

**Manifestations of the identity crisis among Algerian youth:
Between real and virtual reality
A study of a sample of young tiktok users**

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Abstract:

The objective of this study is to gain insight into the depth of the identity crisis among Algerian youth in light of their excessive use of the TikTok application. This will be achieved by demonstrating the impact of these new means on a sample of students from the Faculty of Media, Communication and Audiovisual Sciences at Constantine University. In addition, an integrated view will be provided on the issue of the positioning of Algerian youth between real and virtual identity.

The findings indicate that interactions on TikTok expose youth to new values and behaviors, leading to a state of cultural alienation and a loss of local specificity.

Keyword: identity; identity crisis; tiktok; youth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is arguably the most significant innovation of the last century, alongside computers, satellites and fibre optics. The emergence of social media networks has further amplified its influence and accelerated its growth in recent years, with the number of users exceeding one million in a relatively short period of time, effectively establishing it as a self-contained economic entity.

To illustrate, TikTok, the most prominent and widely used interactive social media platform, has rapidly amassed a vast user base, exceeding expectations due to its free and user-friendly interface. It has become the primary mode of daily communication for users across various devices, including computers, tablets, and smartphones. This open communication space has emerged as a significant alternative to traditional, closed media channels.

The TikTok platform has become the most widely used global communication medium in recent years, due to its capacity to connect individuals from all over the world, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. TikTok has become a daily outlet for opinion, expression and free intercontinental communication in sound and images, as well as the possibility of broadcasting live video. This allows the platform to provide information to its users and respond to their expectations in various areas of daily social, cultural, economic and political life, thereby becoming an important source of entertainment and news.

Such applications provide users with the opportunity to express themselves and their affiliations, as well as to disseminate information about their lives through their posts. As with other forms of communication, social media has a significant impact on an individual's upbringing. It can reinforce their values and support their adherence to moral and religious principles, or conversely, it can weaken their social affiliation and reduce their adherence to cultural identity.

The social personality of the individual is driven by a desire to achieve a state of harmonious belonging within their society, which is



a key factor in their overall sense of well-being. This aspiration is shaped by the need to participate positively and to feel a sense of common identity. It also contributes to the formation of the individual's awareness of their belonging to the cultural identity of the society in question. This is particularly relevant given that identity is closely linked to the way the individual interprets their existence within society and redefines their personality, as well as their sense of familiarity, competition, and participation with others.

It is therefore important to pay attention to the strengthening of the cultural identity of members of society, particularly in relation to young people in adolescence. This is a period of life that is considered to be particularly sensitive, given that the individual at this stage requires a certain level of understanding, guidance and personal development in social conditions that effectively express their characteristics and social and value standards.

The period of adolescence, as the initial stage of youth, is regarded as a highly sensitive phase, marking the inception of an individual's identity formation. During this stage, an individual begins to delineate their personality and determines their roles and how they will function within their social context. During this period, the individual experiences a crisis in identity formation as they attempt to ascertain the significance of their roles in life. They may also exhibit a state of distraction as they endeavour to establish a set of goals that they seek to achieve in order to validate their existence.

The information acquired from socialisation institutions, the family, school and the media plays a pivotal role in the formation of the adolescent's identity. It can serve as a source of information that aligns with their true identity or, conversely, as a source of information that is incongruent with their social culture, thereby engendering a state of conflict in the formation of their identity.

Nevertheless, the evolution of interactive applications and social networking sites has positioned them as the most significant sources of information and interaction in the present era. Adolescents dedicate a considerable portion of their day to these digital platforms, spending more time on them than in their physical surroundings. These virtual

environments are characterised by values that may differ from those espoused in the tangible world.

Consequently, the influence of these new media on adolescents is amplified, as they internalise ideas, form relationships and adopt behaviours through these digital avenues. This phenomenon has the potential to blur the boundaries between individual and virtual identities.

As a result of the considerable time spent by a significant proportion of young people engaged with these types of applications, there is a tendency for them to become isolated and individualised, as evidenced by observations in numerous Arab societies today. This is manifesting in a growing sense of disconnection from the wider community and a lack of privacy, which is leading to feelings of loss and disintegration. This is creating a state of identity crisis for our youth.

In light of the aforementioned observations, this study focuses on investigating the identity of youth, with a particular emphasis on university students. The objective is to identify the manifestations of the identity crisis in this vulnerable demographic within our society. To this end, the following central question is addressed:

This study aims to examine the manifestations of the identity crisis among Algerian youth in the context of their interactions on the TikTok app.

The study proceeded to deconstruct the primary question into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the language used by young people on the TikTok platform?
2. The study also sought to ascertain whether young people would be willing to disclose their religious affiliation while using TikTok, and whether they would adhere to the ethical values of the Islamic religion in their online interactions.

