

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A  
RECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
AMONG THE HAITIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY**

**(Master's Thesis)**

**Marc-Henry PIERRE**

**Eskişehir, 2019**

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**MASTER’S THESIS**

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**May 2019**

## FINAL APPROVAL FOR THESIS

This thesis titled “**Social Media and Identity Construction: A Reconstructive Analysis of the Use of Social Media Among the Haitian University Students in Turkey**” has been prepared and submitted by **Marc-Henry PIERRE** in partial fulfillment of the requirements in “**Anadolu University Directive on Graduate School of Social Sciences**” for the Master of Arts in **Department of Communication Design and Management** has been examined and approved on **14/06/2019**.

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## ÖZET

### SOSYAL MEDYA VE KİMLİK OLUŞTURMA: TÜRKİYE’DEKİ HAİTİLİ ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ ARASINDA SOSYAL MEDYA KULLANIMINA YÖNELİK BİR ANALİZ

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Sosyal medya insan yaşamında kültürel bir belirleyici haline gelmiştir. Dolayısıyla kültürel bağlam ile sosyal medya kullanımı arasındaki ilişki, kullanıcının kimliğini şekillendiren davranışlarla sonuçlanır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki Haitili üniversite öğrencileri arasında sosyal medyanın kullanımını incelemekte ve sosyal medyanın kimlik oluşturma ile ilişkisinin anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yorumlayıcı paradigmaya dayanarak bu tez, Türkiye'deki çeşitli üniversitelerden seçilen 15 Haitili öğrenci arasında sosyal medya kullanımını ve kimlik oluşturma ile ilişkilerinin anlamını yorumlamaktadır. 15 öğrenci ile yapılan derinlemesine görüşmenin hermenötik ve pragmatik analizi, sosyal medya kullanımına atfedilen anlamdan ortaya çıkan üç paradoksal örüntüyü göstermektedir: 1) İletişim ve uzaklık 2) Kendini onaylama ve kendini sınırlama 3) Eğlence ve can sıkıntısı. Ayrıca, görüşmelerden elde edilen bulgular ve Haitili öğrencilerin içinde bulunduğu çevrimiçi grubunun içerik analizi, sosyal medya kullanımının kimlik oluşturmada nasıl algılandığına ilişkin iki paradoksal örüntü göstermektedir. İçinde yaşadığı kültürel bağlamı gözetirken kendini gösterme çabasıyla, Türkiye'deki Haitili öğrenciler dijital ayak izlerini 1) Algı yönetimi ve 2) Sosyal ağ oluşturma yoluyla gerçekleştirmektedir. Bunun sonucu olarak, sosyal medya kullanım algısının, kullanıcıların sosyal ve öz kimliklerini etkileyerek sosyal medyayı nasıl kullanacağını belirlediği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Sosyal medya, Kimlik oluşturma, Çevrimiçi performans, Ağ oluşturma

## **ABSTRACT**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A RECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG THE HAITIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY**

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Department of Communication Design and Management

Anadolu University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, May 2019

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan ÇALIŞKAN

Social media plays such an important role in people's lives that it has become a cultural signifier. Thus, the relationship between the cultural context and the use of social media results in performances that shapes the user's identity. This study explores the use of social media among Haitian university students in Turkey and contributes to the understanding of how social media relates to identity construction. Based on the interpretive paradigm, this paper reconstructs the meaning of the use of social media and its relations to identity construction among 15 Haitian students selected from several universities in Turkey. Hermeneutic and pragmatic analysis of the 15 in-depth interviews shows three paradoxical patterns that emerge from the meaning attributed to the use of social media: 1) communication and remoteness 2) self-affirmation and self-restraint 3) entertainment and boredom. Also, findings from the interviews and the content analysis of an online Haitian students' group show two paradoxical patterns relating the perception of the use of social media to identity construction. In an attempt to assert himself while suiting the cultural context he lives in, the Haitian student in Turkey asserts his digital footprint through 1) impression management and 2) social network building. Thus, the perception of the use of social media determines the use of it which, consequently, reflects on the user's social and self-identity.

**Keywords:** Social media, Identity construction, Online performance, Network building

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14/06/2019

## **STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES**

I hereby truthfully declare that this thesis is an original work prepared by me; that I have behaved in accordance with the scientific ethical principles and rules throughout the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis and presentation of my work; that I have cited the sources of all the data and information that could be obtained within the scope of this study, and included these sources in the references section; and that this study has been scanned for plagiarism with “scientific plagiarism detection program” used by Anadolu University, and that “it does not have any plagiarism” whatsoever. I also declare that, if a case contrary to my declaration is detected in my work at any time, I hereby express my consent to all the ethical and legal consequences that are involved.

Marc-Henry PIERRE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has had a tremendous impact on human life. Social media, like the emergence of any technology, has modified the human value system and perception of the world. Ancient Greek Philosopher, Plato, once declared that the invention of writing and reading were inhuman. In *Phaedrus*<sup>1</sup>, a story about Thamus, Plato claims that the development of the writing skills was created to weaken the human mind and could eventually threaten to phase out humankind's memory. Similarly, the invention of the printing press in Europe during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century was perceived as a big threat to moral and social order for the European culture. The rise of television was viewed as a negative influential tool to the influence on the audience. As for the development of the internet, neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf suggests that the internet has a debilitating effect on the reading brain. It should thus be noted that the advent of new media changes not only the physical channels and operations but also the human vision of the world. According to McLuhan (1962), every technical change affects human schemes, perception and value system. Whereas social media is a part of the recent development of web 2.0, it has been playing a major role in both social relationships as well as the individual mind.

The problem of social media has been addressed by researchers from different fields in both natural and social sciences. From the sociological viewpoint of Wasserman and Faust (1994), a social network is a set of relationships between individuals or social entities. In this perspective, three concepts serve as the conducting wire in the analysis of social networks. First and foremost, the actors and their actions are considered as independent entities. Secondly, the environment in which the actors are placed provides opportunities and constraints to their actions. And thirdly, the social, political, and economic structures have a major impact on the form of the relationship conducted by the actors.

From the technological perspective, social media is defined as a set of interconnected equipment which is used to supply an information stream. According to sociologist Michel

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Postman, (1992). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*, New-York: First Vintage Book Editions, p. 3.

Maffesoli (1996), the world has moved from a collective society to a tribal society, which he believes is a shift related to the postmodern character of societies. Daniel Bell, Manuel Castells, and Neil Postman, other theorists on social media, stress the supremacy of the technology of the information over the information itself. Postman (1992) states that the postmodern era is characterized by the surrender of culture to technology. This context where social relationships are embodied into a spectacle is also addressed by Debord (1994), who stresses that the image provided by the internet replaces the individual's reality. This phenomenon, in which the internet image becomes more important than the real self, is also highlighted by Sherry Turkle (2005), who describes it as a phenomenon of the second self. Moreover, either in the sociological or the technological viewpoint, the study of social media falls within two paradigms which are the functionalist paradigm and the critical paradigm.

The functionalist theorists define social media as the extension of the human relationships that occur in real life. In this perspective, the culture of everyday life becomes intertwined with the internet. Although the influence of the internet remains significant in the life of many people, social ties are being reinforced due to the platforms provided by social media. The functionalist approach minimizes the negative side-effects of social media. Caplan stresses the functional approach of virtual communication through the uses and gratifications perspective. The uses and gratifications theory states that people use social media to satisfy certain cognitive and affective needs. Caplan notes that "Computer-based personal communication technologies are used for a range of different personal, educational or business reasons, as well as for information gathering, social connection and entertainment reasons (Caplan et al, 2007, p. 42)". In this context, the social connection defines social ties. The intermeshing of social media with real life is explained through the search for connection, solidarity, cooperation, and belonging.

On the contrary, the critical approach focuses on the power struggle between the social media persona and real-life relationship. A facet of this struggle involves manipulation, of both the individual self and others which can take form through anonymity, pseudonyms, and multiple identities. These obstacles prevent reliable communication through social media. They also lead to cyber-criminality and violence. According to the critical view, social media contributes to the disintegration of human communication. French philosopher, Serge Proulx

(2004), describes the advent of technologies as a part of the mystification of life. In an article dedicated to the understanding of social relationships in virtual communities, Proulx stresses that the development of technologies is also a result of the human mythical desire to create a representation of himself.

In this perspective, the connection between social media and culture seems to be a relationship of mutual assimilation. Depending on whether the society is collectivist or individualistic, the proportion between culture and technology changes. For example, in collectivist cultures, where cultural values and norms are prominent, technology is regulated and controlled. In individualistic cultures, where technology is prominent, culture is absorbed by the technology and the technology becomes a new form of culture.

From a global perspective, the powerful role of social media in the everyday life of humans has become a technological phenomenon which has attracted the attention of many social scientists. Many social movements, such as the Arab spring, the Gezi protest in Turkey, and the protests in Brazil, have been started and supported by social media. Research shows that most of the users of social media are young people. In fact, all the aforementioned social uprisings were started by students who were later joined by other members of society. These protests gained traction and support due to the role of social media in promoting efforts.

It is evident that the relationship between culture and social media affects individual identity. In Erving Goffman's book, "The presentation of self in everyday life," he stresses how individuals' actions are motivated by the search for acceptance and recognition. With the advent of the internet, this concept has shifted from real life interactions to social media. Goffman views individual behavior as a performance in everyday life, which has now been transformed into online performance and impression management.

It should be emphasized that social media refers to all websites and applications that allow interactions between humans. The focus of this study was on the use of social media by Haitian students in Turkey. Placed in a context of a different culture and geographic location, the Haitian students resorted to social media to create new linkages and to stay in touch with their friends and family. They also used social media to assert themselves through posting, sharing, and comments. In this research, and in light of computerized relationships,

it is assumed that every single Haitian student in Turkey has access to social media not only for the sake of communication but also for the sake of self-expression.

### **1.1. Problem**

This study explores the relationship between the use of social media and the identity construction process among Haitian university students in Turkey. Social media influences the opinions, attitudes, and behavior of its users. However, while influencing the user's behavior, social media meets the norms and the rules of the society in which it is used. Since the use of social media is culturally based, it consequently alters the identity of the user who lives in a cultural context different from his. This study addresses the problem of identity alteration through the use of social media in a different cultural context.

Previous research on “media and identity” fall within three main theoretical approaches of media studies and communication technologies. First, the theory of technological determinism, advocated by McLuhan (1964), argues that the technology used by the mainstream media of a given society determines the behavior of its members. Secondly, the functionalist theory of media, championed by Laswell, Wright, and Merton (1968), addresses the functions and dysfunctions of media which are the connection of the actors of society, control of the environment, the transmission of social heritage, and distraction. The third approach of media and communication technologies is that of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school. The Frankfurt School was Founded in 1923 by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Eric Fromm, and Friedrich Pollock, for whom mass culture conveyed through mass media is an ideology in support of capitalism and the ruling class. According to Adorno (2002), the critical theory of media draws its grounding on the manipulating power of technological innovations.

Existing studies on media on identity mainly focus either on the functions of media or the effect of media on people's behavior. Minimal attention has been directed toward the dialectical relationship between the media and its users even less between culture and the media user. However, the interpretive approach views the media users as actors rather than agents with passive assent. The interpretive approach offers a more complex understanding of people's online behavior. Considering the relationship of mutual absorption between

identity and social media with regard to the cultural context in which the Haitian university students in Turkey are currently placed, the following heuristic question arises: **How do Haitian students in Turkey perceive the use of social media? How does this perception of social media relate to the students' identity building process?** This question and the underlying subquestion explore a major problem in the field of communication which goes beyond the functionalist and critical lenses.

### **1.2. Aim of research**

This research aims at reconstructing the interplay between social media and social identity with regard to the use of social media by Haitian students in Turkey. The study also addresses the factors that have given rise to the second self. This heuristic approach provides an understanding of how the techno-driven society has transformed individual behavior and identity. Consequently, the objectives of this research fall within the following questions:

- How do the Haitian university students in Turkey perceive the use of social media?
- How does the Haitian students' perception of the use of social media through their online performances and strategies of impression management relate to their identity building process?
- How do the online gratifications such as validation and acceptance relate to the students' offline behavior?

### **1.3. Significance of Research**

This research draws its validity and reliability upon the academic and social interest of the related problem. Academically, the research is justified in the lack of research addressing the identity-based phenomena in the era of social media. Thus, this research purports to be a contribution to a prolegomenon to a social theory of digital identity. Moreover, the shared lifeworld between the researcher and the selected sample strengthens the relevance of the observed phenomenon. As for the social grounding, this study is justified in the fact that social media constitutes a new form of society. Therefore, the social relevance of the research is situated in the intense interest that people place on social media.

#### **1.4. Limitations**

Although this research is academically grounded, it remains limited in space and time. This study addresses the interplay between identity and social media among the Haitian students in Turkey over the 2017-2018 academic year. Consequently, the Haitian students make up the sample, Turkey is the space frame, and the 2017-2018 academic is the time frame. The population of Haitian students included come from various cities and universities in Turkey. Another limitation is the dynamic nature and proliferation of social media. Grasping social media as a concept is a difficult task due to the ever-growing and various applications and websites that allow online interactions. It amounts to saying that, regardless of how social media has proliferated lately, understanding the users' behavior remains the main focus of social research. Thus, a purposefully selected sample compensates for the lack of representativeness relating thereto. In qualitative research, choosing the scope of the study and selecting the sample remain a prerogative of the researcher.

