

Engineering the digital self between privacy and exposure

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received: 24/04/2025

Accepted: 28/06/2025

Published: 30/06 /2025

Abstract:

This study, titled Engineering the Digital Self between Privacy and Exposure, explores how technological advancements in cyberspace influence the concept of self. It is based on the idea that expressing oneself through a particular identity is a dynamic and essential activity that adapts to contemporary needs and innovations. The research focuses on how these changes, particularly in the context of a globalized digital landscape, give rise to a digital self that contrasts with the authentic self. The study identified that maintaining cultural specificity within a global culture presents several challenges, highlighting the necessity to use various mechanisms to balance the contrasting forces of alienation and exposure.

Keywords: Self; identity; vulnerability; privacy; cyber threats.

1. INTRODUCTION

The post-realistic era in its globalized form in the context of cyberspace has

brought about many changes in the thinking of individuals towards the way they display their image to others, producing digital entities based on real or fictitious data for several considerations, including security and social ones, so that each individual has a digital presence that reflects his or her self within a specific identity. Thus, self-expression has become a dynamic and vital act that responds to the requirements of the times and the new developments produced by human civilization, especially in its post-realistic technical product in its globalized digital form, producing the digital self as opposed to the authentic self.

The concept of the "digital self" is one of the emerging concepts in the context of the effects of cyberspace, a concept that has cast a shadow over the physical presence of the individual, moving from real to virtual digital existence. This has raised many issues centered mainly on the manifestations of the user's identity that oscillate between a fixed identity and a mobile identity, but also talk about the stakes and the future of identity in light of the multiplicity of real and virtual selves, and whether local and national wraps can preserve their values, nature, characteristics and distinctions, or whether the cyberspace system has imposed itself as a system to fragment and disperse things, even if they are solid values and fixed principles.

In the early twenty-first century, digital identity became a focal point for researchers in the humanities and social sciences due to the security challenges it introduces, affecting not just individual users but also the very foundation of statehood.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following central question:

*How can an individual maintain privacy away from identity exposure within the framework of digital self-engineering?

The importance of this study lies in shedding light on one of the most important contemporary issues, namely the engineering of the digital self. This phenomenon has witnessed significant acceleration in line with the acceleration of technological advancements in light of globalization, which has necessitated research into the problems of self-display in cyberspace.

In search of a methodologically appropriate approach to the topic, the study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach to identify the problems of self-display in digital space. Regarding the theoretical framework, realist theory was used, based on the premise that individuals, within the framework of digital appearance, always seek to achieve and protect their personal interests, away from exposure to security and identity.

To address the problem, the study was divided into three main axes. The first axis addresses the digital self and privacy: a conceptual study. The second axis

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addresses the problems of self-display in digital space. The third axis addresses cyber threats and their implications for the security of the digital self.

2. The Digital Self and Privacy: A conceptual approach.

Digital identities are one of the most important phenomena troubling sociologists and anthropologists in the twenty-first century. They were initially unable to define them, as identity has become a dynamic, complex concept that responds to the changes imposed on the user by the digital world. Therefore, in this section, we will attempt to understand the concept of digital identity in both the public and private contexts.

2.1 The concept of the digital self:

The concept of self and digitization are two of the most closely related concepts, as the self expresses the way a person thinks in various fields, as well as the individual perception of his/her knowledge and perceptions. The self is the sum total of the knowledge and perceptions we build about ourselves.

2.1.1 Self-definition:

The etymological approach to the word self indicates that it is synonymous with the word self and thing, and the self of a thing is the same or the eye and essence of the thing, and the self is more general than the person, based on the fact that the self is called on the body and others, and the person is called only on the body. The self of a thing is its truth and its essence, as well as the saying, "He is aware of what is within the chests".¹

In ontological terms, the self is defined as the idea that an individual forms about himself through his perception of what he wants to achieve and the possibilities he has to build this image.

In the same context, psychologist Carol noted that the self-concept has three different components:²

- **Self-image:** This is the individual's perception of themselves.
- **Self-esteem:** Refers to the status that an individual creates for themselves.
- **The idealized self:** What an individual should be.

Thus, the concept of the self is what the individual perceives within himself and the perception of the surrounding environment, which confirms that the self arises from the relationship between the perceived self and the environment surrounding, and the self is the individual's perception of the various elements that make up his personality or inner and outer being by focusing on academic, physical, and social aspects.

