The role of social networks in shaping the identity and self-realisation of young people

Роль соціальних мереж у формуванні ідентичності та самореалізації молоді

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Abstract

The use of social media is one of the defining features of the modern world. This article aims to explore the role of social media in shaping youth identity and identify their potential as a tool for self-realisation (specifically using Ukraine as a case study). This mixed-method study combined interviews and a literature review. The target sample consisted of students (80 individuals) and experts in social interaction (45 individuals). The collected data were analysed using content analysis, comparison, and synthesis methods. The results indicate that both young respondents and experts equally recognise the importance of social media for self-presentation, finding like-minded individuals, and developing self-esteem. The key tags associated with social media are communication, interaction, texts, content, art, self-realisation, and socialisation. The main risks identified include bullying, developing a need for positive evaluation from others, "digital burnout," and an overemphasis on entertainment content. Countermeasures to such phenomena consist of conducting academic coaching to form identity and a correct vision of young people's prospects for self-realisation, as well as developing students' communicative competencies, stress resistance, and the ability to interact correctly with digital content and set priorities. In the conclusions, it is further emphasised that disseminating Ukrainian content (even entertainment-focused) through social media highlights new trends significantly more favourable to Ukrainian identity.

Keywords: Social networks, coaching, identity, professional self-realisation, risks.

Анотація

Використання соціальних мереж є однією із характерних ознак сучасного світу. Мета статті – дослідження ролі соціальних мереж у формуванні ідентичності молоді та визначення їхнього потенціалу як інструменту самореалізації (зокрема, на прикладі України). Дане дослідження поєднало методи інтерв'ювання та огляду наукової літератури. Цільова вибірка була сформована із здобувачів освіти (80 осіб) та експертів із галузі соціальної взаємодії (45 осіб). Отримані дані оброблено із використанням методів контент-аналізу, порівняння та синтезування. У результатах відзначено, що молоді респонденти й експерти однаково визнають важливість соціальних мереж для самопрезентування, пошуку однодумців, формування самооцінки. Головними тегами, які асоціюються із соціальні мережі є: комунікація, взаємодія, тексти, контент, мистецтво, самореалізація, спілкування. Найбільшими ризиками вказано булінг, формування потреби у позитивній оцінці від інших людей, «цифрове вигоряння», акцент на розважальному контенті. Протидії таким явищам полягає у впровадженні академічного коучингу як засобу формування ідентичності та коректного бачення перспективи самореалізації молоді, а також розвитку в студентів комунікативних компетентностей, стресостійкості, умінні правильно взаємодіяти із цифровим контентом та розставляти пріоритети. У висновках додатково наголошено, що розповсюдження у соціальних мережах українського контенту (навіть розважального) вказує на нові тренди, значно більш прихильні до української ідентичності.

Ключові слова: Соціальні мережі, коучинг, ідентичність, професійна самореалізація, ризики.

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Introduction

In a modern globalised society, the use of social media has become an integral element of daily life for young people, significantly influencing processes of self-identity formation, socialisation, and various aspects of self-realisation in both professional and personal spheres. Due to the rapid development of digital information environments and access to digital platforms, young individuals have gained unique opportunities for self-expression, exchanging ideas, and expanding their social networks. However, the emerging digital realities have also created modern challenges, particularly regarding the adverse effects of social media algorithms on self-perception, critical thinking development, social interaction, and integration into the community.

Identity plays a crucial role in these complex processes, undergoing noticeable and highly dynamic transformations in the modern world (Baker et al., 2019). In traditional societies, identity was primarily shaped within the framework of specific social groups based on longstanding cultural values and local traditions. In contrast, identity today increasingly results from individuals' constant interaction with multifaceted levels of the informational environment and its continuous evolution (González-Soriano et al., 2020). Popular contemporary social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, X, and Messenger have become significant tools for exchanging valuable content. At the same time, these platforms serve as instruments for constructing personal identity and shaping worldviews through active digital interaction (Stoliarchuk et al., 2024). Young people utilise these opportunities for active self-presentation, consuming others' content, exchanging experiences, building personal brands, and seeking and asserting their place within an ever-changing society.

There are different approaches in modern scientific works on the role of social networks in forming the identity and self-realisation of young people. In particular, some scientists have pointed to a positive impact, the possibility of self-expression, development of creative skills and professional growth through digital platforms (Stoliarchuk et al., 2024). From this point of view, social networks contribute to the construction of personal identity, expansion of social capital and integration into global communities.