#### **1.5. Assumptions**

This research consists of an interpretive analysis of the presentation of self on social media. Whereas mass media consists of an extension of human senses, it consequently participates in shaping the human mind, as well as social relationships. This thesis assumes that the cultural context in which an individual is placed affects significantly his perception and use of social media. Also, this paper assumes that online gratifications such as positive comments and the number of "likes," do not only reinforce the social presence the users but also affect their offline behavior. In other words, the more the online identity of one is validated by his peers, the more this identity is likely to be reproduced offline. Thus, the online performances and the impression management strategies are viewed as a result of not only what the user wants the others to see or know about him, but also as a result of how the others expect him to be. In this perspective, online identity has split behavior. The first behavior refers to the identity avoidance strategies where the user hides his real personality through the content he shares on social media. The second behavior refers to an ideal identity where the user tries to magnify his personality and identify himself within a certain social group through the contents he shares.

## **1.6. Operational definitions**

Operational definitions help the researcher measure the variables related to the research. In this study, the concepts of social media and identity construction are measured through an interpretive analysis of online performance. Observing human behavior through social media is explained through the notions of performance and impression management. Performance refers to content or personal information shared on a given social network. Through performance, the individual also complies with the terms and conditions of use of the social network. Impression management refers to the communication that takes place through the performance. The user shares contents in a way to be validated and accepted by his peers. Therefore, the online performance and impression management strategies have emerged as the two measures resulting from the research question. The first measure, which is the online performance, refers to the perception that Haitian university students in Turkey have towards the use of social media. The second measure, which is the impression management strategies, refers to the interplay between the use of social media and the students' identity building process.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter makes up a general consideration on the scientific literature that has so far addressed the phenomenon of social media. In this chapter, an operational definition is given to the concepts that constitute the cornerstone of the study. The second chapter addresses the methodology chosen to carry out the study. This chapter highlights the research model, the scope of research, the participants and the measures, the data collection techniques, and data analysis techniques. It should be noted that this research subscribes to the phenomenological model which calls for an interpretive data analysis technique. The data analysis techniques are the universal pragmatics and the critical hermeneutics which are consubstantial with regard to the objectives of the research. As for the sample, it was purposefully selected in order to address the question of research as accurately as possible. The third chapter of the study consists of data analysis. As previously stated, the universal pragmatics and the critical hermeneutics are jointly used in order to analyze the interviews conducted with the participants whose answers are reconstructed as speech acts. The analysis is, therefore, a reconstruction of the speech acts of the interviewees. As a discussion and since the work subscribes to the theory-building

approach, the fourth chapter refers to the possibility of a theory of negotiated identity on social media. Without any pretense of completeness, the present study is intended as a small academic contribution to understanding the human phenomena related to computer-mediated communication.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review of the current dissertation relies on our archeology of mainstream research conducted in the fields of social media and identity construction. The functionalist and the critical approaches are the main research paradigms used in the research conducted in the field of communication. As for the phenomena related to computer-mediated communication, most of the theorists of communication and sociology subscribe to the methodological individualism to approach the phenomena related to computer-mediated communication. This methodological stance is due to the fact that the emergence of social media refers to the isolation of the individual, coping with more anxieties and solicitations. In the context of this study, the concept of identity building is reconstructed under the presentation of self on social media.

This literature review also covers the concepts and theories that have been addressed in the field of digital communication. Therefore, it is important to clarify some crucial concepts. While a univocal definition of the foundational concepts of the study will be stressed, a glance on the mainstream approaches related to these concepts will be highlighted. A theoretical framework based on Goffman's dramaturgical theory of the self with regard to social media will serve as the conducting wire of this heuristic dissertation.

### **2.1. The concept of social media**

According to the Cambridge dictionary, social media refers to the websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone (Cambridge University Press, 2018). In this context, social media serves as a tool that allows people to build social networking. As for social networking, Kenneth W.M. Wills defines social networking as a virtual communication that embodies a diverse range of concepts, technologies, and practices that represent centrality in the daily life of many people. In today's social environment, individuals and groups can instantly communicate with friends and colleagues despite time differences and geographical distance (Wills, 2016).

Manuel Castell, a theoretician on social networking, states that social networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies (Castell, 1996, p. 469). Castell means

that social networks, which are based on connectivity, are shaping our society. Thus, in postmodern societies, the concept of performance is linked to the degree of connectivity. Everyday relationships experienced in physical life are extended to digital life. People are constantly connecting with each other to ask for support and solidarity, and to share their emotions and common goals. Since networking is based on connection, the golden rule is to always be connected. Being a part of the virtual community is a form of social inclusiveness.

The history of social media has become an integral part of modern society. Social media could be traced back to mail delivery services that existed thousands of years ago. However, humanity waited centuries before the advent of the telegraph, which is a device designed to transmit and receive messages over long distances. The 19<sup>th</sup> century brought the pneumatic post (1865), the telephone (1890), and then the radio (1891). The 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the advent of the email (1966), CompuServe (1969), the Usenet (1979), Google (1998), and blogger (1999). It should be noted that the history of social media is not exhaustive in this paper. Nevertheless, this paper focuses on internet-based media. Thus the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the century that has seen the advent of the most relevant social media. The advent of Wikipedia (2000), LinkedIn, Myspace, Workplace, Skype (2003), Facebook, Podcasting, Flickr (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), Google+ (2011), Google hangout (2013), Shopify and Periscope (2015) consist of the main spaces where online networks are built in order to communicate and share content. Since social media consists of ever-growing online applications and websites, this paper only mentions the most prevalent ones.

### **2.1.1. Virtual communication**

Virtual communication is considered to be the communication that happens in the virtual space. This is communication that happens between an individual and machine, between two individuals using a machine, or between groups of individuals using machines. Authors Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith define virtual communication as follows: “The field of Computer-mediated communication that studies how human behaviors are maintained or altered by exchange of information through machines (Wood & Smith, 2005, p. 4).” In virtual communication, human behavior is maintained or altered by the interactions mediated by the machine. Since the interactions are mediated by the machine, there is a latent

impact of the latter on the user's behavior. Therefore, since virtual communication occurs between people that are geographically distant from each other, these interactions take place in a virtual community. In this paper, the notion of virtual community is addressed under the concept of imagined community.

### **2.1.2. Imagined community**

Online communication allows for a mediated society. A mediated society, when sharing common interests and goals, becomes an imagined community. In his book dedicated to the studies of the spread of nationalism, Benedict Anderson coined the concept of imagined community. In an attempt to define the concept of imagined community, Anderson argues that it is “imagined” because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).”

Therefore, the virtual community is an imagined community as the members are connected through a machine in a communication process. Anderson states that communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 2006 p. 6). In this perspective, social issues such as inequalities and power struggles are overcome by the symmetrical relationships between the members of the community. In the imagined community, there is a dialectic relationship between personal identity and social identity. The personal identity creates a social identity, and the social identity nurtures the personal identity in return.

### **2.2. Social Media and Identity**

Social media and identity refer to the notion of networked identity. The networked identity gives rise to social ties. In other words, the networked identity refers to social identity. In computer-mediated communication, the way we wish others to perceive us prevails over the way we actually are. According to sociologist Anthony Giddens, identity is “the understanding people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them (Giddens, 2005, p. 29).” The main sources of identity include gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, social class, etc. In this perspective, the notion of identity refers to self-concept and the lifestyle of an individual in relation to the society in which they live. Giddens

makes the distinction between two types of identity, namely social identity, and self-identity. He defines social identity as “the characteristics that are attributed to an individual by others.” Thus, the social identity may include status, function or marital situation. Self-identity, however, refers to everything that sets us apart as distinct individuals. Giddens stresses that self-identity refers to the process of self-development through which we formulate a unique sense of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us (Giddens, 2005, pp. 29-30). Self-identity includes a sense of uniqueness from others and a sense of affiliation. In Giddens perspective, self-identity and social identity are constantly interacting in order to shape the individual’s behavior.

Since identity formation is addressed with regard to social media, it is necessary to situate the phenomenon into the functionalist and critical research paradigms.

### **2.2.1. The functionalist paradigm**

The functionalist approach, one of the main sociological perspectives, provides us with a view of an interconnected society. This sociological perspective was coined in the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. The functionalist approach stresses that every subset of society influences the other, working together to maintain a state of balance within society. Merton (1968) differentiates between two types of functions: manifest and latent. The manifest functions refer to consequences that are intended while the latent functions refer to those that are unintended or hidden. In the context of a virtual relationship, the user interacts with others in order to build a communication action. The communication action results from the intersubjective dimension of the interactions.

Caplan addresses the functionalist approach of virtual communication through the uses and gratifications perspective. The theory of uses and gratification refers to a mass communication theory that focuses on the message and its sender. Boer (2003) says that the core assumption of this theory states that users of old and new media actively rely on media to satisfy individual needs, including both cognitive and affective needs. The cognitive needs make up to the needs for information whereas the affective needs consist of the need for entertainment and validation. Caplan writes: “computer-based personal communication

technologies are used for a range of different personal, educational or business reasons, as well as for information gathering, social connection, and entertainment reasons” (Caplan et al, 2007, p. 42). Consequently, social connections define social ties. The individual dives into virtual life to meet with others. It is important to notice that social ties are not only limited to a process of mutual understanding. Misunderstanding, disagreement and even conflict can also be very prevalent within these social ties.

As people are socially connected to each other in their virtual lives, they are able to overcome their disagreements in order to achieve mutual goals. The Tunisian revolution, the student movement in Chile, and the protest movement in Mexico are among other indicators that show how collective actions and social movements take place in the digital world.

In a study on Facebook and Twitter regarding social networked identity, Amana Kaskazi states that social networks allow people to widen their connections and social relationships. Based on the identity negotiation theory, Kaskazi concludes that “Facebook and Twitter are commonly used for building and maintaining social relationships” (Kaskazi, 2014, p. 859). In a study on the relationship between social media and social movement, Manuel Castells emphasizes the role played by social media in the uprisings that occurred in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Castells defines the networked social movement as “a movement mixed of autonomous social movement and political left-wing activism (Castells, 2015, p. 238).” Madison Ganda (2014), exploring the influence of social media on the formation of identity among college students, stresses that there is no correlation between the positive feedback on a post and the user’s behavior in their physical life. However, he acknowledges that online identity and offline identity influence one another.

Furthermore, analyzing the relationship between the personality dimension and the use of internet among 429 Turkish university students, Leman Pinar Tosun (2009) points out that social media is used as a substitute for offline social relationships. According to Tosun, social media does not constitute an extension of offline relationships, but rather, social media

substitutes them. This substitution is highlighted through a certain psychoticism<sup>2</sup> with regard to the Eysenck's personality pattern. Tosun emphasizes that social media is not responsible for the psychoticism but serves as a channel to express it. When going online, the individual feels more comfortable to express his aggressiveness. Nevertheless, the findings also show that the Turkish students use social media mostly in order to stay in touch with friends, sharing photos, establishing new friendships, organizing social activities, playing games and maintaining romantic relationships. Jason L. Skues, Ben Williams and Lisa Wise (2012) analyze the use of Facebook with regard to three of the five big personality traits on a sample of 393 undergraduate psychology students.<sup>3</sup> The analysis assesses neuroticism, extraversion, and self-esteem in relation to the use of Facebook. The findings show that students with higher levels of loneliness tend to have more Facebook friends while the students with the highest level of extraversion use Facebook to broaden their circle of friends in order to discuss various topics. The authors also stress that students who are extroverted use Facebook as a springboard, while students who are lonely use Facebook for emotional compensation.

In the same vein, using a sample of more than 300 undergraduate students, Nicole B. Ellison discusses the benefits of Facebook friends. Ellison stresses that "Facebook friends play a very positive role in helping others to maintain a certain social capital (Ellison et al, 2007, p. 1161)". The research findings highlight that friendship on Facebook helps people with low self-esteem as well as the ones with a lack of satisfaction of their social life. Similarly, in a theoretical research study by Joshua Dickson Ogidi (2015) on social media and identity formation among Christian Youth ministers, social media is viewed as a source of self-identity formation. Ogidi stresses that ministering on social media assists in creating a healthy self-identity among young Christians.

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<sup>2</sup> Psychoticism is a personality dimension with characteristics of aggression, aloofness, antisocial behavior and impulsive actions([Http://: www.psychologydictionary.org](http://www.psychologydictionary.org))

<sup>3</sup> Skues et al, 2012, p. 2414, Neuroticism, extraversion, self-esteem, loneliness and narcissism consist of the five traits of personality.

In light of a psychological perspective, Andalibi, Ozturk, and Forte (2015) study the relationship between depression and photo sharing on Instagram. The findings show that image is more important than text in expressing a state of depression. The authors stress that, regarding the depression-related images, “there is a shared identity among the Instagram users” (Andalibi, Ozturk, Forte, 2015, p. 234). They also emphasize that Instagram plays the role of a springboard that allows people to express their emotions. As a result, Instagram helps its users to create a shared identity, and consequently broaden their social networks.

### **2.2.2. The critical approach**

The critical approach in social sciences originates in Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism. In 1923, nearly half a century after Marx died, a group of German theorists, known as the Frankfurt School, sharpened the approach in light of the expansion of industrial capitalism. The critical approach focuses on understanding the power struggle that occurs in a consumer society. In a broader sense, the critical approach also includes the feminist theory, the postcolonial theory, and critical media studies. The critical approach of social media falls within the critical media studies. In virtual life, individuals are fighting for symbolic power. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer [1944 (2002)], two proponents of the Frankfurt school, view media as a cultural industry that maintains power relations and lessens popular resistance by promoting a strategic mass culture. With the advent of social media, social relationships become distorted and superficial through manipulation. Although information is power, the manipulation of information in this context is the most effective power.