In this sense, the concept of the self is a multidimensional concept, as it is considered a cornerstone in the construction of personality. The individual's self-

concept is of particular importance for understanding personality dynamics and psychological compatibility, and therefore it is necessary to distinguish between the social self, the perceived self and the ideal self, in light of the possibility of absorbing the values of others, and seeking compatibility and stability.³

Self-concept is a fundamental core of human personality, and it is one of the most important factors that influence human behavior and personal and social compatibility. It is also a concept that helps to know individual aspects and characteristics, and is a prerequisite for the psychological and physical health of each person. The way individuals feel and perceive themselves generally determines the extent of their success in different areas of life, as the individual's image of himself is of great importance in the future of his life, through what it reflects in terms of the individual's perception and vision of himself and his respect and acceptance of it, so whenever the self-concept is positive, it means that the individual is close to mental health, and whenever his self-concept is negative, this leads him to a mental health disorder.

In this sense, talking about the self leads us to refer to self-identity, which means "the personal realization of the social roles" that an individual can play in society, in addition to the **fact** that the identity of the individual, as indicated by **Amin Maalouf**, is not limited to what is recorded in official records, but also consists of cultural, linguistic and religious affiliation, defining that self in his self-identity book, saying: "My identity is what makes me not the same as any other person." ⁴

So, the concept of the self can be defined as perceptions and values that arise from the individual's interaction with the environment, and the self maintains the behavior of the counselor, and the self is in a state of growth and change as a result of continuous interaction with the reality surrounding the individual, which realizes its importance, because the individual chooses his response based on what should be his "perception" and not based on what is "reality".⁵

Self = Self as Subject + Self as Process.

Thus, Self-as Object means a person's attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and evaluation of himself as an object while Self-as Process is defined an actor who goes through a set of processes such as thinking, remembering, and perceiving, while Self-as Process is defined as an actor who goes through a set of processes such as thinking, remembering, and recognizing.

2.1.2 Digital self-definition:

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In the digital world, the concept of self-presentation is very different from what it is in the real world. In digital spaces, an individual may have multiple self-identities, which may or may not be related to each other, and may or may not correspond to the physical person behind them.

According to the general concept of identity, which considers it "the expression of all that relates to the self, and the conformity of the person to his or her own self, which means a sense of self and oneness. Identity expresses all that is essential and constant despite all the changes and the representations that humans form every time to express themselves and their potentials in their relationship with others. Therefore, the function of identity in the traditional sense is to protect the individual and collective self from the factors of erosion and dissolution.

However, in an era of technological dominance, the concept of identity has become a dynamic, dynamic concept, with new manifestations and new forms of self-expression.

Dutch researcher "Jose van Dijk", who specializes in digital society, has coined the term "self-promotion" for online self-expression and identity formation, as cyberspaces have transformed our perception of ourselves in the formulation of the so-called digital self.⁶

The latter is how the individual describes and perceives the individual self, through mechanisms and methods of interaction, and the various representations that reflect the self digitally, as the technological format is an important factor in shaping the identity of the individual. The human and societal transformation from "natural space" to "technological space" has a set of outcomes that have come to shape human identity in front of others in light of the impact of technologies on the necessary and impossible forms of self-expression, including the construction of a new digital identity that is open to the world.

2.2 The concept of privacy:

Privacy is considered one of the basic human rights, as it is a recognized right, and it is perhaps the right that is being increasingly refocused at the present time in light of the secretions and effects of the use of information technology and the increasing use of cyberspace. The origin of the word privacy goes back to the origin of the word privacy, where Padinter defined it as: "Everything that has nothing to do with public life or is everything that is not considered from public life."

According to its historical development, privacy has three main milestones, by recognizing the right to protect individuals from physical attacks on their lives and property, which is known as physical privacy, as well as the protection of the values and moral elements of the person, which is known as moral privacy. Without

losing sight of the right of individuals to control private information and data in the face of the challenges of the digital age the framework of what is known as informational privacy.⁷

3. Problems of self-presentation in cyberspace:

Cyberspace is defined as a socio-spatial space created by the combination of media technologies and the Internet within a networked matrix that allows us to produce and exchange data, textual and audiovisual content, and interact in ways governed by the frameworks of social reality, its cultural systems, and its deliberative codes and determinants.⁸

Therefore, the way the self-presentation in cyberspace has raised a number of issues that directly affect the manifestation of the self, its cultural specificity, and raised a set of issues, the most important of which is the issue of identity exposure.