At the same time, there are other opinions. In particular, different authors have emphasised the risks, such as strengthening social comparison, reducing self-esteem, and distorting the accurate perception of oneself and the world. Thus, it is essential to characterise the complex role of social networks. Social media is one of the most prevalent sources fostering a sense of dependency among young people on the opinions of others (Tatem & Ingram, 2022). Such negative manifestations can lead to distorted self-perceptions and idealised content, significant discomfort caused by trolling or other forms of cyberbullying, and risks associated with undesired social comparison. Moreover, disinformation, including explicit propaganda and hate speech, scammers and algorithmic traps, can pose substantial barriers to forming healthy self-determination, evaluative judgements, understanding criticism and self-criticism, and overcoming obstacles to self-realisation.

Therefore, the article aims to analyse the role of social media in shaping youth identity and to determine its potential as a tool for self-realisation. Achieving this aim requires addressing several specific tasks:

- Investigating the influence of social media on processes of personal identity formation among young people;
- Assessing the potential benefits of social platforms for youth self-realisation across various spheres of social life, particularly professional contexts;
- Identifying the main challenges, risks, and barriers from direct interaction between young people and social media.

The gradual fulfilment of these tasks will enable the practical application of an interdisciplinary approach, combining sociological, psychological, and media research elements. This approach will facilitate the examination of both individual contexts of social media usage (including all positive and negative consequences) and the broader characteristics of young people's interaction with social media, considering its impact on the development of broader socio-cultural processes. The proposed research outcomes aim to enhance understanding of the influence of social media on the formation of modern youth identity, offering specific recommendations for optimising the use of digital social platforms and fostering harmonious psychological development among young individuals in an era of globalisation and societal digitalisation.

Literature Review

The challenges associated with identifying young people in the contemporary digital environment have repeatedly become the focus of analytical research. The objectives of such studies are diverse, from examining individual elements of digital technology integration into the complex socialisation process to identifying external factors that significantly influence young people's psychology, behaviour, and actions. Among the latter, particularly in the Ukrainian context, the ongoing war initiated by the Kremlin regime and supported by a majority of Russians (Derviş, 2023) holds special importance.

The influence of social media on youth identity formation

At the same time, the general influence of social media on shaping youth consciousness, fostering specific values, and introducing various markers that define their place in the digital environment is widely acknowledged (Charmaraman et al., 2021). Another promising research avenue lies in exploring social media and its relationship with sexuality. It is no secret that young people often experience insecurities about their appearance, with social media significantly impacting their self-perception. Among other effects, the psychological impact may hinder self-realisation – peer rejection can negatively affect aspirations in creativity, sports, the arts, and beyond (Tatem & Ingram, 2022). Education is no exception to this trend; thus, social media can pose notable barriers to self-identification and personal evolution (Kaldygozova, 2024).

Alternative perspectives on social media's role

Nevertheless, sceptical perspectives require reconsideration, as not all researchers agree with such conclusions or view technological progress (and social media as its product) negatively. For instance, Abu Safaqa (2024) argued that, in conditions of warfare and political instability, digitalisation could structure educational processes and aid psychological self-discovery and the search for one's place in the modern world. Similarly, Lin (2024) assessed the importance of such changes, including integrating technological innovations, from a philosophical perspective. Social media platforms undeniably belong to these innovative systems. Daudi (2022) reviewed scholarly concepts regarding the proliferation of narcissism among contemporary youth as a direct consequence of social media influence. Although his assessments remain contentious, it is worth noting that this phenomenon often reflects a lack of competencies in interacting with social media (e.g., communicative or digital skills) rather than being a widespread issue among young people. From another viewpoint, the formation of insecurities undermines creative self-realisation (and self-realisation more broadly), impedes communication, and complicates identity formation. The issue of psychological development, which undergoes multifaceted influence, will remain highly promising, particularly considering the continued growth of digital technology's impact on social evolution.

Digitalisation and social evolution

A critical research direction has become the study of the digital age with its societal manifestations, the emergence of new values, and perceptions of success, happiness, and more. Tiidenberg (2023) provided a comprehensive review of previous hypotheses regarding the importance of understanding the new principles governing society in the digital era. Consequently, the identity formation and self-realisation process among young people will also require evaluation through emerging paradigms. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly contributed to this discourse, catalysing the development of digitalisation and the introduction of remote learning and work, which immediately affected the usual rhythm of young people's lives. Krap et al. (2024) and Bobro (2024) focused on this issue to trace the changes caused by the active use of social platforms for communication (education, work, etc.) during strict lockdown measures. These researchers also highlighted the relevance of acquiring new competencies for effective functioning in the digital age (Cheng et al., 2024). This has opened prospects for further identifying local strategies to overcome the challenges of complex socialisation young people face in contexts of restricted mobility and traditional interactions. While this area has been partially explored, including through the potential application of social platforms (Manzi et al., 2018), the findings require further development, mainly by incorporating empirical data.