The critical view of digital identity refers to an ambiguous identity that takes place in a complex environment. Serge Proulx (2004) highlights the advent of technologies as part of the mystification of life. Proulx argues that the development of technologies results from the human mythical desire to create a representation of himself. Thus, in virtual technologies, an artificial being is created where the physical body is imagined. In the virtual environment, identities are reshaped in accordance with the goals of the user, the expectations of his peers, and also the constraints of the machine. The distortion of human communication is consequently explained by the negative effects of technologies on social ties. The structures that were previously used to assure social ties have been replaced by networks. The social man has become a networked man. Philippe Breton (2000) calls this phenomenon the disease

of the modern man. The disease of the modern man results from the fact that computer-mediated communication prevails over real-life interactions. The distortion of human communication is due to what Breton calls the cult of the internet. In the same vein, Simon Laflamme (2006) views virtual communication as the desynchronization of social ties and an obstacle to collective action. He assumes that: “the more the communication is mediated by internet the more people communicate in number and frequency; the more people communicate with internet the less they communicate face to face; the more the communication is internet-mediated the less deep it is; the more people resort to internet the more they feel alone.” As a result, computer-mediated communication impacts adversely real-life interactions as well as the individual's emotional state.

The critical literature regarding social media and identity reveal many issues that affect the individual in both their private and social life. Sam Fahmy (2008) suggests that Facebook might be a fruitful land for researchers who want to detect narcissism among Facebook users. Fahmy stresses that people who are narcissistic use Facebook in a self-promoting way that can be identified and appreciated by others. This shows that Facebook is used as a steppingstone to exhibit the self. The exhibition underlies a lack of satisfaction in their real-life relationships. Similarly, Karen Cerulo (1997) addresses the notion of identity in relation to electronic media. Revisiting different approaches such as essentialism, social constructionism and deconstructing categories, Cerulo suggests that the conciliation between social constructionism and the deconstructing categories is necessary for effectively approaching the phenomena related to digital identity.

Furthermore, Judith Rauhofer (2008) stresses that the sharing of personal information online shows a lack of awareness of risk management. The fact that personal information is controlled by social networks makes the individual lose control over the information. According to Rauhofer, privacy is dead. Rauhofer regards privacy as the price for having access to the virtual world. Heivadi and Khajeheian (2013), in a study in Iran, evaluate the effect of the offline identity on the presentation of self on social media. The research findings show that half of Iranian Facebook users make their personal identity ambiguous for others. The confusing identities result in fake profiles and pseudonyms and serve to share contents that are often upsetting to their community. Multiple identities, anonymous profiles and

pseudonymous are among identity masks that imply representation in the virtual world. Furthermore, Ilire Zajmi (2015), analyzing the masking strategies related to the complexity of online identity, stresses the following:

Results of research conducted for the purposes of this paper, confirms the thesis on the fragile world of the individual-user in creating an online identity, the uncertainty which accompanies this journey and challenges of online communication, although this type of communication is defined "free from obstacles arising from real communication, "emphasized suspicion in themselves – of users in their real identity, as some of them do not really know who they are, are the same individuals as in real life like in a virtual world (Zajmi, 2015, p. 340).

Based on Zajmi's assertion, the masking strategies imply a tradeoff between the challenges of online communication and the ability of the user to magnify his real identity. This problem results in the need to address the presentation of self on social media.

### **2.3. The presentation of self on social media**

In the context of the new forms of sociability mediated by the machine, real life and virtual life maintain an ambiguous relationship. According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, there is no reality in itself, but all realities are represented or mediated by human relationships. In the context of represented reality, scholar Fanny Georges (2009) points out that the evolution of communication devices has changed the relationship of the individual with others and, as a result, have impacted social ties. Georges assumes that the numeric interface alters the individual's perception of his own self as well as his perception of his surrounding world. The numeric representation of self is referring to the observable signs on the screen that the user expresses, and the semiotic layout which expresses his personality. According to Georges, the system of numeric representation of self is divided into two categories: (1) the set of signs displayed by the user, and (2) the set of signs valued by the communication device. In this perspective, identity is pointed out through three categories of signs which are the declarative identity, the active identity, and the calculating identity. The declarative identity refers to personal information such as names, date of birth and photos. The active identity refers to the explicit activities of the user. For example, John and Jacques became friends is an expression of active identity. As for the calculating identity, it refers to the quantified variables product by the system. Information such as the number of friends and the number of groups in which the user is a member makes up the calculating identity.

The notion of presentation of self on social media is closely intertwined with the notion of difference. In the “Anthropology of online communities”, Wilson and Peterson (2002) consider the online identity as a negotiated which cannot be understood without considering the user’s offline behavior. They claim: “Of course identities are negotiated, reproduced and indexed in a variety of ways in online interaction and often cannot be understood without considering the offline context (p. 457).” Instead of grasping the meaning of the online identity as a negotiated identity, the authors view the notion as a contextualized identity. Identity is, therefore, a context-dependent notion. Moreover, the authors stress the fact the virtual frame allows the individual to show a positive image of himself. In this context, the presentation of the self on social media is based on the user’s own subjective construction of meaning.

Referring to Peraya and Meunier (1999), Georges (2009) emphasizes that the construction of meanings may be viewed through the notions of centration and decentration. The notions of centration and decentration imply the dynamic relationship that an individual has with oneself through others. In the quest of himself, the individual wants the approval and the validation of others. The presentation of self thus carries symbolic values at the intersection of the norms of the technical apparatus and the tactics of the individual using that apparatus. The numeric identity becomes the commitment between the user and the system. However, the system remains dominant in this transaction. Moreover, once the user meets the constraints of the system, he becomes open to other users in order to carry out the process of his contextualized identity.

### **2.3.1. The era of the second self**

For over 30 years, American psychologist Sherry Turkle has been exploring how the digital era participates in shaping human life. Turkle expresses concern about how a “culture of simulation” affects the human mind, body, and self. In this regard, Turkle uses Baudrillard’s concept of simulation while highlighting the importance of the machine. The culture of simulation is not without consequences for social relationships. The normative dimensions of human communication are recessed into the “game of social media”. With reference to the so-called game of social media, Turkle stresses that “the self is constructed, and the rules of the social interactions are built, not received” (1995, p. 10). Through this

new way of life, which is displayed on the screen of a machine, the concept of identity becomes ambivalent. On the screen, the individual is shared between his person and his persona. In the dynamics of the communication mediated by technology, the self takes place in a role-playing game.

Having assessed the Multi-User Domains (MUD) and the Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Turkle discovered that the human self has become “a transgressive mixture of biology, technology, and code” (1995, p. 21). Using a sample composed of high school and college students, Turkle found that although a computer does things for people, it mainly does things *to* them. In the first book of Turkle’s three-part series, she claims: “we have become accustomed to opaque technology; we have learned to take things at interface value; we have used our relationships with technology to reflect on the humans” (1995, p. 26). In such a culture of simulation, social ties are put aside in favor of connectedness. The life on the screen is a simulation of real life instead of being a representation of it. Baudrillard (1981) distinguishes between simulation and representation in saying that a representation can be viewed as a reflection or a copy of the reality while simulation makes the reality a copy. By simulating, the individual tends to build a self that provides gratifications that he/she is not able to get in real life. Turkle argues that “people escape their lack of satisfaction of the physical by fulfilling their fantasies online. MUD players commonly try to take things from the virtual to real life and are usually disappointed” (1995, p. 207). One of the students interviewed by Turkle was physically disabled. She created a disabled character on MUD and received some positive gratifications. These positive gratifications were then internalized by the student and gave her a better opinion about herself.

The gratifications displayed on social media remain problematic because of the validity of the claims shared by the users. While overlooking the ambiguous characteristics of the virtual relationships, a technophile thesis claims that virtual communication facilitates psychological growth and that risks such as pregnancy and contagious diseases do not exist online. However, the specter of risks such as identity crisis, anonymity, multiple personality, and fragmented self still remains challenging. The social world is shaken by the fluidity of human-life transformation (Bauman, 2000). For Bauman, the norms of the societies have become liquid and the human rooted to places has significantly lessened. Thus, in the present

era what matters is the ability to adapt and change. The unitary self has been overthrown by the multiple selves. The “solid” traditional world has been taken over by the liquid modernity.

The era of the second self is one of the machines. Turkle (2005) calls it the era of selfishness and self-absorption. The individual exists through the machine and the cultural, social and ideological content of the machine influence the individual’s actions and behavior. Human perception and knowledge get computerized. The computerized knowledge is being reproduced in real life. Turkle underlines these facts as follows:

We are insecure in our understanding of ourselves and this insecurity breeds a new preoccupation with the question of who we are. We search for ways to ourselves. The computer is a new mirror, the first psychological machine. Beyond its nature as an analytical engine lies its second nature as an evocative object (2005, p. 279).

Human concerns such as emotional insecurity, existential void, and lack of motivation are addressed online. The machine seems to provide more assistance and intimacy. Friendship with the machine is more valued by people who try to escape others’ judgment and rejection. The human being is in the middle of a new quest of himself. Accordingly, the norms and mores that make up the frame of reference for an individual melt into the need for constant connection. Through online connection, the individual asserts himself and builds up network through an interplay between his online identity and his offline identity.

#### **2.4. The theories of identity construction**

Aside from the works conducted in the field of social media, various theoretical considerations have been made on identity with regard to technology. Erik Homberger Erickson (1968) might be considered as the pioneer of research related to identity construction. His works, which are related to developmental psychology, focus on the stages of identity from childhood to teenagehood. In the same perspective, Marcia (1980) considers identity as “an internal organization built by oneself which falls within the dynamics of the needs, abilities, beliefs, and history of the individual” (p. 159). Marcia distinguishes four identity statuses which are identity achievement, foreclosure, diffusion, and moratorium. The identity diffusion indicates that the individual has not yet made a commitment to explore a specific developmental task. Foreclosure refers to a commitment made by the individual yet

without exploration. Moratorium refers to an active state of exploration yet without commitment. As for identity achievement, it refers to a period of life where the individual has reached a state of active exploration and made a commitment relating thereto. Marcia states that identity change is triggered by a lack of adequacy between the individual and the context in which he lives.

For their part, Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose a theory of identity that focuses on group conflicts. This focus on groups shows the major role that society plays in shaping the individual's identity. They express the idea that social identity is constructed through a double dynamic of differences between groups and similarities within the same group. The more integrated someone is within his group, the more different he feels from others in other groups. In this perspective, the identity construction takes places in a process of levels which are respectively social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Social categorization is related to the conventions socially constructed. Social identification refers to the categories that fit an individual's self-concept and expectations. Social comparison refers to the relationship between the individual's group and other groups. Social comparison can result in separation of the individual from his group in order to join another group that is able to provide him with more gratifications.

A theory of identity which includes both psychological and sociological dimensions of the process should constitute the bedrock of the present dissertation. This refers to a theory of identity that falls within the perspective of self-construction through the relationship with others. Whereas social media makes up platforms of the new dominant form of social relationships, a theory of identity negotiation remains the most appropriate pedestal to the present work. Social media is seen as a stage and identity as a role-playing game. The following section proposes a review of the different seeds of the identity negotiation theory before placing emphasis on Goffman's dramaturgical theory.

#### **2.4.1. The identity negotiation theory**

First and foremost, it is necessary to set an operational definition of the notion of negotiation. According to Ting-Toomey (2015), the term negotiation refers to "the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between two or more communicator in maintaining,

threatening or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other in situ” (p. 418). A negotiation is thus a communication activity which mediates human relationships. As a communication process, a negotiation takes place into a cultural context which influences its nature. In a collectivistic culture, the weight of the social norms shapes the identity while in an individualistic culture, the individual has more space to negotiate his identity. As a communication activity, identity negotiation is a process of intersubjective recognition. As for Daniel Druckman (2007), a negotiated identity refers to the interaction of values and interest. Therefore, identity and group values are closely intertwined. Thus, in collectivistic cultures, identity consists of a solid entity imposed by the elites. In this context, identity is manipulated or forced. However, in individualistic cultures, identity is a fluid entity. The individual is motivated by his affinity and interest in a certain group and is likely to join another group in case of lack of satisfaction.

From a historical perspective, the first roots of identity negotiation as a concept emerged from the works of Goffman (1959) and Weinstein (1964). From a psychological perspective, the notion was first systematized in psychological research conducted by Second and Backman (1965), Swam (1983) and Schlenker (1985), including both a behaviorist and personality approach. In 1986, Stella Ting-Toomey integrated the notion of identity negotiation into a theoretical framework. Since then, the theory has undergone many modifications due to its development. The 2005 version of the theory, which is the latest version, highlights the negotiation competence which requires intercultural knowledge, mindfulness and interaction skills to cope with identity-related issues.

Relying on other works conducted in the perspective of a negotiated identity, Ting-Toomey suggests ten fundamental assumptions of the identity negotiation theory. However, five of the ten core assumptions prevail with regard to the present work. The first assumption stresses that symbolic communication serves as the channel to shape membership identities. The second assumption refers to the common needs of the individuals or groups such as security, integration, connection, and acceptance. This assumption refers to the relational dimension of the human being that pushes him to communicate with others. The third assumption states that the individual tends to feel secure in the group in which he is a member while he feels insecure in a group in which he is not integrated. The fourth assumption refers

to the feeling of being approved and rejected within his own group. The fifth refers to the negotiation competence outcomes which are the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected and the feeling of being affirmatively valued.

However, the most prized among the sociological approaches of identity remains the symbolic interactionism offered most prominently by Goffman. As an interplay between the self, the situation and the other, the interactionist approach states that all concrete human activities tend to the solution of a problem. The problem refers to the communication situation. In this context, the situation implies three dimensions which include (1) the objective conditions in which the group and the individual have to act, (2) the previous attitude of the individual or the group, and (3) the definition of the situation. Consequently, with regard to the interactionist perspective, identity is deemed as a relational construct and as a situational product.

