52.6% are familiar and 10, 3% are very familiar with the Internet. The usefulness of using the Internet for 0.3% of students is none, 0.6% is very low, 8, 8% is low, 59, 1% is high and 31, 1% is very high. 17, 2% of them use the Internet in the internet cafe, 7, 4% in the university and 75, 4% use it at home.

The type of Internet use about sending or receiving emails, most respondents' (i.e. 25, 8%), use it to a lesser extent, about getting software, most respondents' (i.e. 21.2%), use it less, about scientific search (i.e. 35, 2%), High, about internal news search, (i.e. 28, 8%), low, about foreign news search, (i.e. 26, 3%), low, about educational sites, (i.e. 31, 7%), high, about Cultural websites

### 3.2. Describing Respondents Based on National Identity Variable

Students' national identity indicators average is 3.95, and the minimum and maximum of it are respectively 2 and 5. Therefore it seems student's national identity is higher than the assessed average.

### 3.3. Testing the First Hypotheses

It seems that there is a significant relationship between usage of internet and the users' national identity.

### 3.4. Testing the Second Hypothesis

It seems that there is a significant relationship between the amount of Internet usage and national identity.

**Table 1. Pearson correlation of the second hypothesis**

		Daily amount of internet usage
National identity	Pearson correlation	-0.188
	Significance level	0.001
	Amount	323

### 3.4. Testing the Third Hypothesis

There seems to be a significant relationship between the level of familiarity of users with the Internet and their national id.

**Table 2. Pearson correlation of the third hypothesis**

		Level of familiarity with using the internet
NATIONAL IDENTITY	Pearson correlation	-0.135
	Significance level	0.022
	Amount	321

### 3.5. Testing the Fourth Hypothesis

There seems to be a significant relationship between internet location and national identity.

**Table 3. Pearson correlation of the fourth hypothesis**

Location	Amount	average	Standard deviation	standard error	confidence (%) interval for the average		minimum	maximum
					low	High		
Internet cafe		3.9512	0.56248	0.8480	3.7802	1222.4	2.76	86.4
University	23	4.1843	0.41945	0.9381	3.9880	3807.4	24.3	95.4
Home	233	3.8896	0.5892	0.0843	8098.3	9693.3	95.1	95.4
general	309	3.9207	0.5788	0.3748	8623.3	9892.3	95.1	95.4

**Table 4. Table of Between Group and Among Groups**

	sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Squares average	F	.Sig
Between groups	1.637	2	0.818		
Among groups	90.200	273	0.330	2.477	0.006
General	91.836	275			

### 3.6. Testing the Fifth Hypothesis

There seems to be a significant relationship between the type of Internet usage amongst its users and their national identity.

**Table 5. relationship between the type of Internet usage amongst its users and their national identity**

Row		amount	average	Standard deviation	Rates priority	Rate of correlation with national identity		
						Correlation rate	Significance level	Correlations priority
1	Chat Sending	327	2.16	1.26	22	-0.36	0.00	1
2	or receiving emails	326	3.05	1.26	7	-0.33	0.00	4
3	Online gaming	322	1.85	1.17	24	-0.17	0.00	12
4	Downloading softwares	319	2.94	1.28	8	0.10	0.08	
5	Scientific search	325	4.19	0.86	1	0.12	0.05	16
6	Searching domestic news	323	3.16	1.16	5	0.07	0.19	21
7	Searching foreign news	322	2.71	1.26	11	-0.10	0.08	19
8	Sports websites	322	2.85	1.41	9	-0.11	0.06	10
9	Educational websites	323	3.51	1.06	2	0.22	0.00	8
10	Cultural websites	323	3.17	1.12	6	0.20	0.00	10
11	Economic websites	323	2.48	1.16	15	0.01	0.82	24
12	Political websites	321	2.95	2.95	13	0.00	0.94	26
13	Entertainment websites	325	3.41	1.15	4	-0.14	0.01	15
14	Domestic music	325	3.42	1.28	3	-0.02	0.72	23
15	Foreign music	321	2.82	1.43	10	-0.20	0.00	11
16	Downloading religious films	311	2.12	1.12	15	0.17	0.00	13
17	Downloading comedy films	319	2.46	1.12	17	-0.01	0.10	25
18	Downloading family films	320	2.51	1.3	14	-0.04	0.43	22
19	Downloading	323	1.69	1.09	26	-0.36	0.00	2

	sexual films							
20	Downloa ding shows	320	2.21	1.35	20	-0.32	0.00	5
21	Sexual images	321	1.78	1.17	25	-0.35	0.00	3
22	Iranian singers images	320	2.41	1.29	16	-0.16	0.00	14
23	Foreign singers images	323	2.35	1.35	18	-0.24	0.00	7
24	Iranian celebritie s images	324	2.61	1.30	12	-0.09	0.11	20
25	Foreign celebrity images	322	1.28	1.27	19	-0.21	0.00	9
26	Writing on blogs	319	2.18	1.21	23	-0.25	0.00	6

The above table proves this significance.

**Table 6. Friedman Test**

Respondent number	261
Freidman test square statistics-Chi	1540
Freedom rate	25
e rateSignificanc	0.000

The above table shows that there is a significant relationship between entertiament site, online games, mail-sending, sex images, downloding movie shows, music and national identity.

#### 4. Multiple Regression

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Not standardized B	standard error	standardized Beta	T	.Sig	F	R
National identity	daily internet usage rate	-0.18	0.16	-0.155	-2.541	0.012	3.8	0.20
	Familliariry with internet usage	-0.14	0.049	-0.11	-1.118	0.005		
	duration of internet i usage	-0.6	0.53	-0.15	-0.762	0.007		
Rate of daily internet usage	Familliariry with internet usage	1.23	0.15	0.41	8.3	0.00	64	0.37
Duration of internet usage	Familliariry with internet usage	0.29	0.4	0.34	6.6	0.00	44	0.34

#### 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was an attempt to find out how the Internet will affect on the national identity.

We stated several hypotheses. The role of government and policymakers is important in this regard. Internet can become an opportunity to stenghten the identity. We did our best ro confirm the hypotheses and show the existence between the independent variables and dependent variables. This technology has entered every part of people's daily life and has affected all aspects of their lives. Easier, simpler, wider and cheaper communications are all advantages of these technologies, however, there may be negative effects. Technology is not inherently harmful, but it can have detrimental, unintended and unexpected effects

#### References

- Abbasi, M., & Khalili Kashani, M. (1999). *Strategic studies*. Tehran: Tehran Publication
- Bahrami, M. (2010). *Sociology of Communication*. Tehran: Kavir Publication.
- Didar, M. (2002). *Sociology of information society*. Tehran: Mohseni Publishing.

- 
- Rabani, J. (2003). *National identity*. Tehran: Association of Parents and Educators of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Ritzer, G. (2005). . Tehran: Thalasi.
- Stephen, J. (2005). Theories of communication. Tehran: Noorbakhsh Publication.
- Turkle, S. (1999). Identity Cybe. *Sociology*, 28(6), 643-648.