In contemporary studies, the impact of social media on youth identity formation and self-realisation has received limited attention. Against this backdrop, the work of Babich and Rybalko (2019) stands out for

tracing the peculiarities of education and upbringing among young people, highlighting key aspects of psychological development and the influence of the modern digital environment on these processes. However, this comprehensive study was conducted before the full-scale Russian invasion, meaning its findings require further analysis and updates in light of current practices of social media influence during wartime. This creates a significant research opportunity to examine contemporary challenges and perspectives on youth identification and self-realisation under martial law. Social media undoubtedly transforms into a vital communication platform, as physical interaction may be limited or impossible. Evaluations (including self-evaluations), interactions, creative expression, and communication paradigms – all of these aspects require further exploration, and it is proposed to be conducted using surveys and comparisons of collected data with expert opinions.

Methodology

Research Design

This cross-sectional study is based on expert surveys, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research problem. Contextual approaches enable an understanding of the specifics of Ukrainian realities, including those during wartime.

The choice of the cross-sectional type is because this type allows for the capture of informed perspectives and provides a high level of analytical content and relevance. Given that the study focuses on understanding youth identification processes in the contemporary media landscape, the input of intersectional analysis provides details that may not be easily accessible through general population surveys. The proposed research methodology facilitates an in-depth analysis of the identification processes of youth amidst the pervasive influence of social media on modern life, with particular attention to specific aspects of this issue. The study employs a comprehensive approach to gather the necessary data, including information obtained through the conducted survey. This approach ensures results that are supported by relevant empirical measurements. Furthermore, a comprehensive approach to data collection that combines expert assessments with structured survey data increases the reliability of the results. Hence, this methodological framework ensures that the study produces reliable results that significantly contribute to academic discourse and the broader scientific community.

Sample

The study considers expert opinions, for which a purposive sampling strategy was employed. Information about the proposed research was disseminated through social media, enabling interested individuals to participate in the survey. Social media was chosen to align with the study's primary subject and remotely introduce potential participants to the survey. The main criteria for forming the target sample were as follows:

1. Experience in social communications, psychology, or management.
2. Understanding of key issues related to identity formation and self-realisation.
3. Provision of consent for data processing.

Using these criteria, 65 potential experts were identified. However, 11 declined to provide complete information about themselves, and 9 failed to submit their consent for data processing within the stipulated timeframe. Consequently, 45 experts from various fields with experience working with youth participated in the survey. The expert evaluations provided significant insights into youth identity formation under contemporary conditions.

The study also incorporated opinions from students. Similarly, information about the survey was disseminated via social media. The main criteria for forming the student sample were:

1. Enrolment in higher education institutions.
2. Active use of social media.
3. Provision of consent for data processing.

89 students expressed interest in participating; however, 9 did not provide the necessary consent for data processing. Ultimately, 80 students participated in the survey.

Materials

For comparative purposes, scientific sources were identified through searches in bibliometric databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Various scientific materials were used, including monographs, academic articles, and chapters in collective monographs. The selection of relevant information adhered to the following criteria:

1. Language: English or Ukrainian.
2. Chronological range: 2020–2024, with exceptions for works referenced in previous studies that are directly relevant to the research subject.
3. Thematic focus: The impact of social media on youth, including their socialisation, identity formation, and self-reflection.

Applying these criteria resulted in the selection of 40 academic sources that met the search criteria and were dedicated to the issues outlined in the study. (See Table 1.)

Table 1.
Searching strategy of relevant literatura

Criterion	The initial number of articles	Excluded items	Number after selection
Thematic relevance	940	-335	605
Language relevance	605	-316	289
Timeframe (2020-2024)	289	-246	43
Overall			43

Source: Author's development.

Instruments and procedures

The research process began with collecting expert evaluations through semi-structured interviews. This method allowed respondents to express their perspectives during the interviews. Some questions had predefined answer options, while expert opinions were also analysed through content analysis to identify key themes. The questions addressed various aspects of youth identity formation and self-realisation, including:

1. To what extent do social media platforms influence the personal identity formation of young people in the modern world?
2. What are the key elements of social media's impact on youth identity that can be considered most significant?
3. What contextual factors are most important for understanding the influence of social media on identity?