3.1 the issue of congruence between the true self and the false self:

Returning to German-American philosopher "Erich Fromm's" book "The Alienated Man," we find that he introduced the concepts of the true self and the false self, explaining that the true self is characterized by a thinking person capable of thinking, feeling, and creating, while the false self lacks all or some of these qualities. Therefore, the concept of the true self is synonymous with the non-alienated self, which has realized its integral human existence, while the false self is the self that has alienated itself, thus producing a separation from its authentic human existence.⁹

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger also addressed the idea of authentic existence and false existence, which proves that the idea of the real self and the false self goes back to the existential philosophy of Heidegger and the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, where the latter distinguished between existence within the crowd and isolated existence, as the former is a false existence that escapes from responsibility and the burden of freedom, and this is the cancellation of human existence, while the isolated existence is the real existence capable of assuming responsibility and exercising freedom. The former is the false presence that has escaped responsibility and the burden of freedom, which is the abolition of human existence, while the latter is the real presence that is able to assume responsibility and exercise freedom.¹⁰

Thus, digital worlds have allowed the individual the freedom to produce a digital identity or a set of identities, with the possibility of modifying and updating them according to their desires or according to their perceptions, reflecting the era of flexible identities instead of rigid ones, which the digital individual forms from the multiple cultures provided by the global network, by relying on personal data

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algorithms or others chosen by the user for many considerations, such as hiding their real identity, by putting fake information such as pseudonyms.¹¹

In this sense, the digital presence of the individual raises a set of questions based the nature of the interactor's use of virtual platforms and the extent of congruence between the real personality of the individual in reality, or the authentic self, and the personality that appears on the sites, based on the fact that the nature of the self in cyberspace works to shape and engineer the image of the self born in cyberspace, or what is called the digital ethos.

3.2 Cultural specificity versus cosmopolitan culture "Cosmic Identity":

Discussing identity in terms of what something is and how it defines itself closely aligns with the concept of immediacy; it embodies what characterizes a person and reflects their reality from a metaphysical perspective. However, the notion of specificity pushes us toward distinguishing the human being not just as an individual entity but through their connection to a particular group or society. This interplay between specificity and universality urges a shift away from isolated individualism to a broader perspective of openness, encompassing diverse cultural and societal dimensions.

The debate between specificity and universality raises a fundamental challenge: how to balance the universal, which encompasses all aspects uniting human diversity in its rich complexity, with the specific, which shapes the unique identities of individuals, societies, and cultures. This calls for exploring the potential of reconciling these two dimensions—upholding universality as a shared human goal that seeks unity, while simultaneously respecting the need for difference and preserving the right to distinctiveness.

How can we safeguard identity while avoiding a rigid stance that insists on framing universality through the lens of a particular specificity? Furthermore, how do we strive for universality without dismissing the value of specificity or succumbing to exclusionary tendencies in our pursuit? The challenge lies in imagining a universal framework that fosters communication under selective conditions, all while respecting and integrating the nuances of specific contexts.

In this sense, personal identity is a dimension of identity by being all that characterizes the uniqueness, unity, and uniqueness of the self, "self-consciousness" and the individual's representation of this consciousness so it must be taken into account without stopping only at it, so Locke's definition of personal identity was different from his definition of human identity. Personal identity is the metaphysically and ethically perceived identity of the self and is defined as a person's uninterrupted sense of who he or she is.

Edgar Moran addressed the issue of identity through the complexity and diversity of the levels of human identity, as he believes that the diversity between individuals and cultures is so great that we consider human unity to be an abstraction. Moran considers identity to be a composite of personal identity, social identity, and cultural identity, in light of the impossibility of a pure identity, as a single identity is formed by many internal and external factors, and is therefore a composite whole of multiple cultures, and the composite identity leads the human being towards openness to the universal, that is, as an identity perceived from within and without, which is the source of the distinction of one society from another society or one culture from another culture.

In this sense, cosmopolitan culture is an idea that embodies the alliance of cultures while retaining their specificities, which is completely different from what is promoted under globalization, as it is the actual embodiment of the equation of international hegemony and the equation of the dominant culture. On this basis, we should not categorically reject cosmopolitan culture, but we must define the conditions for constructive dialogue between cultures, which represents a basic condition in adopting decentralization through the experience of the other, and accepting to enter the language game to carry out the experience of dialogue, in addition to reviewing our view of dialogue to achieve a hermeneutical understanding based on the openness and multiplicity of meaning, a product to recognize the role of habits, as we must recognize that our positions are built according to habit, we live in a specific place and a specific period and move in a certain environment and all these elements form our entity and interpretive awareness alone enables us to open to real dialogue and criticism through communication.