#### **2.4.1.1. Identity as a relational construct**

In the perspective of the social theory of Communication, identity consists of a sum of “selves” which arise from a dialectic of an intersubjective recognition. Jürgen Habermas (1987) referred to the concept of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) borrowed from Husserl to describe the intersection of the objective world, the social world, and the subjective world. Habermas thinks of the lifeworld as a reservoir of convictions common to all the communication actors. Thus, Habermas agrees with Goffman (1959) who himself described the interaction as a place of relational adjustment where the accomplishment of actions is negotiated on an identity basis. Therefore, the communication actors, placed in a specific situation, guide their actions in accordance with their relationship with others which determines the communication. The relational framework legitimates communication actions but also facilitates their interpretation. That is what Harré (1991) calls “the discursive production of selves”. Whereas in symbolic interactionism, the interaction and the situation are consubstantial, a brief consideration of the notion of *situation* becomes necessary. Hence the purpose of the following segment.

#### **2.3.1.2. Identity as a situational product**

Every single communication action is the solution to a situation. As aforementioned, the situation implies three sides which include (1) the objective context in which the relationship takes place, (2) the previous attitudes of the actors, and (3) the definition of the situation itself. The situation of the relationship determines the places of the actors with regard to their history, lifestyle, and targets in life. According to Charaudeau (1991), the features of the situation refer to stable attributes that comfort the actor within his belonging group. Thus, the modalities of construction of the relationship arise from the perception of the interactional framework. Identity negotiation lies in the process of construction of the norms of communication. In this perspective, every action is considered as social action where the interlocutors act according to motives and intentions. The following section on Goffman's theory of the presentation of self intertwines the notions of interaction and situation.

#### **2.4.2. Goffman's dramaturgical theory of the self**

Erving Goffman is considered one of the major figures of the interactionist approach. All his works are based on the modalities of interpersonal communication. The presentation of self in everyday life (1959) is an attempt to describe, classify and order the modalities of everyday-life human interactions. In this perspective, Goffman uses the metaphor of dramaturgy. First and foremost, it should be noted that according to Goffman, the world is not reduced to a stage. Although Goffman's theory of human interaction draws on some conceptual resources from the metaphors of stage, audience, character, role, and staging, a transfer of notions would be simplistic. Goffman refers to the dramaturgical resources not to dramatize life but to highlight all that is hidden in human mental and gestural routines. His presentation may be referred to as sociology of the unveiling. Contrary to the positivist sociology which questions the nature of reality, Goffman's approach is an attempt to understand the circumstances that condition the perception of reality. The positivist approach reifies, defines and systematizes the meaning of reality while the phenomenological approach, used by Goffman, stresses the complexity of reality which stems from humans' attitudes towards the world. Thus, the relationship between the copy and the original, the false and the true, the staging and reality, the theatrical representation and the social life are

characterized by paradoxes and ambiguities. The dramaturgical theory of social life does not deny the existence of reality. However, it consists of an observation grid that allows access to the moments of social life where the boundaries between the symbolic action and reality disappear. This theory consists of an ethnography of communication action. The following segment highlights the modalities of the action through the notions of performance, front and backstage settings, and impression management.

#### **2.4.2.1. Performance**

The notion of performance arises from the binomial “*interaction and situation of action*” which consists of the heart of Goffman’s theory of human interaction. Performance is related to the modalities of action which are either an unconscious mental work or the acceptance of the scenic mandatory constraints. The latter makes up the necessary conditions that allow the absorption of the onlookers in and by the spectacle. Goffman defines the notion of performance as a “socialized, molded and modified behavior to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is expressed” (1959, pp. 21-22). In a context of social interaction, the internal motives of the individual are thus adjusted to the external requirements related to society. Therefore, the audience shapes unconsciously the stage but also undergoes its effects. Goffman argues: “When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them” (1959, p. 10). The audience undergoes the effects of participation, splitting, cooperation, engagement or absorption.

Furthermore, the audience plays with the performing actor without being a part of the staging. The audience is absorbed or captivated to some extent. With regard to the bystanders, Goffman states that “they are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be” (1959, p. 10). In such a context, the individual is likely to play a masked individual or a cynical individual. Since Goffman distinguishes a sincere performer from a cynical performer, it becomes necessary to address the settings that underlie those characters. In the dynamics of ordinary human interactions, performance takes place through some front stage and backstage settings. As closely intertwined to the notion of performance, the notions of front

and backstage are addressed in the following segment in the sense of an extended definition of the notion of performance.

#### **2.4.2.2. Frontstage and backstage settings**

The front and the backstage make up the bedrock of performances. The ambiguity and the complexity of the notions *frontstage* and *backstage* settings underlie Goffman's prudence in avoiding stressing any resemblance between reality and representation. However, the essence of the analysis of performance lies in an attempt to understand where the boundary between the mask and the self is blurred. Goffman labels as the front: "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (1959, p. 13). The front settings thus refer to the physical context such as décor and a physical layout that define the scenery. Hogan (2010) sees the front stage as the presentation of an "idealized version of the self" that confers a specific role to the individual. As for the backstage, it refers to a performance where the individual keeps up his social appearance. The backstage refers to a place of character dissimulation.

Relying upon the front and the backstage settings, the performer tends to show dramatic self-expression. He displays an idealized view of himself. Goffman acknowledges that a human being tends to look a little better than he actually is. Thus, wealth, luxury and class status are displayed through the performance. Through some mystification strategies, the performer relies on the audience to maintain his expressive control. Goffman argues: "the performer can rely upon his audience to accept minor cues as a sign of something important about his performance" (1959, p. 33). Nevertheless, in the spirit of Goffman's theory, the notion of performance has a different meaning than in the analytical philosophy of Austin (1975) where performance results in illocutionary effects. In the dramaturgical theory of human interaction, performance is more likely to be an individual success than a communication action. The effects of the front and back regions consist of perlocutionary effects that foster a certain perception of the reality which results from the impression managed by the performer. The next segment establishes the modalities of the notion of impression management.

#### **2.4.2.3 Impression management**

In social psychology, the notion of impression management refers to the way an individual manages his image so that he influences the way others think of him. The reality experienced by others is the impression created by the individual. Goffman refers to this impression under the terms of the art of impression management. Goffman defines the impression as follows:

The past life and current round of activity of a given performer typically contain at least a few facts which, if introduced during the performance, would discredit or at least weaken the claims about the self that the performer was attempting to project as part of the definition of the situation (1959, p. 133).

Impression management might be seen as the double face of Janus. On one hand, the unmeant gestures or the inopportune intrusion refers to the side of the performer that remains uncontrolled by him. On the other hand, the internal verbal statements refer to the behavior adopted by the performer in order to fulfill his expectations. The impression management is carried out through three main defensive attributes and practices which are the dramaturgical loyalty, the dramaturgical discipline and, the dramaturgical circumspection. Goffman highlights the fact that “the performer who’s disciplined, dramaturgically speaking, is someone who remembers his part and does not commit unmeant gestures or faux-pas in performing it” (1959, p. 137). The dramaturgical circumspection refers to the prudent behavior adopted by the performer in order to remain loyal in the eyes of the audience. Thus, the circumspection functions in accordance with the context. Goffman underlines the fact that “the performer who is dramaturgically prudent will have to adapt his performance to information conditions under which it must be staged” (1959, p. 142). Goffman sees in the performer a merchant of morality. The performer manages his image through his self-presentation, his reputation and the desire to enhance his social visibility.

#### **Summary of the chapter**

The advent of social media has caused an upheaval in the human perception of himself and his environment. As new platforms of self-expression, social media makes up a new cultural frame where the individual identity is constructed. This identity, which consists of a negotiated identity, takes place in an imagined community characterized by the social presence of its members. The main research conducted in this field is shared between two

paradigms, a functional approach and a critical approach of the digital culture. The proponents of the functional approach maintain that the presentation of self on social media broadens social relationships and enhances the individual's self-acceptance. The functionalist approaches of the techno-self assume that virtual communication consists of the extension of human face-to-face communication. Social media is thus the engine of the coming together of peoples. On the contrary, the proponent of the critical approach maintains that social media alters the essence of human communication. This approach states that self-identity is manipulated through the use of multiple identities, pseudonyms, and anonymity, all of which impede the reliability of virtual communication.

Several theoretical frameworks focus on identity construction through either a sociological or a psychological lens. The dramaturgical theory of the self by Erving Goffman remains the most suited for the understanding of such a phenomenon. The presentation of self in everyday life consists of a frame of reference to approach the dynamics of the self on social media. Goffman's theory states that human relationships refer to the movements of a stage. The individual is thus a performer. In this dynamic of performance, the observation matrix consists of the management of both the front and backstage settings, as well as the impression management. Impression management refers to the management of the image of the individual and his strategies to gain social approval and visibility. However, Goffman's theory cannot automatically be adjusted to the reality of social media. It may constitute the aporia of the scientific theory of digital identity.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The present work consists of a reconstructive analysis of the presentation of self on social media among Haitian students in Turkey. It should be admitted that, despite the omnipresence of the phenomenon, social media remains a sociological object under construction. The scientific literature does not abound in these new platforms of social interactions. However, any attempt to understand the social and cultural dynamics that underlie this phenomenon is justified in humans' interest in social media. Thus, this dissertation is a reconstructive analysis based on the use of social media and the Haitian students' perception of the use of such media. The interactive dimension of social media serves as the conductive thread to the process. This chapter outlines the analytical process and therefore the research method.

#### **3.1. Research model**

As a reconstructive analysis of the identity construction on social media, the present work falls into the interpretive paradigm, hence the phenomenological model. A reconstructive phenomenology based on the work of Jürgen Habermas constitutes the conductive thread of this dissertation. Contrary to the positivistic paradigm, which is reductionist and isolationist, the interpretive approach is holistic and contextual (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The interpretive paradigm suggests that the researcher is part of the social phenomenon while the positivist approach claims an objective distance between the researcher and the object under study. Bhattacharjee suggests that interpretive research is holistic and contextual. Thus, the core assumption of such an approach refers to the “meaning” which is contextual and intersubjective. Bhattacharjee states:

Interpretive research is a research paradigm that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology) and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic contexts reconciling the subjective interpretation of its various participants (epistemology) [...] Interpretive research assumes that social phenomena are situated within and cannot be isolated from their social context, interpretations of such phenomena must be grounded within their socio-historical context. Researchers are always embedded within the social context that they are studying. However, their personal insights, knowledge, and experiences of the social context are critical to accurately interpreting the phenomenon of interest (2012, pp. 105-106).

Therefore, the reconstructive approach results in a phenomenological model based on an intersubjective interpretation of phenomena. Hence the interpretive paradigm. Thus, instead of being a hypothesis testing research, this study falls within the theory building approach. Whereas a scientific theory that encompasses the phenomena related to social media is yet to get off the ground, this dissertation might be seen as part of the prolegomenon to a critical theory of digital identity construction. Given that the research model is clearly defined, the following section addresses the scope of the project.

### **3.2. Scope of research**

As Howard and Enrique (2010) suggest, the research design is “the point where researchers define the scope of research that is the limits and content of the data investigated” (p. 76). Thus, the scope of research refers to the delimitations in time and space of the phenomenon under study. This research is limited to the Haitian students in Turkey. The choice of Haitian students is justified in two factors. First, as foreigners, these students are all living in a country with a culture that is different than their own. Second, since they are living abroad, these students resort to social media to communicate with their peers in Turkey as well as their friends and family back in their home country. Therefore, the dynamics of communication undergoes some shifts due to the new cultural reality. As for the measurement, this research aims at understanding the use of social media among Haitian students through the representation that they make of their own use of social media. According to Giroux and Tremblay (2009), the scope of research is determined by the researcher, and the nature of the units of analysis is determined by the objectives of the research.

### **3.3. Participants**

The number of participants to the research refers to the sampling under study. In qualitative research, rather than the representativeness of the sampling, the most important benchmark is the characteristics of the sampling. The participants to the present study are 15 Haitian students purposefully selected from several universities in Turkey. Creswell notes that in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Thus, the selected students

are active users of social media who are likely to share their experiences on using these media. No quota nor criterion related to gender, age or level of study was set. The participants were selected in accordance with the question of research and the objectives of the study. The choice of the Haitian students as the population under study is justified in the fact that these share the same lifeworld as the researcher. Developed by Husserl and emphasized by Habermas, the lifeworld refers to the cultural and social experiences that a group of people shares or have in common. So, the shared lifeworld between the Haitian students and the researcher, along with the meaning-based approach to which the study subscribes, justifies the sample selection method. In this case, the lifeworld of the students is more tangible and perceptible to the researcher.

### **3.4. Measures**

In this dissertation, two major measures are assessed in order to address the research question. The measures are “the perception of the Haitian university students in Turkey of the use of social media” and “the relationship between online gratifications resulting from the use of social media in relation to the offline behavior outcomes”. The following segment gives an idea of the questions that will constitute the corpus of interviews.

#### **3.4.1. Perception of the use of social media**

Participants were asked to state their experience with, and opinion of social media. They were asked open questions about their personal definition of social media, including its purpose and role in society; the difference between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face conversations; and their opinion on the average time they think a student should spend online. Participants were allotted sufficient time to share their experience and point of view and to interact with the interviewer.

#### **3.4.2. Online gratifications and offline behavioral outcomes**

Once their perception of social media had been clarified, the participants were asked questions on the relationship they are building through these networks. The questions are related to the motivation for using social media (making friends, managing long-distance, entertainment), the nature of the posts (text, image, video), and the post-related activities (comments, sharing, liking). All the questions were asked in a semi-structured interview that

gave enough space to the participants to share his experiences and opinions, as well to the interviewer to use probes in order to obtain additional information.

### **3.5. Questions of research**

This research aims at understanding the factors that give rise to the online identity among Haitian students distributed in several universities in Turkey. Babbie and Mouton suggest that a research problem is generally formulated either in the form of a research hypothesis or a research question (2010, p.73). Since the present dissertation is embedded in a qualitative approach, the research problem refers to the research question. Thus, the impact of social media on the social relationships results in shifting the individual outlook towards himself. Whereas the university students make up a very active category of social media users, a heuristic question is raised: How do the Haitian students in Turkey perceive the use of social media? Since the notion of online identity constitutes an assumption in this study, and with regard to the factors that give rise to this identity, the relevance of the research question lies in the relationship between the online self and the offline self. Hence the following subquestion that arises from the research question: How does the use of social media relate to the student's identity building process? The question of research and its underlying subquestion constitute the key factors in choosing the data collection technique.