Additionally, assessments were conducted to evaluate the potential benefits of social platforms for youth self-realisation in different spheres of societal life and the risks and challenges associated with social media interaction. Focus groups were organised among the experts, providing an online forum for discussing the key issues and concepts proposed during the survey. This step-by-step approach facilitated the collection of necessary scientific literature and organising surveys involving students and experts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis utilised Microsoft Excel, which proved to be the most suitable software for data processing due to its versatility and user-friendly interface. Additionally, it allowed for high-quality visualisation, simplifying the handling of information. Core data (author, publication title, year of publication, and findings) were recorded in a dedicated table. This facilitated a practical content analysis of the academic literature, creating a holistic view of youth identity and self-realisation.

Furthermore, another table was compiled detailing each expert's identification number, main statements, and survey results. This enabled a comprehensive summary of the experts' opinions. The obtained results (from student and expert surveys) were subjected to comparative analysis, including comparisons with perspectives presented in the academic literature.

Results and Discussion

Social media has become integral to everyday life (Bartosh, 2022). This is particularly relevant for young people who actively use such digital technologies. Under these circumstances, communication in the digital environment is a significant factor in shaping their identity, aligning with current globalisation processes and trends (Myropoltseva & Amplieieva, 2021). Within this context, and considering the challenges faced by Ukrainian society (such as Russian aggression and the aftermath of COVID-19), it is essential to identify the key aspects of social media's influence on the personal identity formation of young people and assess its potential as a tool for self-realisation (Cheromukhina, 2024). A survey of young people revealed specific trends within this process (see Table 2).

Table 2.
The influence of social networks on the formation of personal identity in young people

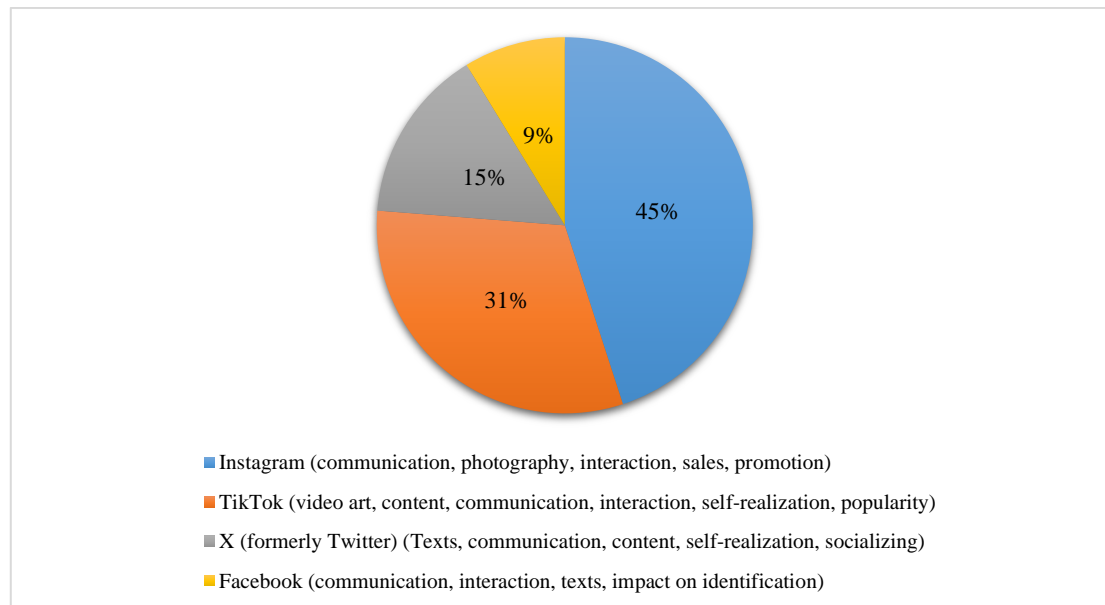| No	Questions and answer options	Number of ratings (youth)	Number of ratings (experts)
1.	Assess how much social networks in the modern world influence the formation of the personal identity of young people.		
A	Very noticeable	35 (44%)	18 (40%)
B	Noticeable, but not crucial	25 (31%)	16 (35,5%)
C	Less noticeable	14 (18%)	8 (18%)
D	Imperceptible	6 (7%)	3 (6,5%)
2.	What are the main elements of the influence of social networks on the formation of young people's identity that can be considered the most important?		
A	The ability to present yourself	38 (47%)	16 (35%)
B	The impact of digital content on self-perception and self-esteem	16 (20%)	14 (31%)
C	Finding like-minded people	17 (21%)	10 (22%)
D	Creating a digital footprint, learning	8 (10%)	5 (12%)
3.	What context can be considered most important for understanding the impact of social media on identity?		
A	Social	34 (43%)	15 (33%)
B	Psychological, or worldview	20 (25%)	12 (27%)
C	Cultural	20 (25%)	11 (26%)
D	Economic	6 (7%)	7 (15%)

Source: Author's development.