3. To what extent are young people engaged with the potential of the TikTok application as a platform for exploring and engaging with local social and political issues?

4. To what extent are young people integrated into their social environment, and to what extent are they alienated from it as a result of electronic communication?

5. To what extent do the cultural patterns, including customs and traditions, values, food and clothing, reflect the influence of interactions on TikTok?

2. define the concepts:

The study was based on the following key concepts:

2.1 Definition of crisis:

The term "crisis" is defined as follows: "A crisis can be defined as a state of tension and a turning point that requires a decision resulting in new negative or positive situations that affect the various entities involved" (Shaalán, 2002, p. 26)

2.2 Definition of Identity:

It can be defined as "the extent to which an individual achieves self-awareness, uniqueness and independence, and is perceived as a distinct entity from others, with a sense of internal integration, homogeneity and continuity over time, and adherence to the ideals and values of their culture"(Al-Sayyid, 1998, p. 400).

2.3 Definition of Cultural Identity:

The term "cultural identity" is defined as "the constant, essential and common measure of the general features and characteristics that distinguish the civilisation of this nation from other civilisations and that make the national or national personality distinct from other national and national personalities" (Al-Tuwaijri, 1997, p 15).

2.4 Definition of Identity Crisis:

In its current state, The term is defined as "the absence of norms that control action and guide behaviour in social life'. The decline in the value of patriotism among young people is a consequence of the

perception that the homeland is the source of wealth and prosperity. This has led to the replacement of national symbols with global ones that lack the specificity associated with the homeland” (Balgheeth, 2011, p 355).

• **Operational definition:**

Our definition of identity crisis is aligned with the assertion that there has been a decline in interest in ethics and an excessive attachment to materialism. “This is evidenced by the observation that the Arab-Islamic reality is witnessing the atrophy of numerous moral values, including chastity, sincerity, honour, honesty, truthfulness, mercy, kindness to parents, charity to neighbours, and respect for the guest” (Ibid., p 355).

3. Methodology

3.1 Method of the study

Given the nature of the study, we employed the descriptive method, which entails the description and analysis of the nature, features, and characteristics of a specific society, situation, group, or individual. This method is concerned with the study of current facts related to a phenomenon or situation from a set of events, with the aim of obtaining information.

3.2 Study Sample

The study employed a sample of 112 university students, selected at random from a pool of TikTok users. The study questionnaire was distributed to a sample population of over 200 students with an active TikTok account. After a period of 20 days, 112 responses were received, which were subsequently analysed and included in the study sample.

3.3. Study Tool

A bespoke scale was constructed to enable the identification of manifestations of identity crisis among university students utilising the TikTok application. This scale is considered a questionnaire-like tool, comprising two parts:

- **The first axis:** Related to the personal information and data of the respondents.

- **The second axis:** Questions related to the topic of the survey and the respondents' opinion of it, and included 22 statements about the identity crisis among university youth influenced by the use of the Tiktok application.

4. Results of the field study:

4.1 Results related to the first axis: Personal data:

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 - 21 years	34	30.35
	22 - 25 years	41	36.60
	26 - 29 years	37	33.03
Total		112	100%
Gender	Male	49	43.75
	Female	63	56.25
Total		112	100%
Economic status	Low	28	25
	Medium	65	58.03
	High	19	16.96
Total		112	100%
Number of years using TikTok	Less than a year	4	3.57
	One to two years	9	8.03
	More than three years	99	88.39
Total		112	%100

The statistical data in the table clearly indicates that the young people in the study sample, 112 students using the TikTok application, are between the ages of 18 and 29 years old. The data reveals that only a small proportion of students are below the age of 22, with 34 students in this age group. The majority of students in the study area are female, representing 63% of the total sample.

The table also revealed that the majority of students from the University of Constantine 3-Saleh Boubnaider come from middle-income families, with 56.03% of respondents indicating a medium economic status.

Furthermore, the table indicates that the respondents are highly proficient in the use of the TikTok application, with 88.39% having used it for a period exceeding three years. This highlights the significant role the application plays in their lives.

4.2 Findings related to the second axis: Manifestations of identity crisis among young Algerian tuktuk users

No.	The phrase	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
01	I use Standard Arabic to write my posts and stream videos on TikTok	84	75	9	8.03	19	16.96
02	I don't use slang on TikTok	18	16.07	21	18.75	73	65.17
03	I don't tend to use foreign languages when communicating with others on TikTok	49	43.75	51	45.53	12	10.71
04	I prefer to mix Arabic and foreign words on TikTok	86	76.78	8	7.14	18	16.07
05	I disclose my religious affiliation on TikTok	72	64.28	9	8.03	31	27.67
06	I am not interested in religious topics and advice shared by others about religion on Tiktok	-	-	15	13.39	97	86.60
07	I mainly follow local events that take place in Algeria	49	43.75	12	10.71	51	45.53
08	I am not interested in following foreign issues in TikTok	86	76.78	14	12.5	12	10.71