### **3.6. Data collection techniques**

In order to address as deeply as possible, the question of research, this study relies on in-depth interviews with participants. Creswell defines interview as the qualitative data collection technique that “when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record the answers (2012, p. 217)”. The relevance of interviews to this study lies in the interpretive stance of approaching the phenomenon. Contrary to the positivist model that gives precedence to the explanation of the phenomenon under study, the phenomenological model prioritizes the interpretive understanding which sees the participant as a protagonist of the heuristic process. The interview is thus an intersubjective technique to understand a phenomenon related to the subjective world, the social world or the objective world. As for the type of interview, it was selected in accordance with the size of the sample, the time allotted to the research, and the availability of the participants. Although it consists

of the most time-consuming type of interview, the one-on-one interview and the telephone interview remain the most relevant to this study. Confidentiality, reluctance due to timidity, and sense of intimacy are among other factors that make the one-on-one interview prevail over the other types of interview. As for the telephone interview, availability of participants, distance and time allotted to the research are among other factors that play in favor of this data collection technique.

### **3.7. Data analysis techniques**

The data analysis technique of a phenomenon under study stems from the nature of the research problem. With regard to this study which aims at understanding the relationship between the use of social media and identity formation, the analytical stance turns out to be a communicational reconstruction. Indeed, the presentation of self on social media is perceived as a communication action. It is assumed that every single post, share or comment is an expression of the self, but it also calls for the appreciation of others. Since the data under analysis consist in speech acts performed by the participants during interviews, these speech acts constitute the content to analyze. The present study resorts to a discourse analysis that rests on the critical hermeneutics and the universal pragmatics as two consubstantial methods of analysis which bear on the epistemological grounding of the research problem. In the following sequence are discussed the notions of critical hermeneutics and universal pragmatics.

#### **3.7.1. Critical hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the reconstruction of meaning in everything that comes under the domain of knowledge. According to Gusdorf (1988), to interpret a document is to decipher its content, read the message it contains, and together to situate it in the cultural context in which it was formulated. Thus, the wording of the text consists of a communication circuit which occupies a mediating position. It should be noted that it is not enough to only take note of what the text says, it is necessary to establish what it means, for what purpose it was written, and ask in what state of mind it will have been read by those for whom it was intended. The meaning of the text is not in the text, it is scattered around without the entire landscape that focuses at this point. The idea of meaning implies a movement, the aim of an

intention. In this perspective, the hermeneutic analysis is a reflection on the pragmatic functions of language corresponding to the universal conditions of validity claims. Habermas [1995 (1983)] suggests that the interpreters understand the meaning of a text insofar as they see why the author wanted to hold to be true some affirmations, hold to be right some values and norms and hold to be truthful some experiences that might be attributed to others. Thus truth, rightness, and truthfulness are considered the three universal conditions of validity claims.

Furthermore, interpreting the individual experience requires to understand the lifeworld of this individual. Habermas considers the lifeworld as a background that denotes the interaction between the individual and his surrounding world. He argues: communication action can be understood as a circular process in which the actor is two things in one: “an *initiator* who masters situations through actions for which he is accountable and a *product* of the traditions surrounding him, of groups whose cohesion is based on solidarity to which he belongs, and of process of socialization in which he is reared [1995 (1983, p. 135)]”.

Habermas differentiates between communication action oriented toward success and communication action oriented toward understanding. The communication action oriented toward success is instrumental, manipulative and self-centered while the communication action oriented toward understanding is true, sincere and just, hence intersubjective. Regarding the communication action toward success, Habermas insists: If the actors are interested solely in the success, i.e., the consequences or outcomes of their actions, they will try to reach their objectives by influencing their opponent’s definition of the situation, and thus his decisions or motives [1995 (1983:134)]”. As for the communication action toward understanding, Habermas refers to the world as the mediation of this understanding. A situation of communication always refers to something in the objective world, the social world (legitimately ordered interactions) or the subjective world (the intimate self) through a process based on consensus which consists of the required deliberative procedure that leads to understanding. Hence the three universal conditions of claims to validity which are truth, rightness, and truthfulness. The truth refers to the representation of the state of affairs, the rightness refers to the maintenance of an interpersonal relationship and the truthfulness implies the manifestations of lived experiences.

Habermas calls competent speaker any actor of communication capable of expressing himself intelligibly, stating something to be understood others (propositional truth), making himself understandable and trustworthy (truthfulness), and building understanding with others (normative rightness). People come to understand each other by referring to a shared normative background. Hence the four validity claims that are reconstructed through the universal pragmatics. In the following sequence, a definition of the notion of universal pragmatics is set in relation to the critical hermeneutics.

### **3.7.2. Universal pragmatics**

The universal pragmatics, in the light of Habermas' thought, aims at reconstructing the universal conditions of possible intercomprehension. As aforementioned, truth, rightness and truthfulness are the universal conditions of claims to validity that are to be reconstructed. It should be noted that communication occurs through a situation that mobilizes the subjective world of the actors, the objective world and the social world. The lifeworld serves a cultural background or reservoir to which the actors resort when they have to refer to one of the mentioned worlds. Habermas defines communication as the basic type of activity for intercomprehension. Relying on language as a medium of intercomprehension, Habermas makes of the speech acts the privileged communication activity of the universal pragmatics' analysis.

The reconstructive analysis is, therefore, a procedure that stems from four pillars which are the formal analysis, the observation and the process of understanding (the communicative experience), the epistemic relationship between the observer and the observed, and the symbolically restructured reality. Habermas insists on the fact that "communicative experience originates in an interactive context in which at least two subjects are linked within the framework of a linguistically produced intersubjectivity of agreement on meanings that remain constant. In that framework, the "observer" is just as much a participant as the observed" [1988 (1967, p. 93)]. It should be noted that the formal analysis is here different from the structural analysis which focuses on the syntax, the frequency and the inference of propositions. The formal analysis is embedded into a process of reconstruction of content as well the objective and normative context in which it has been produced. In that framework, Habermas differentiates between linguistic competence and communicative competence.

Linguistic competence refers only to the comprehensibility, which is the ability to perform grammatically correct sentences. Unlike the linguistic competence, the communicative competence involves the comprehensibility, the propositional truth, the truthfulness and the normative rightness regarding an utterance that calls for understanding.

In order to achieve mutual understanding, the actors of communication must, first and foremost, reach the intersubjective recognition. The intersubjective recognition falls within the social world that underlies the norms socially regulated. Mutual understanding is reached through the action of the actors in presence. In that framework, Habermas distinguishes between four types of actions which are the teleological action, the dramaturgical action, the normatively regulated action, and the communicative action. The teleological concept of action refers to the goal-based actions that presuppose situations that occur in the objective world. Habermas suggests that “the concept of teleological action presupposes relations between an actor and a world of existing affairs. These relations between actors and world allow them for expressions that can be judged according to criteria of truth and efficacy [1984 (1981, p. 87)]”. This specific type of action falls within the actions that mobilize rhetoric, persuasion, and influence on the actors involved in the communication situation. The state of affairs implies that a teleological action refers to a proposition that can be true, hence the objective world. The second type of action, the normatively regulated action, refers to the social world. Indeed, when taking part in a communication situation, the individuals mobilize a shared normative framework that enables them to regulate their behavior toward others. Habermas states that “a social world consists of a normative context that lays down which interactions belong to the totality of legitimate interpersonal relations [1984 (1981, p. 88)]”. Regarding the norms, their validity remains a major issue. In fact, a norm is valid if its outcomes affect equally the actors involved in the action. As for the dramaturgical type of action, Habermas relies on Goffman who, on his part, explicates the dramaturgical behavior under the notion of presentation of self. He argues: “From the perspective of dramaturgical action, we understand social action as an encounter in which participants form a visible public for each other and perform for one another [1984 (1981, p. 90)]”. Through the performance, the actor affords to show a certain image of himself that allows the audience to see him a certain way. In that framework and like the teleological action, the dramaturgical action turns

out to be a goal-based action. However, and like Goffman, Habermas differentiates between a sincere dramaturgical action that is an illocutionary action and a cynical dramaturgical action which is a perlocutionary action. The illocutory language complies with the criteria of the validity claim while the perlocutionary action refers to strategies of influence and manipulation of the audience.

Finally, Habermas sets the communicative action. The communicative action aims at a mutual understanding between at least two actors capable of speech and action. In that framework, the communication process turns out to be a negotiated process among the actors involved in the communication situation. Habermas suggests that “the actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement [1984 (1981, p. 86)]”. When the actors involved in an action situation reach for mutual understanding, they suggest at least three validity claims through their utterances. The three validity claims suggest that “a statement made is true; that the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context; that the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed [1984 (1981, p. 99)]”. The true statement refers to something in the objective world, namely the world of state of affairs. Being right and conform to the normative context, the utterance refers to something in the social world. In fine, the sincerity of the utterance refers to the subjective world. Hence the relationship between the three validity claims and the three worlds.

Furthermore, besides the aforementioned three worlds, another world serves as the reserve fund to the communication process, hence to the three worlds. Actors involved in a communication situation understand each other better if they have a shared cultural charge. This shared cultural charge is what Habermas [1985 (1981)] calls the lifeworld. Habermas defines the concept of lifeworld as follows:

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreement, and arrive at agreement (p. 126).

Thus, the lifeworld is the undisputed frame of reference on which participants to a communication process rely to arrive at an agreement. It should be noted that during the communication process, the speaker does not necessarily refer to the lifeworld but to one of

the aforementioned worlds (objective, social, or subjective). The speaker and the hearer refer to the lifeworld in order to interpret together the utterances. In that framework, the lifeworld is a reservoir of convictions shared by all the actors of communication. The lifeworld owes its evidence to the intersubjectivity of language comprehension. It follows that the lifeworld has, therefore, a common aspect, meaning that it is above all possible dissension. Thus, in the perspective of a reconstructive analysis, a shared lifeworld between the researcher and the participants enables the researcher to carry out the process of interpretation.

### **3.8. Analytical grid**

It should be reminded that the reconstructive analysis subscribes to a process of interpretation of the meaning that subjects give to their actions. In the frame of this research, the analysis consists of the reconstruction of the speech acts of the participants regarding their perception of themselves on social media. Given the hermeneutic and heuristic dimension of this dissertation, the discourse analytical grid of Patrick Charaudeau (2005) is adopted. The discourse analysis is thus carried out over two levels: the pragmatic analysis of the speech acts and the hermeneutic analysis of the meaning hidden behind them. As for the content analysis of the Facebook page called “The Haitian students in Turkey”, the analysis focuses on the nature of the posts, the language used, and the nature of interaction between the students in a time frame ranging from March 2016 to March 2018.

#### **3.8.1. Discourse analysis of speech acts**

The discourse analysis of a speech act is about the social and discursive identity of the speaker. According to M.H Abrams (2005), the discourse analysis is “the study of the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts”. In that framework, the discourse analysis consists of the analysis of the language beyond the sentence. Since the user of the social is here perceived as a performer and his contact as the audience, his speech act is considered a dramatization speech act. Since the discourse dramatizes, this dramatization is done through a staging. The analysis focuses on the logos, the pathos, and the ethos. The logos corresponds to the rational argumentation of the speech, the pathos to emotion conveyed in discourse and the ethos to the self-image that the speaker constructs with regard to his dual discursive and social identity. However, in the content analysis of a speech act, the ethos prevails over the

logos and the pathos. Charaudeau sustains that “every speech act is constructed through the construction of a self-image (2005, p. 67)”. Charaudeau distinguishes between the ethos of credibility and the ethos of identification. The ethos of credibility brings together the ethos of seriousness that refers to great energy and an ability to control oneself against criticisms, the ethos of virtue that refers to sincerity, loyalty, and honesty of the communication actor, and the ethos of competency that requires both knowledge and know-how. As for the ethos of identification, they bring together the ethos of character, the ethos of intelligence, the ethos of humanity, the ethos of leadership, and the ethos of solidarity. The ethos of character consists in the self-concept which can be manifested through provocation and polemic. The ethos of intelligence refers to the cultural capital of the speaker. The ethos of humanity refers to the feelings of compassion toward others. The ethos of leadership consists of a figure of a guide, while the ethos of solidarity refers to the shared ideas between the speaker and his audience.

Consequently, the present analysis consists in the reconstruction of the speech acts of the Haitian students in Turkey regarding their use of social media, a reconstruction that goes hand in hand with the reconstruction of the ethos conveyed by these students. The reconstructive analysis arises from the critical hermeneutics and the universal pragmatics. A matrix composed of the communication contract and the content analysis of speech acts allows the interpretation of the utterances of participants. As a result, the next chapter consists of the reconstructive analysis of the utterances stated by the participants regarding their use of social media.

#### **4. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PATTERNS AND OUTCOMES**

The findings that follow are presented in the form of an attempt to answer the research question of this qualitative research: How do the Haitian university students in Turkey perceive the use of social media? A question from which rises the following subquestion: How does the use of social media relate to the student's identity building process? The research question, as well as its corresponding philosophical issue (the subquestion), aimed at understanding the online behavior of the Haitian university students in Turkey. To address the first question, the researcher reconstructed the interviewees' narratives into three paradoxical patterns that emerged from the data collected. The three patterns are as follows: communication and remoteness, Self-affirmation and self-restraint, and entertainment and boredom. As an answer to the second question, two themes emerged from the data collected: impression management, and network building.

How do the Haitian university students in Turkey perceive the use of social media?