The results indicated that both young respondents and experts generally agree on social media's impact on forming personal identity among youth. Specifically, both groups concur that this influence is significant or highly significant (75% of young respondents and 75.5% of experts). This suggests a shared understanding of social media's importance in the modern world. The difference between those who do not perceive any impact of social media is also minimal.

At the same time, young respondents emphasise that these technologies enable them to present themselves better (47%). While experts agree with this perspective, their responses are slightly lower, at 35%. Conversely, students believe that an essential aspect of social media's influence on identity formation is the ability to find like-minded individuals (17%). In contrast, experts highlight the importance of digital content's impact on self-perception and self-esteem (31%). Both groups, however, agree that opportunities related to creating a digital footprint and learning are less significant. Students' and experts' opinions are also relatively aligned regarding the context deemed most important for understanding the impact of social media on identity. Both groups prioritise socialisation issues (34% and 33% of respondents, respectively), while psychological and cultural effects receive roughly equal evaluations. The economic aspect ranks lowest in the survey results.

Overall, modern digital technologies provide opportunities for self-realisation across various directions, including different spheres of social life. Researchers argue that engagement with specific social media platforms allows individuals to showcase creative skills and gain valuable experiences from observation. For instance, TikTok offers promising avenues for sharing original video content, while Threads facilitates concise text creation (Ali et al., 2023). In the Ukrainian context, not all such trends may be effective. Furthermore, young people typically utilise only select social media platforms they associate with their

notions of identity and self-realisation (Vovk, 2022). It has also been proposed that the most successful avenues for self-realisation be identified as directly linked to specific social media platforms (see Figure 1).

- ■ Instagram (communication, photography, interaction, sales, promotion)
- ■ TikTok (video art, content, communication, interaction, self-realization, popularity)
- ■ X (formerly Twitter) (Texts, communication, content, self-realization, socializing)
- ■ Facebook (communication, interaction, texts, impact on identification)

Figure 1. Assessments of the possibility of obtaining benefits from social platforms for the self-realisation of youth in various spheres of public life.
Source: Author's development.

The survey identified TikTok and Instagram as platforms that promote Ukrainian photo and video content. This contributes to identity formation, while popularising certain professions also aids future career decision-making. Engagement with these platforms is noted most frequently, given their high levels of popularity and corresponding influence on young people's consciousness. At the same time, it is worth comparing the survey results with expert opinions to determine how students' perceptions align with specialists' evaluations (see Table 3).

Table 3.
Assessments of the possibility of obtaining benefits from social platforms for the self-realisation of young people in various spheres of public life (expert opinion)

Platform and self-realisation	Number of ratings	Individual opinions of experts
Instagram (communication, photo art, interaction, sales, promotion)	19 (43%)	Expert 2: Instagram's popularity in Ukraine is undisputed. The social platform offers vast opportunities for self-development and for finding the information you need.
		Expert 28: Instagram is familiar to many young people in Ukraine as a marketplace.
Facebook (communication, interaction, texts, influence on identification)	15 (33%)	Expert 16: Facebook remains a leader in discussing socially significant events, directly affecting young people's self-identification.
		Expert 32: The opportunities to interact with information and other users on Facebook remain the best, even despite the company's rather strict policy.
TikTok (video art, content, communication, interaction, self-realisation, popularity)	7 (15,5%)	Expert 20: TikTok's capabilities are primarily aimed at the entertainment context, which must be considered when interacting with this social platform.
X (formerly Twitter) (Texts, communication, content, self-realisation, communication)	4 (8,5%)	Expert 43: Using Messenger X to form self-identification is problematic, although it can develop specific text communication skills.

Source: Author's development.

The results of the expert survey differ from those of the young respondents. First and foremost, the social platform Facebook ranks second, whereas young respondents placed fourth. This discrepancy can be explained by changes in the preferences of the younger generation, which the experts have not fully considered. The growing popularity of TikTok is observed globally, as noted in several contemporary studies (Jia, 2024; Steinert & Dennis, 2022). On the other hand, experts do not dispute the associations that young people form while engaging with social media platforms. The survey does not contradict the belief among young people in the significant potential of the listed social networks for identity development and various forms of professional and creative self-development. The main tags associated with social media include communication, interaction, texts, content, art, self-realisation, and socialising. Considering these tags will help trace the evolution of social networks as part of the digital environment and their impact on the self-reflection of young people.