3.3 Identity Security vs. Identity Vulnerability:

The issue of identity security versus identity exposure is part of the approach of alienation, which is based on the basic premise of "denying humanity from its essence", as the individual's rejection of the customs, traditions and values prevailing in society, his distance the cultural and social norms of his society, and his preference for all that is foreign and alien to him leads to alienation that produces exposure and threatens identity security.¹²

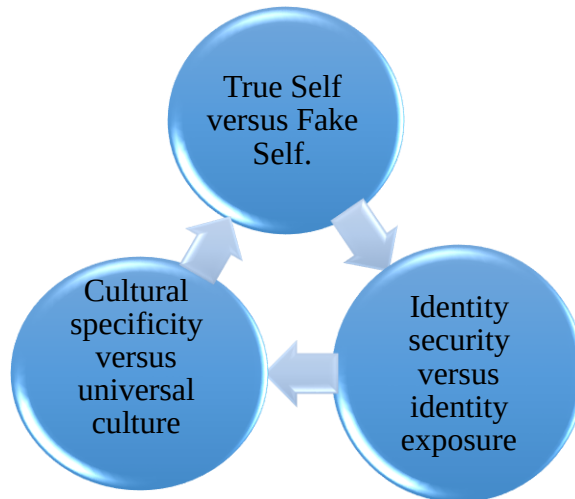
We can also point out that what individuals give of themselves through their information exposure is what threatens their technological security in the first place, to feed the control of Internet giants through the smart dominance of artificial intelligence and advanced software, and then activate their control and exploitation of the huge data collected about users, and in accordance with the activation of the

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legislative aspect and work on inter-legal initiatives in the form of agreements and binding laws, especially by third world countries, it seems that education on digital means or digital education is the only option that must be worked on to educate users about these dangers and rationalize their use. Identity security in the post-realist era, in its globalized digital form, is no longer just a cultural-intellectual goal, but has become a comprehensive civilizational goal, involving national and political aspects that are no less important than others. Identity security means the ability to retain cultural specificity in light of cultural diversity.

It also means building the power of self-existence, which is not only capable of resistance and steadfastness, but also of impulse and effective action, thus strengthening the immunity of the self against all movements to weaken the homogeneity of identities.

Problems of self-presentation in cyberspace.



Therefore, self-presentation in cyberspace is based on two key elements:

- Pride in the cultural self, because it is the framework or vessel that represents the symbols, ideas, and values of society, thus giving the self the natural horizon to defend its social and historical being, which is the strategic choice through which we can achieve identity cohesion.
- Openness and dialogue with different cultures and identities, within the framework of various dialogic spaces, including cyber, but without identity alienation. This can only be done by deepening our spiritual, religious and cultural values through the development of comprehensive cultural policies within the various real-life social groups (family, school, university, friends, neighbors, ...).

4. Cyber Threats and Digital Self Security:

The fundamental problem in building digital social relationships is the constant desire to escape from real society to digital society, thereby displaying either one's true self or one's false self, which poses numerous threats to the individual's self in the globalized digital world.

4.1 The reality of cyber threats:

Cyber space is considered one of the modern spaces for human interaction, which has increased in prominence after the rapid trend to exploit technological development in the service of the requirements of individuals and societies, which has become, due to its virtual nature - which is difficult to control - loaded with new threats that pose a challenge to the security of the state and society, and among the most prominent of these threats we find:¹³

- **Violations of the confidentiality and disclosure of personal data:** There are many forms of violations of the confidentiality of personal data, including the violation by those in charge of the processing process of the legal conditions and methods stipulated internally, , such as the failure to grant a license from the competent authorities, its revocation or expiration, and the issue of illegal disclosure of data is one of the most important forms of violations of data confidentiality, the most common of which are those related to electronic banking transactions.

- **Cognitive espionage:** This is done by eavesdropping on computers and intercepting electronic correspondence, often by installing cognitive spyware, which are programs designed to collect data from a computer or other device and forward it to another party without the user's consent or knowledge. This poses a challenge to the digital self.

- **Digital fabrication:** Digital fabrication is one of the most important forms of random and uncontrolled circulation of information in cyberspace, and it comes in the form of text, image or video, which constitutes a clear violation of digital privacy with its impact on the digital community in general and the digital self in particular.

- **Promoting extremist ideology:** One of the causes of the pollution of the digital environment lies in the exploitation of young people's use of information technology to spread extremist ideology and hate speech among members of the same society by stirring up nationalism, ethnicity, and sectarianism. The Internet and various social media have also been used to attract young people to terrorist movements by following the method of electronic recruitment based on appeals and gaining support related to religious aspects. This poses a real threat to the value dimension of self-identity.