##### **4.1. Communication and remoteness**

As the first paradoxical pattern, communication and remoteness contrast the student's representation of the use of social media. For all the students, social media are first and foremost means of communication. A way to connect with their friends and family back in Haiti. Living a new cultural context and parted from their family and friends, they resort to social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, or Imo so they feel the presence of their people. Communication through social media is cost-effective. "Social media play a major role in my life on a financial basis. It costs me less money to call my family in Haiti through social media than it would have cost without them", stated Jeff. The development of many applications that allow phone calling and instant messaging have had an impact on the budget allotted to distance communication between the students and their family and friends. Similarly, Robert a graduate student in Economics stated the following: "the low-cost aspect of digital communication makes me spend more time on the social than I would do if it was expensive". The easy access to people and cost-effective communication constitute a major satisfaction for using social media. In the same vein, William, a graduate student acknowledged: "Social media eases the long-distance communication. I am living far away

from Haiti now, but I am very happy that I can easily get in touch with my friends and family back in the country.”

As virtual as the computer-mediated communication appears to be, it helps maintain the bond between the students and their people back in Haiti. Sofia rejoiced: “Social media reduce the physical distance between me and my people.” Moreover, for the students, the communicational dimension of social media also relates to making new friends and connect with the world. “Apart from the sense of rapprochement, social media allows me to connect with new people from all over the world and make amazing discovery”, said Sandra, an undergraduate student in social work. The participants all acknowledged the fact that living in a cultural context that differs to a large extent from their own culture has a meaningful incidence on their use of social media. In this context, they rely on digital applications to reach their friends back in the country.

However, this form of communication, although viewed as a sort of connection between the Haitian students and their family and friends back in Haiti, is also contrasted by a sense of remoteness from the situation they have to cope with in Turkey. To situate himself into this context, Edmond quoted Pope Francis: “social media brings us closer to people who are far from us and far from those close to us”. Many factors explain this remoteness according to the students. Homesickness, the cultural shock they have been facing in Turkey, and the linguistic barriers are among reasons that make them tighten up the bond with Haiti.

Furthermore, the dual relationship between communication and remoteness in the perception of the use of social media came to question the nature of the relationships these students have created on social media. Although the participants acknowledged that online and offline relationships complement each other, they also admitted that there is a significant difference between them. They all claimed that real-life communication is more genuine, reliable, and secure than online communication. Carl, an undergraduate student in architecture, emphasized that the offline communication is more hands-on and more reliable than computer-mediated communication. Comparing friendship in real-life and friendship on social media, he insisted: “Friendship in physical life enables us to observe someone’s behavior through nonverbal communication. Human communication is more coincidental.

The genuineness is more obvious in real life'', argued Peter an undergraduate student in sociology. However, the reliability of their online relationships is closely intertwined with the bond they have already created offline. Melissa, an undergraduate student in Chemical engineering, highlighted the connection between real-life and online communications: "I see social media as an extension of my physical relationships with people that I care for." As for Leticia, a graduate student in health management, people feel more comfortable to assert themselves on the screen. "Sometimes, the virtual life is more real than the real life", she argued.

Accordingly, the paradoxical pattern "communication and remoteness" that emerged from the representation made by the participants of their use of social media fits in what the students see as a double-edged sword. The lonelier and more homesick they feel, the more they rely on social media to fill the distance between them and their family and friends back in Haiti. Thus, the homesickness offset by their adaptation to the Turkish culture had split their perception towards the use of social media. The same digital tool that brings them closer to the people back in Haiti is the same tool that removes them from the reality in Turkey. Peter, an undergraduate student in sociology, criticized the lack of reliability and reciprocity of the online interactions while acknowledging his passion for communication. He stated: "I am always checking my phone to see whether I have received a new message. I stick to my phone because I am living in solitude." This close attachment to his phone is not only a response to his solitude but also the expression of his connectedness.

Despite the huge weight of the nonverbal dimension of human communication acknowledged by the interviewees, they all praise the cost-effective dimension of the computer-mediated communication enhanced with a sense of rapprochement with their family and friends. The sense of rapprochement that, however, gets them away from the new cultural context in which they have been placed. "Once I come out of school, I feel tired. Since I have nothing to do, I just lie down in my bed and start chatting with my family and friends" said Sonia, an undergraduate student in physiotherapy. The difficulties in adapting the Turkish culture, the weather conditions, and the time-zone are considered major factors getting the Haitian students to stick to their phone or computer. This situation also brings

about their remoteness from real-life interactions in Turkey. Hence the dialectic dimension of the online connection: communication and remoteness.

#### **4.2. Self-affirmation and self-restraint**

Regarding the data collected, the concept of self-affirmation refers to the expression of the personal and social identities of the participant. The personal identity lies in the ethos of character and personality. The social identity, it refers to the sense of belonging to social figures or groups that are perceived as models. As for the self-restraint, the data revealed that, while people tend to share a certain type of information about themselves, they also refrain from sharing some data that might put them at risk. Hence the paradoxical pattern “self-affirmation and self-restraint”.

The participants acknowledged to assert themselves on social media according to what they believe to be part of their values, beliefs, and vision of the world. However, they refrain themselves from posting things that could conflict with their values. Sonia admitted that Facebook was a place where people could share their religious beliefs. “All my post on Facebook are related to my religion”, she said. Nevertheless, what Sonia has been seeing on Facebook has negatively impacted her self-confidence. She explained: “Social media are platforms that show people with great talent. When I try to compare myself with these people, it makes me downplay myself.” As for Jessica, an undergraduate student in management, exposing herself on social media makes her feel different. “I use the hashtag Haitian girl in all my Instagram posts”, she enthused. Jessica also shares contents regarding her religious belief: “my posts are mostly fun and religion-related”. However, like Sonia Jessica tends to shy away from negative comments from some people on her posts, she, therefore, does not show things related to her studies. She explained: “I used to post things related to my studies, but I stopped. Some people were not happy about that, they said that I was just showing off. As you know, people can hate you for no reason. I decided to stop just to avoid silly problems”.

The contrast between self-affirmation and self-restraint lies also in what the participants view as their self-concept. The way they see themselves must fit into the features of social media. Johnny acknowledges that has become more aware of his skills and talent

since he started posting texts and pictures on social media, which are positively received by his friends and followers. He nevertheless refrains from displaying texts of political nature. “I am more inclined to participating in discussions related to religion and love stories”, he admitted. Like Johnny, Carl balances the front stage and the backstage settings regarding what should be displayed on social media. He came to realize the necessity of online prudence. He explained: “I remember posting a picture on Facebook with a wig that made me look like a Rasta, I received many negative comments about it, but it had nothing to do with my real life”. According to Carl, this decision to refrain from disappointing other people made him adjust the frontstage settings.

Furthermore, all the participants assume that there is no need to show their personal issues on social media. “I think there are many things about my life that other people do not need to know”, Carl claimed. In the same vein, Steve stated that “people use social media mostly to look for attention from others. To that end, people go online making up stories and controversies”. As for Peter, he assumed that he would share sexual contents only with someone who is special to him. However, he admitted that he would be more likely to receive than send them. Regarding the posts related to privacy concerns, Melissa acknowledged that she could share contents related to sexual education. She, nonetheless, remained careful about the outcomes that sharing sexual contents underlie. Melissa also admitted that she used to share her personal issues on WhatsApp, but she was called to order by her boyfriend. She explained: “The reason behind my boyfriend’s reproof is the need for privacy. Moreover, Melissa claimed to be against all kinds of online contents that degrade women.

Apart from seeing social media as platforms that allow them to showcase their abilities, beliefs, and belonging, some participants also see social media as a political public sphere. In that case, they use social media to voice their opinions on topics that are believed to be of general interest. Leticia assumed that the contents she shares on social media are academically, socially, and politically motivated. “Although I look at the freedom of speech provided by social media with a critical eye, freedom of speech remains a part and parcel of any constitutional states”, she noted. Similarly, Peter defined social media as an appropriate public sphere for sharing thought-provoking ideas. He stated: “I think the thought-provoking contents are more significant and more effective.” As for Edmond, the irony is the best

strategy to assert oneself when it comes to politics and religion-related posts that he sees as very sensitive topics. He acknowledged using irony in his posts as a way to raise awareness. “The contents that I share on social media mainly aim at ignorant people that are misusing social media. I want them to become aware of their nonsense”, he said.

In a nutshell, the participants acknowledged that social media provides gratifications notwithstanding the security and privacy concerns. On the one hand, they see the use of social media as a way to assert their religious belief, political views, and vision of the world. On the other hand, they see the use of social media as a practice that is not risk-free, hence the need for self-restraint. “Social media can be useful or harmful, it all depends on how we use it”, Sandra stated. Besides being a way that allows the students to assert themselves, the use of social media is also perceived by the participants as a way to escape boredom. Thus, another paradoxical pattern emerged from the data regarding the perception of the use of social media: entertainment and boredom.

#### **4.3. Entertainment and boredom**

All the participants viewed the use of social media as entertainment. However, some participants also acknowledged that, due to overuse, social media is sometimes boring. For Sonia, the use of social media is efficacious a remedy for solitude. She declared: “When I go online, I usually get something funny that makes me forget my solitude. Social media helps me kill the time and helps me forget my problems at least for a while.” Nonetheless, Sonia also admitted that social media was absorbing and time-consuming, therefore boring. “Although I use my phone to talk with my family and to kill time, I admit that I don’t consciously use social media. But it is beyond me”, she stated. As for Jessica, using social media is stress-relieving. She goes online every time she feels bored. However, Jessica, as well as Sonia, has experienced disappointment on social media. Her disappointment lies in the fact that people sometimes use social media to manipulate others. She stated: “Some people share rigged contents. Others use multiple identities. That is not right.” Furthermore, the participants acknowledged that the overusing of social media is also as boring as alienating. Paraphrasing Karl Marx in the context of social media, Peter claimed:

“The individual creates a product and this product becomes his master. His life depends on the products. We decided to open an account on social media, and we are making ourselves dominated by this account. Because of that, we do not project the person we truly are.”

The fact of being absorbed in the online networks, according to the participants, does not necessarily mean that there is a real connection between the user and their online friends. Peter emphasized:

“Another bad side of social media lies in the loss of the notion of time. People who are constantly connected cannot live in the moment. Someone who goes to a concert spends more time taking pictures and videos instead of enjoying the concert. At the same time, the person on the other line who is watching the video is not connected with the person who is live on Facebook but with the concert.”

As for Johnny, although he acknowledged that the online networks bridge the geographical gap between him and his family back in Haiti, social media also allows people to spread bad influences. He stressed:

“Sometimes I spend a week without accessing any of my online networks. Sometimes I even uninstall all of them at once, either I realize they are excessively time-consuming, or I feel disappointed in some people sharing unhealthy contents. Sometimes social media is annoying, and it helps spread bad influences”. Like Johnny, Carl gets annoyed by some contents seen on Facebook. He stated: “Some people are posting things that just piss me off.” As for Edmond, with the advent of social media, freedom is trivialized. He noted:

“Unfortunately, many people are misusing social media. I remember posting something on Facebook where I said: social media plus ignorance equals stupidity. Freedom of speech is being trivialized with social media. The content that I share on social media is directed towards ignorant people misusing social media. I have to admit that some friends of mine are pretty annoying with the nonsense they sometimes.”

Accordingly, all the participants claimed the entertaining dimension of social media while stressing its downside as well. Their perception of the use of social media can be summed up through the following sentence that Sandra stated: “In my opinion, social media

is a double-edged sword.” The participants claimed that the online networks help them escape their loneliness, make them laugh, and relieve their stress. Nevertheless, they also pointed out the time-consuming and disappointing side of the online platforms, which is due to their pervasiveness and the misuse that many people make of them.

The perception of the use of social media emerged from three paradoxical patterns which are “communication and remoteness”, self-affirmation and self-restraint”, and “entertainment and boredom”. It should be reminded that the subquestion that rises from the main research question is the following: How does the use of social media relate to the student’s identity building process? This question brought out two categories from the data collected and the content analysis of the Facebook platform called “The Haitian students in Turkey”. The two categories are “impression management” and “network building”.

How does the use of social media relate to the student’s identity building process?

#### **4.4. Impression management**

As mentioned in the literature review, the notion of impression management refers to the online behavior adopted by the performer in order to fulfill his expectations. This pattern emerged from the data collected through the way the participants manage other people’s reactions to their online activities. The participants admitted, to a large extent, that when they share something online, they expect to be validated by their followers. To that end, they share things that appeal to their followers. Regarding the purpose of the contents she shares online, Jessica acknowledged the following:

“To be honest, I do not share anything in a vacuum, but I am not obsessed with people’s likes and comments. People’s reaction does not boost my self-esteem. When I post something funny on social media, I expect people to laugh. I would love to see people enjoy my posts, but I am not obsessed with that. Nevertheless, I like when people share my posts more than when they like. If someone shares my post, I guess the post means a lot to them.”

As for the impression she gets from other people’s comments to her posts, Jessica admitted the following:

“I feel happy about the positive comments because they give me a sense of accomplishment. I feel helpful since I make others smile. As for the negative comments, I just ignore them and move on. If someone who disagrees with me comes up with some arguments, I might reply to them. But if the comment is nonsense, I just ignore it.”

Along with Jessica, Sofia purposefully selects the posts she shares and comments on. She stressed: “If someone important is live on Facebook, I watch and leave a comment.” When it comes to the effect of others’ comment to her posts, Sofia stated: “You know, man, in general, loves to be praised. If I post something nobody likes or comments, I feel ridiculed. Sometimes I even think if no one likes my post, it means that no one likes me.”