At the same time, using social media has risks, affecting self-identification and educational and cultural development. The survey, which revealed specific results (see Figure 2), made the identification of such risks possible.
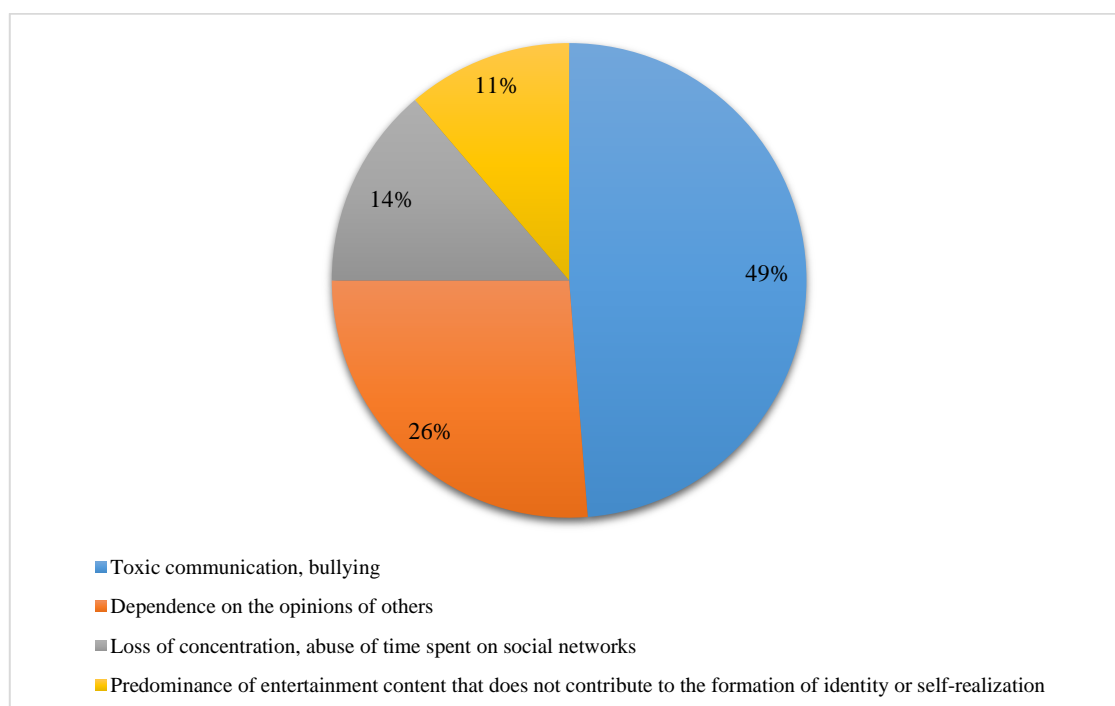
Figure 2. Risks and obstacles when interacting with social networks.
Source: Author's development.

Young people consider the most significant risks associated with interacting with social media to be bullying, the development of a need for positive feedback from others, "digital burnout," which reduces overall productivity when working with gadgets, the predominance of entertainment content that replaces opportunities for self-improvement, creative work, and so on. Psychologists argue that, in general, dependency on the opinions of others is a significant issue for contemporary young people, who are trying to conform to trends, fashion, and current behavioural norms (Sobchenko et al., 2022). Adhering to such ideals may replace the positive aspects of communication, exchange of experiences, etc. However, only positive elements in the modern digital environment are probably impossible (Camara et al., 2023; Mudrak et al., 2019). Experts suggested that the results of the student survey be evaluated. The responses have been summarised in a separate table, with additional comments that allow for an overall assessment of the specialists' perspectives (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Risks and obstacles when interacting with social networks (expert assessment)