4.2 Challenges to the digital self in light of current cyber threats:

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With all that the transformations of human experience in the use and effects of digital technology, multidisciplinary scientific research, and philosophical visions and theses, self-presence in the digital environment faces a set of challenges, including those related to self-image, and those related to identity.

4.2.1 From lifestyle change to self-image change:

Cyberspace is changing not only our lives, but also our selves, by providing us with new tools that ensure the social construction of our selves, in a self-directed manner. On the Internet, just as the rules of social interaction are constructed, so is the self, and unlike the fixed, individualized, and authoritative identity of the past, online identity is multiple and subject to repeated fabrication and revision. Older ideas of identity were associated with the concept of authenticity, but virtual experiences proved the opposite, by not only de-centralizing the self, but also multiplying the self and blurring its boundaries.

4.2.2 non-possibility and the disappearance of the body "from a physical existence to a digital virtual existence":

The changes brought about by technology have transformed social life from traditional patterns of social order to modern ones, affecting not only the external extensions of the individual, but also more deeply the internal extensions, establishing new forms of existential affiliations.

The existence of the contemporary individual has moved from physical existence to virtual digital existence, and thus humans in the new digital system are divided into two sections, analog selves and digital selves. Analog selves are those who do not have a presence on the network in light of the continuation of traditional communication, while digital selves are the categories that are integrated into the virtual network, reflecting the individual's involvement in a new system of thinking and communication that makes digital existence the most important form of existence in general.¹⁴

Therefore, the virtual presence is a break and transgression of the physical presence by bypassing the traditional elements of personal identity, manifested in different ways through symbolic images and pseudonyms that may be an extension of a real presence, as well as its opposite, thus posing a real challenge to the authentic self.

4.2.3 Self-unity and multi-identity:

The binary oppositions of ego/other, black/white, male/female, and writer/reader will disappear in the world of cyber discourse, which is far from certainty. Within this structure, the self or identity becomes not only something that

is mediated by the network, but the identity itself acquires the characteristics of the network. This confirms that the unity of the self in cyberspace disappears in favor of multiple identities, which raises many questions, the most important of which is the fate of the authentic self.¹⁵

The reality of our contemporary society, which is fragmented between the real and the virtual, but also between the duality of networks and identity, foreshadows the crises of the contemporary man who is lost between the moral, value and normative, which imposes the need to spread cultural awareness of the importance of preserving the components of the authentic self by achieving identity cohesion.

5. CONCLUSION

This research focused on shaping the digital self while navigating the balance between privacy and exposure. It explored the conceptual framework of engineering the digital self and privacy, examined challenges related to self-presentation in the digital realm, and addressed cyber threats along with their effects on the digital self. The study yielded several key findings, with the most notable being:

- In today's digital age, fully maintaining or preserving one's privacy has become increasingly challenging due to the indirect threats that constantly expose us in cyberspace. While the digital self serves as a gateway to engaging with other cultures, it must do so while preserving cultural diversity. Cyberspace aspires to elevate the concept of privacy to a universal principle rather than forcing the world into a singular, uniform model.
- Openness and dialogue with diverse cultures and identities have become inevitable with the advancements in technology. This interaction occurs within various dialogic spaces, including the digital realm, while ensuring that individual identities are respected and preserved.
- We should not categorically reject global culture, but we need to define the conditions for constructive intercultural dialog.
- Identity security in the post-realist era, in its globalized digital form, is no longer just a cultural-intellectual goal, but has become a comprehensive civilizational goal, as identity security means the ability to retain cultural specificity in light of cultural diversity

The study also proposed several recommendations, with the most significant being:

- The need to build the power of self-presence, which is not only capable of resistance and steadfastness, but also of impulse and effective action, in order to strengthen the immunity of the self against all movements to weaken identity

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homogeneity within the framework of cyberspace.

- The need to protect the cultural self, because it is the framework or vessel that represents the symbols, ideas and values of society, thus giving the self the natural horizon to defend its social and historical being, which is the strategic choice through which we can achieve identity cohesion.
- The need to define the conditions for constructive intercultural dialog in cyberspace, based on the premise that only a hermeneutic awareness of our being can enable us to be open to real dialog and criticism through communication.
- The need to deepen our spiritual, religious and cultural values by developing comprehensive cultural policies within various real-life social groups (family, school, university, friends, neighbors, ...), in order to enhance community security as a gateway to comprehensive national security.
- The need to institutionalize the ethics of the digital self by focusing on the intellectual and civilizational security bet

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