As for Peter, self-assessment is important when it comes to criticizing the use of social media. Although he acknowledged having an evaluation attitude towards other people who use social media, Peter believes that charity begins at home. He stressed:

“Personally, I cut down on my online presence. I used to use social media much more. I used to make personal attacks. Like a curtain, social media offer us backstage to perform our most controversial opinions. But I decided to stop these attacks because the feedback is mostly positive, but the effect is quite negative. I remember posting something criticizing people who wish a happy birthday to themselves, a lot of people agreed on that with me, but they keep doing it. This makes me think social media are also platforms of strategic performance.”

The participants acknowledged that the online platforms consist of a context-driven sphere where egos collide. They view social media as a place for following the trends. Steve stated: “I am just following the trends. For instance, I am using Facebook and WhatsApp because they are the most popular social networks and I don't really know about the other networks”. Similarly, Edmond draws on the reactions from his followers. “At first, I used Facebook just for the sake of being up-to-date”, he said. As he usually posts ironic content, he claimed to have built an image from that. “Some of my friends confessed that they always open their notifications once they see that I had posted something. I feel valued”, he stated. As for Robert, he acknowledged that he mindfully shared contents on social media in a way to avoid negative comments. He stressed: “I choose the people that I want to see my posts. I allow my friends only to see the contents that I share. People’s reactions matter to me only if

they are close to me.” In the same vein, Sandra declared that she purposefully manages the contents she shared on Facebook as her parents are also in her friend list.

The notion of impression management emerged from the data collected according to the way the participants show their image on social media in order to get reactions from others. On the one hand, all the participants assumed expecting positive reactions and somehow validation from their online peers. Thus, they adjust the content of their post in relation to their expectation. On the other hand, the participants asserted purposefully choosing the online contents to react to in order to associate their image with some posts while avoiding being tagged in some others. The next segment is dedicated to the notion of network building, another pattern that emerged from the interviews. This pattern shows how the use of social media relates to the process of identity building.

#### **4.5. Network building**

The concept of network building emerged from the Connectivism theory, a learning theory coined by Georges Siemens and Stephen Downes. Designed specifically for improving the learning process in the digital era, the Connectivism theory refers to interactive learning, a learning that is networked. Downes stresses that “knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks (in Duke, Harper & Johnston, 2013, p. 7)”. As for the present study, the network-building pattern emerged from both the data collected and the content analysis of the Facebook page called “The Haitian students in Turkey”. In the context of this study, the notion of network-building refers to solidarity, mutual assistance, information and raising awareness, playing interactive games, and any actions that foster a sense of rapprochement between the students. From the data collected during the interviews, the participants showed their interest in posting contents whose interest is shared by other people. Sofia asserted the following:

“If you check my YouTube, you will have an idea on things I care for. I mostly watch videos related to dreadlocks. My Facebook is more for agriculture and traveling. YouTube is for my lifestyle, my look while Facebook is reserved to my professional activities related to

agriculture which is my field of study. I also follow some pages related to yoga and meditation.’’

Edmond, whose posts are irony-driven, follows lots of pages of sarcasm on Facebook and Instagram. He acknowledged getting inspired by the sarcastic posts. He stated: “My day is better with social media. I follow some groups, especially the sarcastic ones they help me have a bright day. I sometimes get inspired by some funny videos since I also use sarcasm and irony in my posts. “Like Sofia and Edmond, Melissa admitted having her own network where she shares common interest and issues with others. Melissa resorts to social media in order to overcome some academic issues. She explained: “As for YouTube, it helps me out with my math class. Sometimes I do not get anything from the prof’s explanation, but I know I can go to YouTube and get it”. Other participants claimed the interactive dimension of playing games with their friends. “I play candy crush, farm and heroes, they are entertaining and interactive”, said Melissa. Robert goes the same way by stating: “I do play a game that gives me the opportunity to see people in my Facebook friend list who also play the game. It allows seeing the score of your friends and the ranking”. As for Leticia, she attributes a function to each social network she uses according to the people she wants to communicate with. She explained:

“I use WhatsApp for instant messaging. I communicate with my family and friends on daily basis via WhatsApp. I use Facebook for entertainment and fun. As for Instagram, I use it because some friends and Facebook ask to use it and I consequently take the opportunity to keep up with some important events.”

The participants stressed also the importance of their Facebook group and their WhatsApp chat group where they especially share ideas related to their stay in Turkey and also show their belonging to Haiti. They also follow pages that are related to their fields of study and other hobbies in life. “I follow pages on Facebook that are related to my studies”, said Steve. Like Steve, Carl stressed that the pages he follows on Facebook and Instagram are mostly related to his field of study. He stated:

“I just turned in a project regarding my studies in Architecture, I have to confess that I have got the idea from Instagram where I follow a lot of pages related to Architecture. I designed my project by relying on others that I found on Instagram.”

The interviewees acknowledged that they follow pages related to Football, Basketball, music, fitness, love story, and diet. Sandra says that she follows almost everything related to fitness and diet. Robinson is a Real Madrid supporter, then he takes part in discussions happening on several pages dedicated to football. Johnny stressed his inclination for pages related to love relationships. He also acknowledged being inclined to making new friends.

Furthermore, as a complement to the previous section, the next segment consists of the presentation of the findings that emerged from the content analysis of the Facebook page called “The Haitian students in Turkey. The Haitian students in Turkey is a Facebook group created in September 2010 that has at present 41 members. Some of the members have already graduated or left Turkey. It should be noted that all 15 interviewees are part of the group and still live in Turkey. The analytical grid takes into consideration the nature of the posts and the language used. The nature of the posts includes texts, pictures, and videos posted in the form of information and interaction, mobilization and motivation.

#### **4.5.1 Network building: The Haitian students in Turkey**

The data that emerged from the content analysis of the Facebook page called “The Haitian students in Turkey” falls within the dynamics of information and interaction, mobilization and motivation. The posts are mostly in Creole, some in French, and some in English.

The information and interaction pattern of the Facebook page “The Haitian students in Turkey observed from March 2016 to March 2018 emerged in relation to the notion of empathy and solidarity. Thus, the announcement of the death of one of the Haitian students in Turkey that was one of the administrators of the group was stated as follow: “who have known Jack<sup>4</sup>?” Jack is the name of the student that passed away. This post was seen by

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<sup>4</sup> The researcher changed the name of the departed student for the sake of privacy

twenty-five people while only four of them reacted by expressing how highly they were affected. In the same vein, another post stated the death of Haitian student in a car accident in Turkey. The post was seen by 31, like by 8 and commented by three people. The student stated:

“Brothers and sisters, I am greeting in the name of the almighty God. Jack, one of the most respectful persons among us has left us. For those like me who were close to him, I believe this is a very sad time for you and his family. I share your pain, and I will always love you.”

This announcement was followed by another post in the form of a word to caution. The post was seen by 31 people and liked by five. The text stated:

“Greetings to all of you my friends. I am very sad about what happened to Jack, it could happen to any of us. While we are sharing the pain with his friends and family, I am inviting you to be careful. Rest in peace, my bro. I will never forget about you.”

Moreover, the network-building pattern brought out a dimension of mobilization and motivation. The mobilization refers to activities that were intended to gather the members of the group. A call to mobilization went as follows: “Greetings to all of you. I am taking this opportunity to remind you that our gathering will be held in Izmir on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. There will be lots of great and fun things”. The post was seen 32, liked by 4, and commented by 3 people. After four months of silent on the forum, one of the students came out with this appealing post: “Hey, does this group still exist?” A month later, another student called the others upon a special gathering. He stated the following:

“Greetings to everyone. Ayibobo<sup>5</sup>! I hope all of you are doing well in the name of the alive and almighty God. I actually have an idea that I wanted to share with you. As the summer holiday is approaching, I think it would be great if we could organize a meeting where we could eat together. We would go to Antalya or Eskişehir. If you are interested, you can still

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<sup>5</sup> The term “Ayibobo” is in the Voodoo practices what the word Allahu Akbar is in Islam or Hallelujah in Christianity.

propose a place by leaving a comment down below. Thanks to all you for your understanding.”

The post was seen by 28 people, liked by 9 and commented by 5 people with a pronounced sense of humor. As for the motivational dimension, the researcher noticed many posts with a sense of encouragement and solidarity. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, the day of the celebration of the last battle for Haiti’s independence, a student posted the following on the forum:

“The number of times you have fallen down does not determine your journey nor the distance covered. It can mean an assessment of the distance covered, the need for new strategies, and the necessity to drop off some unimportant loads in order to acquire some useful resources. But no matter what, keep up the journey. Do not give up on your goals. Focus and stay positive.”

This post was seen by 24 people, liked by 4 people, and no one commented. In the same, another post came to encourage and motivate the students regarding their studies:

“Hello everyone! It has been a long time, I even thought that the group was closed. I wanted to say hello to all of you and send you a word of encouragement. Congratulations to all those of you who already graduated, and power to the elbow of the soldiers that are still on the way of the studies. I know things are not easy out there, but don't give up the fight. One day you will reach your goals. Be happy guys. Have a great day in the name of Jesus.”

The post was seen by 33 people, liked by 14 and commented 7 people with an accent of thankfulness. Furthermore, it should be noted that during the period of observation covered by the present study, only one picture with the students was displayed on the group’s forum. There are 13 people in the picture that showcases the Haitian flag. Among the 13 students in the picture, only one is Haitian. The picture was taken on the occasion of a students’ gathering in Konya.

### **Summary of the chapter**

The sections of chapter 4 reported on five different patterns that emerged from the data collected. Three paradoxical patterns addressed the main research question which is: How do

the Haitian university students perceive the use of social media? The three paradoxical that were brought out from the in-depth interviews are “communication and remoteness”, “self-affirmation and self-restraint”, and “entertainment and boredom”. By “communication and remoteness” the participants expressed the paradox between being enabled to maintain communication with their family and friends back in Haiti and the fact of being removed from the new reality which they live in at present. By “self-affirmation and self-restraint, the students claimed the need for them to assert themselves while they remain concerned about their privacy. As for “entertainment and boredom”, it brought out the acknowledgment of the use of social media as entertaining and boring at the same time. Moreover, two other patterns addressed the subquestion related to the main question of the research. The two patterns are “impression management” and “network-building”. The participants stated that social media consists of platforms where they let others see what they want them to see of them. As for network-building, the interviewees acknowledged their inclination for contents that fit in their beliefs and values, interests, and passion. The next and final chapter consists of a reconstructive discussion of the research findings, and suggestions of the possibility of an identity-negotiation theory in the digital era.

## **5. DISCUSSION: RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PERCEPTION AND THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG THE HAITIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY**

This section consists of the reconstructive analysis of the findings. In this section, the researcher repeated in an interpretive way the different patterns that emerged from the data collected. It should be reminded that, with regard to our grid of analysis, the discussion is a discourse analysis that falls within the universal pragmatics and the critical hermeneutics. The discourse analysis thus follows the thematic schema of the findings that consists of three paradoxical patterns that address the research question and two patterns that address the subquestion bound to the research question. On one hand, the three paradoxical pattern that addresses Haitian students' perception of the use of social media: communication and remoteness, self-affirmation and self-restraint, and entertainment and boredom. On the other hand, the two patterns that brought out the relationship between the perception of the use of social media and the identity building process among the Haitian students are impression management and network-building. However, regarding the theory-grounded aspect of this study, the recommendations are presented in the form of the possibility for a theory of the self in the digital landscape.

### **5.1. Communication and remoteness**

The paradoxical pattern "communication and remoteness" emerged with regard to the Haitian students' perception of the use of social media. Considering that the Haitian students in Turkey are living far from their family, their friends and their culture, social media are to them a way of rapprochement. A tool of cost-effective, easy, and fast communication. However, the data showed that this communication is inversely a way for them to remove from their immediate environment. The students claimed difficulty of adaptation to the culture, the weather, the lifestyle, as well as a certain feeling of homesickness are among factors that keep them stuck to social media. This paradoxical pattern is a dilemma but rather a strategic use of social media. This strategic use consists of a response to their emotional situation in Turkey. When Sofia said: "social media reduces the physical distance between me and my people", she implicitly implied that social media also increases the distance between her and some other people. In the same vein, Edmond quoted a statement by Pope Francis: "social media bring us closer to people who are far from us and far from those close

to us”. As stated before, this is due to a need for emotional fulfillment that is deeply related to a certain sense of belonging. In the perspective of identity negotiation, the individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment and identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment. In a study dedicated to young people in the context of immigration, Malewska (1997) shows that identity construction refers to a pragmatic need for adaptation to the dominant culture and the ontological need to be loyal towards oneself.

With regard to the paradoxical pattern of “communication and remoteness”, the notion of identity becomes a daily process of construction that is rooted in the way the individual sees himself as well as the constraints by the environment in which he is placed. According to the participants, communication pertains a sense of satisfaction, rapprochement, and exploration of the world. “Apart from the sense of rapprochement, social media allows me to connect with new people from all over the world and make amazing discovery”, stated Sandra. Sandra is able to make new friends and follow things that she likes. This gives her a certain psychological satisfaction. However, this psychological satisfaction falls within an escaping behavior towards life in Turkey. “Once I come out of school, I feel tired. Since I have nothing to do, I just lie down in my bed and start chatting with my family and friends”, said Sonia. This deficit of socialization which is here perceived as a remoteness strengthens the need for communication with her family and friends back in Haiti. The assumption that Peter confirmed when he said the following: “I am always checking my phone to see whether I have received a new message. I stick to my phone because I am living in solitude”. This statement implies that the phone or the computer are seen as alternatives to the solitude of someone that has people around him. Turkle (1995), exploring identity in the age of the internet, notes that people escape their lack of satisfaction of physical life by fulfilling their fantasies online.