Risks	Number of ratings	Individual opinions of experts
Toxic communication, bullying	15 (33%)	Expert 10: Bullying is one of the most common problems in modern digital communication.
		Expert 12: Communication skills in modern digital communication are mandatory for every young person. Such skills must be introduced into the educational process to avoid undesirable situations.
		Expert 21: Security challenges are highly relevant since the digital environment of social networks is now also an active field where scammers, people with toxic influence, etc., operate. These aspects must be taken into account when working on social networks.
Dependence on the opinions of others	12 (28%)	Expert 8: Communication on social networks sometimes requires resilience because imposing opinions harms creative self-expression and self-realisation.
		Expert 31: Propaganda is a tangible challenge of our time. Russian aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated how digital channels can be used to spread lies.
		Expert 33: Often, the image of the professional future imposed on students by social networks does not correspond to reality.
Loss of concentration, overuse of time spent on social media	10 (22%)	Expert 27: Digital burnout leads to loss of concentration, time waste, and inefficient use of technology.
Predominance of entertainment content that does not contribute to identity formation or self-realisation	8 (17%)	Expert 4: Modern social networks (including TikTok and Instagram) are oversaturated with entertainment content (including low-quality content) that does not stimulate cognitive activity.
		Expert 26: Viewing large amounts of entertainment information creates obstacles to self-realisation, for which time may not be enough.

Source: Author's development.

Experts generally reached similar conclusions to those of the surveyed students. The findings confirmed the primary concerns of students, with specialists ranking threats in the same order. Some perspectives highlight the need to develop communication competencies (to prevent bullying), adhere to safety rules (such as sharing only the minimum necessary information), build psychological resilience, counteract burnout (caused by excessive gadget use), and acquire skills to interact appropriately with digital content without losing motivation for self-fulfilment. Additionally, it is worth noting that the aggressive dissemination of propaganda poses challenges to forming Ukrainian identity. However, the growing popularity of Ukrainian content (even entertainment-focused) on modern social media points to emerging trends significantly more favourable to Ukrainian identity, introducing young people to national culture, art, and history.

Social media has become an essential element of everyday life for young people in the modern world. Under such circumstances, communication in the digital environment, with its specific characteristics, plays a crucial role in shaping their identity. The study aimed to investigate social media's impact on young people's identity formation and explore their potential as a tool for self-realisation. The research sought to address several relevant questions, including the influence of social media on the processes of personal identity formation among young people, the existing assessments of the benefits provided by social platforms for self-realisation in various spheres of societal life (including professional domains), and the identification of the main challenges, risks, and obstacles encountered during direct interaction between young people and social media.

The results of the study indicate that young respondents and experts alike consider the influence of social media on the identity formation of young people to be profound. This finding supports the conclusions of other researchers who regard social media as one of the modern tools for exploring one's future (Roberti, 2022; Setia et al., 2024). Simultaneously, young people emphasise that these technologies allow them to present themselves better and find like-minded individuals. Experts highlight the importance of social media in shaping young people's perceptions of themselves and their corresponding self-esteem. This divergence in evaluations has become a topic of academic debate. Some researchers argue that such differing perspectives are typical of young individuals who have yet to fully appreciate the importance of developing healthy self-esteem for achieving their ambitions (Jakaza, 2022). On the other hand,

professional self-identification, which is critically important for young people, appears to be overlooked (Capstick et al., 2019). In this context, social media can be particularly hazardous, as it may create misleading perceptions of the professional world, potentially causing distress among young people with unrealistic expectations fostered by social media.

In turn, one of the productive approaches that allow young people to form an idea of self-identification and ways of professional self-realisation is coaching, which is used in the higher education system. Such coaching not only creates a space for maximum self-realisation of student youth but also stimulates self-education so that students can later find and acquire the necessary knowledge independently – this helps them learn to learn (Zelenin, 2024), in particular in the context of social networks (Ponomarenko & Zelenin, 2022). Researchers note that one of the key tasks of academic coaching (Garvey & Stokes, 2022), to be undertaken by university educators, is to correct misconceptions about professional futures and foster realistic (and adequate) perceptions and strategies for professional self-realisation (Jarrar et al., 2022; Zelenin & Antoniuk, 2022). The lack of attention to students' professional futures is partially evidenced by the fact that the economic context of social media's influence on identity ranked last in the study's findings.

The proposed findings highlight that social platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are identified as practical tools for promoting Ukrainian photographic and video content. This activity contributes to identity formation while popularising certain professions, aiding future career determination. Engagement with these social platforms is most frequently noted due to their significant levels of popularity and corresponding influence on the consciousness of young people. Experts have prioritised Facebook in terms of importance. This situation can be explained by the dynamic changes in the preferences of the younger generation, which are less evident within Ukrainian expert circles. However, these results align with the perspectives of European researchers, who observe emerging trends in the interests of young people, including their engagement with social networks (Cano-Marin et al., 2023; Du, 2024; Subiyanto, 2021). Respondents emphasised that their primary interests are communication, interaction, texts, content, art, self-realisation, and socialisation. Such findings corroborate the views of other scholars and validate their conclusions (Quiroga-Sánchez et al., 2022). The identified markers point to the deep integration of social networks into everyday life, particularly in self-realisation.