09	I feel more comfortable with TikTok friends than with real ones	72	64.28	21	18.75	19	16.96
10	I would rather get help to solve my issues from my TikTok friends than some real-life friends	44	72.13	2	3.27	66	58.92
11	I prefer to integrate into foreign relationships compared to Arab and national ones	59	52.67	4	6.55	49	43.75
12	I feel lonely and anxious when the internet goes down and I can't access TikTok	78	69.64	15	13.39	19	16.96
13	I use a pseudonym on TikTok instead of my real name	73	65.17	22	19.64	17	15.17
14	I tend to change my country of residence on TikTok	61	54.46	-	-	51	45.53
15	My cultural identity is based on global cultural openness	69	61.60	31	27.67	12	10.71
16	Conversations with my foreign friends make me excited to live a Western lifestyle	55	49.10	9	8.03	48	42.85
17	I prefer my account not to be based on historical topics	71	63.39	29	25.89	12	10.71
18	I pay attention to posts about our customs and traditions and post them on Tiktok	63	56.25	45	40.17	4	6.55
19	I change my beliefs about the social customs of my region when I'm on TikTok	21	18.75	13	21.31	78	69.64
20	I prefer to use a picture of a young man wearing foreign clothes instead of my own because it is more attractive	44	72.13	20	17.85	48	78
21	I imitate TikTok celebrities in my wardrobe	78	69.64	25	22.32	9	8.03
22	I like the style of snacks that celebrities showcase on TikTok	69	61.60	24	21.42	19	16.96

The data indicates that the respondents predominantly utilise Arabic words written in foreign letters, with a significant proportion (76.78%) employing this approach. Additionally, the findings reveal that they predominantly utilise Classical Arabic in their posts, with a notable proportion (75%) doing so. Conversely, they demonstrate a clear reluctance to utilise the colloquial dialect, with a relatively low proportion (65.17%) employing it. Furthermore, they also exhibit a notable aversion to foreign languages, with a relatively low proportion (43.75%) utilising them.

The respondents demonstrate a proclivity for utilising a dual language between Arabic and French in their messages, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the prevalence of mobile phones. This does not, however, negate their adherence to the use of Classical Arabic at the expense of other languages. In this case, it can be stated that technology has exerted an influence on the linguistic aspect of the students under study, although this influence is limited and does not extend to the extreme impact of globalisation, which tends to use English as the dominant language in electronic content worldwide.

The proportion of students who disclosed their religious affiliation on the TikTok application was relatively high, at 64.28%. This indicates that a significant number of users wished to express their Islamic identity directly and demonstrate their commitment to this religion. In contrast, 27% of respondents indicated that they were opposed to this practice.

This is consistent with the tendency of individuals to conceal their religious beliefs and affiliations, which are integral to their identity. Conversely, the respondents demonstrate a notable inclination to engage with religious content and express opinions about it, with 86.60% doing so. This indicates a strong attachment to these contents and a keen interest in following them, which serves to reinforce their identity and authentic religious beliefs.

With regard to following local events that take place primarily in Algeria, the estimated percentage was 43.75%. In contrast, 76.78% of the sample indicated that they are not interested in following foreign issues on TikTok.

This finding corroborates the sample's attachment to their local community, as evidenced by their engagement with various political and social issues related to Algeria. In Algeria, there is a willingness to engage with these issues and discuss them with others. This suggests that the Internet, while it may create a sense of disconnection from one's immediate community, can also facilitate integration and involvement in society. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "electronic public domain" or the "electronic public sphere."

The majority of respondents (64.28%) indicated a preference for online interactions over face-to-face, with 52.67% expressing a preference for foreign connections over those within their own Arab communities. This indicates that respondents are eschewing face-to-face interactions in favour of virtual ones. They are at ease conversing with their online acquaintances but are reluctant to place complete trust in them, largely due to the anonymity and inauthenticity of their digital personas.

The 69.64% figure pertaining to feelings of anxiety and a sense of individuality when the internet is disrupted and access to TikTok is unavailable lends support to the notion of residing in a virtual community at the expense of social reality. This ultimately results in these young individuals becoming psychologically and socially estranged from their homeland.

Furthermore, 65.17% of the sample utilise pseudonyms to disassociate themselves from their original identity and adhere to a virtual identity that possesses disparate characteristics. Additionally, 54.46% alter their current place of residence and establish a fictitious location.

The results demonstrate that 61.60% of respondents endorse the concept of global cultural openness, which presents a significant risk to the individual's cultural identity, encompassing values, customs, traditions, and behavioural patterns. Furthermore, it was found that 49.10% of the young people surveyed indicated that discussions with their foreign friends have inspired them to embrace a Western lifestyle.

