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***YOUTH AND THE DIGITAL ERA. HOW DOES GENDER IDENTITY
INFLUENCE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT PRODUCTION?***
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Abstract

This book is a breakthrough in studying the social media usage by teenagers and gender studies altogether. The author manages to pinpoint how gender identity influences social media behaviour of teenagers, which, in turn, is used to affirm and act one's gender in front of the peers. The author begins by contextualizing gender identity studies within the current theoretical frameworks, including third gender theory, gender ambiguity, and feminist approaches. She then details her mixed-methods research design, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative techniques to capture the complex ways in which teenagers produce and consume social media content through a gendered lens. The book concludes by emphasizing the social implications of gendered digital practices, and the critical need for continued research. Seserman's work offers a compelling look at how digital spaces act as arenas for both self-expression and social validation among youth shaped fundamentally by gender identity.

Keywords: gender studies, gendered social media consumption, gendered online behaviour, social media consumption, gender identity.

In 2024, an important book was published by ProUniversitaria in the field of social research and gender studies – “Youth and the Digital Era. How does Gender Identity Influence Social Media Content Production?” by Corina Seserman. The book is dedicated to a broad audience, including, but not limited to sociologists, educators, psychologists, parents, and anyone interested in the intersection of youth, gender identity, and digital media.

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In this book, the author chooses to tackle a bold, yet really important theme for the Romanian scientific literature, especially in the era of new media – how teenagers build their gender identity on social media and how they use the new technologies to build and share their gender identity, how gender identity influences social media consumption behaviour, and how it is used as a means to confirm that their actions are approved as belonging to a certain gender identity.

The book is built on four chapters, following the logic of a well-thought research enterprise, with the first chapter introducing the reader to the old, yet new field of gender identity studies. Corina Seserman puts the study of gender identity in actuality whilst analysing it from several important theoretical perspectives such as the third gender theory, gender ambiguity theory, or the feminist perspective of gender identity. The author also successfully manages to study the implications of social media in building gender identity, and how it is used to communicate and validate one's gender identity in the peer group.

The second chapter presents the process through which the data was collected and analysed. Given the complexity of the research theme, Corina Seserman managed to unravel it by using various data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative, each with the purpose of showing us both the process of studying how gender identity influences social media posting behaviour, as well as the actual opinions and behaviours of teenagers on social media. Although more technical, this chapter offers a glimpse into the mind of the researcher and how she managed to unravel the social minds of the teenagers.

The third chapter, which is also the most consistent part of the book, presents the results of the research, and how the teenagers navigate social media platforms through the lens of their gender identity.

Aside from showing that the vast majority of the surveyed teenagers were active on social media (99%), the author managed not only to create a hierarchy of the most used social media platform overall, but by gender as well, highlighting how gender identity influences internet consumption behaviour both by platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitch, Snapchat), and by content (gaming, fashion, lifestyle, movies, educational, etc.). During the second phase of data collection, Corina Seserman highlighted how social media usage, aside from being gender dictated, was also a place for affirming and acting one's gender identity, as if to find confirmation from their peers. These behaviours were emphasised in the themes "Reproducing gender norms in social media context", "Gender impact on the type and genre on content consumption" and, lastly, "Online performances and experiences have an offline impact".

For the purpose of constructing a more accurate image of how teenagers built their image on social media platforms, the author asked the teenagers to send curated photos of themselves from their social media platform, and which were used to understand and discuss the process of building one's online image, and the meanings attributed to it. Photographic analysis has proven to be an accurate

means of engaging in conversations with the teenagers about their online self and how they try to construct it. As one should expect by now, the author was thorough in her endeavour, and the research showed that the gender identity of the adolescents dictated how they built their online image, which was to represent their gender identity, by the types of poses they used in the picture, the scenery in which the photo was taken, as well as the objects they interacted with, or were present in the composition. Photographic composition proved to be closely tied with building and showing one's gender identity.

In the last chapter, the author draws a series of concluding remarks on the study, highlighting the importance of the book in the field. By restating the main findings regarding the social media online behaviour and consumption differences based on gender identity, the author closed the circle of the research, reinforcing the importance of paying attention to teenagers' online behaviour, the online being the new medium of expressing oneself and also the medium where one's self is judged and validated. While it is normal and expected for any study to have a series of limitations, I consider that the limitations of this study only highlight the importance of further continuing the research, on a much broader teenage population.

The book is available to be read online at <https://bibliotecadesociologie.ro/download/seserman-corina-2024-youth-and-the-digital-era-how-does-gender-identity-influence-social-media-content-production-bucharest-pro-universitaria/>.