The proposed results also indicate that young people perceive significant risks associated with social media interaction, such as bullying, the development of a dependence on positive evaluation from others, "digital burnout," which reduces productivity when using gadgets, and the predominance of entertainment content that can overshadow opportunities for personal development and creativity. Empirical measurements conducted by other researchers demonstrate similar trends (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Furthermore, Ukrainian experts share analogous opinions and propose strategies to counter these risks. These include developing communication competencies to avoid bullying, adhering to safety guidelines, becoming more resilient to stress, countering burnout, and prioritising effectively. The proposed findings could be further developed through comparative studies with other academic research. Specifically, researchers have formulated a set of recommendations for optimising the influence of social networks on the identity of young people (Bonsaksen et al., 2023). Foremost among these is the active implementation of informational campaigns to foster critical thinking and acquire digital literacy and communication skills (Campanella, 2022). Ensuring psychological support for young people who become dependent on social networks or struggle with their use is also crucial (Shayner et al., 2024). Continuing this policy could involve incorporating specialised educational courses to promote digital ethics and safety (Yefimova, 2024). These perspectives complement the survey findings, which generally confirm the substantial impact of social networks on the identity formation of young people. The obtained results introduce new insights into the processes of youth identity formation, particularly in creative, professional, and cultural contexts, and raise questions about further interdisciplinary research into the integration of educational practices to support young people in utilising social networks and other digital tools for self-realisation in the modern world.

Hence, the results of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications. In particular, the findings of this study have contributed to the formation of an essential framework for the analysis of identity development in the digital age, particularly in the Ukrainian context during the war. By analysing the views of experts, the study has strengthened existing theories of social identity and digital influence. In addition, the study has also expanded discussions on the theory of the media effect and highlighted the role of social media as a reinforcing and destructive force in identity formation.

From a practical perspective, the results have offered essential information for stakeholders involved in youth development and media literacy programs. Youth engagement programs can adapt some of the described interventions, such as mentoring programs that connect young people with cultural and historical narratives.

The methodology proposed in this study has limitations, which should be considered in future work with the survey results. Specifically, it is essential to recognise that the interview method relies on the subjective experiences of respondents. As a result, one respondent may evaluate positively, and another may describe more cautiously. The conducted survey is no exception to this rule, so this aspect should be considered when using the results. However, the survey reflects the general direction of respondents' opinions, meaning there are no radical discrepancies between assessments, only minor adjustments that merit attention. The survey, however, was conducted during a period of military conflict, which may have caused some respondents to feel the pressure of external circumstances, potentially influencing their evaluations. This aspect also requires consideration, yet such surveys are valuable examples of how respondents living in extreme conditions perceive issues of self-realisation, communication, and professional self-determination. The comparison was based on the content analysis method of scientific literature. For this purpose, the most relevant works published in English over the past six years were selected. This approach is logical, as it focuses on peer-reviewed publications; however, there is a possibility that certain scholars' perspectives were not included due to language barriers. While this does not diminish the value of the survey's findings, it opens opportunities for further research, particularly in expanding the academic foundation for comparisons with new scientific sources.

Conclusions

Thus, contemporary social media platforms play a significant role in shaping young people's identity and serve as a tool for self-realisation, as highlighted by the surveyed students and specialists. It has established social platforms with opportunities to promote Ukrainian visual and video content. This contributes to identity formation, while the popularisation of certain professions further aids young people in shaping their professional futures. Experts, on the other hand, traditionally favour using Facebook as a reliable tool for identity formation and exploring opportunities for self-realisation. Experts acknowledge that the primary tags associated with social media include communication, interaction, texts, content, art, self-realisation, and social engagement.

The most significant risks identified are bullying, developing a dependency on positive evaluation from others, "digital burnout," and an overemphasis on entertainment content. Experts generally agreed with these findings during the survey. To resist these negative phenomena, it is recommended that academic coaching approaches be introduced into the education of young people as a means of forming an identity and a correct vision of the prospects for professional self-realisation. These approaches should also develop students' communication skills, adherence to safety protocols, increased resilience, combat burnout, proper interaction with digital content, and effective determination of life priorities. Notably, the growing presence and popularity of Ukrainian content (even entertainment-focused) on modern social media platforms indicate emerging trends that are increasingly favourable to Ukrainian identity.

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