The statistical tables indicate that a notable proportion of respondents expressed interest in topics related to customs and traditions, with 56.25% indicating a desire to publish such content on TikTok for wider dissemination.

Furthermore, the data reveals that 69.64% of the respondents maintain their convictions regarding the customs of their region when engaging with TikTok content. This indicates a strong adherence to these customs, which reflect the local cultural characteristics of the respondents. In contrast, 18.75% of the respondents demonstrate a willingness to alter their convictions regarding regional customs. This suggests a readiness to acquire foreign customs through the medium of TikTok, reflecting the ease with which individuals are influenced by globalisation.

The majority of students (78%) indicated that they do not prefer to use the image of a young person wearing foreign clothes, citing it as more attractive. Additionally, the majority of students (69.64%) stated that they do not necessarily put their real personal photos on TikTok, indicating a desire to hide their real identity in exchange for a virtual identity.

The majority of Algerian youth (69.64%) imitate the international fashion favoured by TikTok celebrities when selecting their attire. This finding is at odds with their expressed disapproval of posting profile pictures that reflect a foreign style of clothing. This suggests that globalisation is influencing the daily lifestyle of youth.

A majority of respondents (61.60%) indicated a preference for following snack food pages, which may indicate a desire to consume these foreign products and integrate them into a globalised consumption pattern.

5. The results:

are as follows:

- The influence of technology on linguistic aspects of students has been observed, though to a limited extent. This is in contrast to the extreme impact of globalisation, which tends to use English as the dominant language of electronic contents worldwide.

However, this does not prevent the use of classical Arabic in written posts and the use of Arabic words written in French in personal conversations. This has a clearly defined impact on the Arabic language as a component of their cultural identity.

- The data demonstrate a clear tendency among the sample to reveal their religious affiliation, which aligns with their pronounced attachment to religious content on Facebook and their enthusiastic engagement with it. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the sample does not reveal their religious affiliation, which suggests that they disavow their religious beliefs and orientations that express their identity.

- The Algerian youth cohort displays a clear interest in following social and political issues that concern their local community through the contents posted on Facebook. This enables them to interact about these issues virtually, thereby providing an outlet for them to express opinions and issues that they would otherwise be unable to express in reality. This partly reflects their alienation from their community, despite the potential impact of social networking sites.

- The social relations of the sample members have been affected by electronic communication on Facebook, in particular, resulting in the disintegration of their relationships and the emergence of individualistic and isolated behaviours, with a preference for forming relationships virtually.

This increases the impact of their integration into foreign groups, which makes them more susceptible to acquiring Western patterns of behaviour, customs and traditions that are alien to their original society. Consequently, they will gradually lose their deep connection to their society, which has a significant impact on their cultural identity, particularly in light of the dominance of globalisation on their consciousness.

The interruption of internet access evokes feelings of anxiety and individualism among Algerian youth, particularly when they are unable to access Facebook.

This supports the notion that modern society is increasingly virtual, with a concomitant decline in social reality. The result is a growing alienation and an increase in cases of individuals experiencing a loss of sense of belonging to the self.

This creates an opening for digital identity to gain ascendancy over the real identity of individuals, thereby deepening the identity crisis among youth. The use of pseudonyms and the concealment of personal information serve to compound this problem.

- The prevailing circumstances mandate an identity that is receptive to external influences, able to coexist with them and embrace modernisation without compromising its fundamental tenets. This has resulted in a tendency among the younger generation to adopt a global outlook in expressing their cultural identity, which is traditionally characterised by local specificity.

- This has led to a situation where global forces exert greater influence than local ones, which poses a significant risk to the individual's culture, including its values, customs and traditions. The aforementioned factors contribute to the formation of a new identity that is open to the other, coexisting with it and accepting modernisation without abandoning its basic components.

- The influence of international fashion pages and snacks on the purchasing decisions of Algerian youth indicates their admiration and integration into the Western lifestyle, which carries the values of globalisation. This leads them to be immersed in this culture and fascinated by it to the point of preferring it over their own culture. This process of cultural penetration and assimilation into the culture of globalisation results in poor harmony between youth culture and the culture and society.

6. CONCLUSION

Social networks have become a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life, facilitating an important aspect of the daily social communication process in a virtual world where temporal and spatial borders are less defined and cultures interact. In this context, the formation of youth cultural identity and virtual identity is a key issue. Social networking sites facilitate integration, but this can lead to contradictions in the structure of the cultural identity of Algerian youth, due to their integration into the culture of the other.

This crisis situation is reflected in the level of identity, with young people displaying a sense of alienation from the self and society. This has led to a state of cultural disorientation, as evidenced by changes in behaviour patterns that are not aligned with the specificities of the local community. These changes serve the interests and goals of cultural globalisation.

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