As a pattern of the Haitian students’ perception of the use of social media in the context of studying abroad, communication and remoteness consist of a dialectical dynamic that follows two paths. On one hand, communication that refers to interaction with people they care for as well as an effort of assimilation to the Turkish culture. Some participants have Turkish friends both online and offline. On the other hand, a remoteness that refers to the

effort of differentiation from the others. The process is dialectical insofar as online communication is both a way to build interaction with people while also being a way to escape other people. This pattern showed how heavy the context hangs on identity. It also showed how meaningful and heavy the cultural proximity weighs in any communication situation. No matter how much they value the importance of social media with respect to long-distance communication, the participants also acknowledged a sense of solitude. In this perspective, social media does not only alleviate the solitude of the students, but it also inversely increases it by preventing them from building communication with others in the physical life.

In a nutshell, the participants saw the use of social media as a double-edged sword. They rely on them to reach people they care for while also remotening from their current situation. Tosun (2009) views this form of communication as a substitute for offline social relationships. However, Tosun's study discusses the use of social media in a cultural context with which the participants are familiar. The present study views computer-mediated communication as an exit strategy, a way for the Haitian students to either bring Haiti to Turkey or take themselves back to Haiti. Communication and remoteness refer to overuse of social media that distorts the notions of time and physical presence among the Haitian students in Turkey.

Some participants admitted that they are stuck to their phone while having a face-to-face conversation. Some others said they sometimes forgot they were using their phones. In a dynamic of a subjective construction of meanings, this pattern infers a lack of assimilation of the Haitian student in the Turkish culture, a sense of homesickness, and alienation to social media. In this case the use of social media is perceived by the students as an emotional compensation. Williams and Wise (2012) discuss the emotional compensation with regard to loneliness. In a study conducted with 393 psychology students, they found that students with higher levels of loneliness tend to have more Facebook friends. The present study shows that since the students missed their family and friends back in Haiti, online communication is mostly an extension of the bonds they have created back in the country, and that the overuse of social media is beyond them.

## **5. 2. Self-affirmation and self-restraint**

The pattern “self-affirmation and self-restraint” showed the paradoxical behavior of the student that displays his ethos on social media while setting a certain area of privacy. Self-affirmation refers to the contents fall within the self-differentiation of the student. These contents have religious, academic, cultural, and political nature. Such contents show an ethos of character, an ethos of thought-provoking, an ethos of identification, and an appeal for validation. As for the self-restraint, it refers to an evaluation attitude towards the risks that are associated with social media.

As stated in the findings, the concept of self-affirmation refers to the social and personal identity of the participant. The self-affirmation tends to a welcoming behavior while self-restraint tends to avoidance behavior. “All my post on Facebook are related to my religion”, said Sonia. This is not only a way for her to assert herself as a religious person but also a sense of belonging to a network. In “Mask and Identity”, Dorian and Richard (1998) state that identity is clearly related to the community. They asserted: “As much as we wear a mask, it is to assume a role in the social life (Dorian & Richard, 1998, p. 92)”. Furthermore, Rettberg, and McMillan emphasize the notion of self-affirmation through the notion of shared identity. They point out that “many people use their Facebook profile picture to express a shared identity, a connection to a social group or a political cause (Rettberg & McMillan, 2014, p. 41).” These online communities, in light of Maffesoli thought, evoke the tribal societies of the pre-modern era.

Nevertheless, displaying strictly religious contents on social media while the telephone even prevents her from praying regularly infers a role playing in Sonia’s behavior. As for the self-restraint in Sonia’s behavior, it is due to an inferiority complex generated by the comparison she makes of herself with other people who show their talent on social media. “Social media are platforms that show people with great talent. When I try to compare myself with these people, it makes me downplay myself”, she conceded. Dorian and Richard asserted that online identity often reveals fear and lack of confidence which are hidden behind the mask. In the context of Sonia, the fear and lack of confidence even go beyond the mask.

Asserting oneself on social media is also a way to look different from others. Jessica always her posts on Instagram with the hashtag “Haitian girl”. However, like Sonia Jessica tends to shy away from negative comments from some people on her posts, she, therefore, does not show things related to her studies. She explained: “I used to post things related to my studies, but I stopped. Some people were not happy about that, they said that I was just showing off. As you know, people can hate you for no reason. I decided to stop just to avoid silly problems”. The self-restraint in this context expresses some security concerns. Jessica does not want to make people jealous of her academic achievement since she knows jealousy can lead them to harm her.

The participants subscribe to the online exhibition of their talent, beauty, religion, culture, and political views. Contrary to the Iranians (Heivadi and Khajeheian, 2013) who display an ambiguous identity due to their political opinions and religious views, They Haitian students in Turkey share proudly and provocatively their religious and political views on social media. The Iranians use an identity mask mostly to be critical of the political establishment and to champion a secular Iran. Conversely, the Haitian students in Turkey criticize the Haitian government openly, display their religious faith provocatively, and showcase their cultural belonging proudly. However, the relationship between affirmation and restraint results from the choice of people to choose what to show and what to hide about themselves. Also, they remain aware that the content they share on social media should suit the normative background regarding Turkish society. Carl who decided not to share any more pictures on Facebook with a Rasta wig did it to avoid negative comments from others. It is a form of self-restraint, since the drive, desire or motive to share such a picture comes from his own fantasies and expectations of other people who like the rastas. Moreover, displaying a picture with a Rasta wig shows an ethos of identification. Contrary to Carl, Peter wants to stand out. His posts subscribe to an ethos of differentiation. Peter claimed not to look for validation but for self-affirmation. He mostly shares thought-provoking contents. With an attitude of evaluation, Peter subscribes to the strategy of personal attack to draw other people’s attention to serious topics. He assumes an intellectual, a polemicist who lives on controversies. In that regard, Edmond assumes a sarcastic self in order to address some

sensitive topics. He also displays an ethos of intelligence by comparing himself to the majority of people he is connected with on social media.

The process of identity construction in the context of living abroad is for the Haitian student a way to assert himself, to look different from other, and to manage the risks that are likely to undermine his social presence. Moreover, the online presence also remains for them a strategy of survival in a culturally different reality. As for the self-restraint, the students claim to have a great sense of privacy and intimacy. Mustafa Öz (2014) found that Facebook usage and media consumption are positively associated with awareness of privacy implications. The present findings showed that in a culturally different context, the privacy implications are more important.

With regard to the “self-affirmation and self-restraint” pattern, it can be inferred that the Haitian students show content that is socially acceptable. Despite the provocative and sarcastic behavior of some of them, the students claimed to be aware of the borders. On one hand, the self-affirmation of the Haitian students in Turkey implies the identification to their culture, their religion, but also their vision of the world. The self-affirmation of the Haitian university students in Turkey shows in through the ethos of identification and the ethos of differentiation. All the participants claimed to be affected by the negative image of Haiti shared on social media. However, this self-affirmation sometimes leads to self-distortion for someone who is obsessively interested in others’ validation. The self-affirmation also results in narcissism for someone who overly likes and comments on his own posts. On the other hand, the self-restraint of the Haitian students in Turkey implies their privacy concerns. The students claimed that most of their friends are people they have already known in physical life. They mostly claimed not to post their personal issues on social media. They also claimed not to post sexual, aggressive or other harmful contents on social media. Hence the dialectical, the paradoxical dimension of the students’ online behavior. Like Rauhofer (2008) states it, although some people care about privacy on social media, they tend to exchange it, to some extent, for a small reward of popularity and identity construction.

### **5. 3. Entertainment and boredom**

The data collected showed that the Haitian students in Turkey see social media as both entertaining and boring. The participants admitted that social media is stress-relieving. In that regard, social media consists of a remedy for loneliness, and a way of escaping the routine and the boredom of everyday life. Peter admitted that he constantly relied on his phone because he lives in solitude. As a university student, Peter is in touch with many people, but he still feels lonely. He confessed that his phone was a way for him to get distracted. In this perspective, the phone does not play the role of a physical person, but it alleviates the absence of people in Peter's life. Peter's situation shows the affective dimension of the role of social media. Contrary to Turkle (2005) who stresses that some youngsters develop a certain intimacy with their phone, the participants to the present study view social media as a useful tool. However, they also acknowledged that the fun-related contents shared online have become a part of their life. "Instagram and Facebook are very efficient in relieving stress in me", said Sandra.

The findings showed a clear relationship between the ludic perception of the use of social media and the emotional situation of the Haitian students in Turkey. They all admitted relying on fun-related contents not only to entertain themselves but mostly to escape boredom. Two principal motives lie behind this behavior. The first motive is relational. As aforementioned, the relational void brings about the overuse of social media. This relational void is caused by the geographical gap between the students and their family and friends back in Haiti. Instead of compensating this void by building new relationships in Turkey, the students chose to relieve the corresponding loneliness by accessing entertaining contents online. The second motive behind the ludic perception of the use of social media is existential. Some students admitted being introverted in life whether online or in real life. Thus, having discrete access to fun-related contents is a way for them to cope with their shyness and introversion. "I rely on social media to manage my emotional roller coaster", said Jeff. This attachment to the technical tool is viewed by Turkle (2011) as a strategy to avoid the risks and disappointments of relationship with other human beings.

Accordingly, the students escape the routine and boredom of life by accessing fun-related contents on social media. However, the paradox of this behavior is that the use of

social media sometimes turns out to be a routine and boredom as well. No matter how technology meets human vulnerabilities and needs, seeing them as friends remains wishful thinking. Sonia admitted that, despite the entertaining side of social media, the use she makes of them is not right. She admitted they are time-consuming and boring sometimes. Peter said: “We decided to open an account on social media, and we are making ourselves dominated by this account. Because of that, we do not project the person we truly are”. This shows the alienating dimension of social media. Some of the students confessed losing the notion of time, and the notion of sociability. They stick to their phone while having a face-to-face conversation with someone, even while in class. Other students recognized that social media are channels for negative influences, multiple identity, and hacking. Johnny sometimes gets rid of them to a point that he even uninstalls them. He stated: “Sometimes I even uninstall all of them at once either I realize they are excessively time-consuming, or I feel disappointed in some people for what they post”.

The paradoxical perception of the use of social media through “entertainment and boredom” emerged from what Turkle calls the offer of an illusory companionship. In the context of solitude, it seems easy and better to access an interlocutor that never disappoints. All the students interviewed stated that social media are a double-edged sword. Thus, the entertaining side of social media is counterbalanced by its boring side. This illusory comfort is not only a response to their solitude, but it also turns to be a risk-free relationship with a machine that ends up shaping the user’s behavior.

Although entertainment and boredom are opposite terms, the relationship between them regarding social media remains dialectical. For instance, a post might be entertaining to someone while it annoys someone else. All the female students interviewed are against misogynistic posts or posts that show the female nudity on social media. Thus, a post that is degrading for a woman can be entertaining for a man. In this context, entertainment is the pursuit of egoistic satisfaction since the moral, ethical, and social considerations are neglected. Since social media are platforms where multiple identities, hacking, and harassment are gaining ground, the other side of the coin turns out to be disappointment and boredom for other people.

In brief, all the participants acknowledged the ludic dimension of social media. They described them as stress-relieving, fun, distractive, hence entertaining. In a lecture given at the University of Vermont, Foucault (1982) coined the concept of *technology of the self*. He states:

“Technologies of the self allow individuals to effect by their own mean or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conducts, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order attain a certain state of happiness, wisdom, purity, perfection, or immortality.”

In the context of social media, the technologies of the self reinforce the egoistic behavior of the individual who exchanges his intersubjectivity for a self-absorbed subjectivity. Thus, social media has become boring owing to the fact that people expect from them what they used to expect from other people. They unconsciously attribute human characteristics to the machine. Although the participants in this study claimed to be aware of the artificial dimension of social media, they all remain grateful to them for taking away their sadness and loneliness. In this era of computerized behavior, the human being is domesticated by the machine that he has created. Some participants acknowledged that life would be very hard without social media. They cannot forego their phones even for one hour. Caught in the middle of happiness provide by the fun-related contents and the boredom due to the overuse and the negative contents, the participants admitted that a reasonable use of social media is beyond them.

Consequently, happiness, as well as boredom in life, become technologically situated. In this context of technologically situated happiness and boredom, the relationship between the online and offline selves emerged as an ambiguous phenomenon. Turkle highlights: “Where one technology makes us busy and anxious, another technology will organize, amuse and relax us (2011, p. 10).” Being constantly connected, the students have to cope with the anxieties related to disconnection. Their emotions have become technologically shaped. In that framework, another question arose: How does the use of social media relate to the students’ identity building process? The next segment consists of an attempt to address that question on the basis of the reconstructive analysis of two other patterns that also emerged

from the data collected. These patterns are “impression management” and “network-building”.

How does the use of social media relate to the student’s identity building process?

#### **5.4. Impression Management**

The reconstruction of the notion of impression management with regard to the present study brought out different ethos displayed by the Haitian students in Turkey. Whether it is an ethos of leadership, identification, or credibility, it remains deeply dependent on the contingencies of social media. Social media is here reconstructed as a stage where the students use their profiles and all kind of contents to manage a certain impression on others. The results showed that the students show only things they want others to see. This kind of behavior falls into what Goffman (1959) calls backstage and frontstage regions. By managing their image on social media, the students tend to adopt, depending on the context, either a welcoming behavior or avoidance behavior. When Jessica said that she does not show anything in a vacuum, it amounts to saying that she expects others to react, but also implicitly invites them to react to her posts. Similarly, said that she was negatively affected by people disregarding her posts. This implicit attention seeking strategy is a welcoming behavior. However, some others prefer to subscribe to an avoidance behavior by refraining from displaying their real feelings on social media. Leticia stated that she only displayed happiness on social media. This attitude however conflicts with the fact that she also said that the person she showed online is the exact one she was offline. There is a hiatus between the ethos of authenticity and the avoidance attitude in Leticia’s online behavior.

Impression management on social media starts from the self-presentation. Swann and Bosson define self-presentation as “a collection of behavioral tactics designed to achieve various interaction goals (Swann & Bosson, 2014, p. 448)”. As for the present study, the self-presentation goes beyond self-affirmation. Self-affirmation is the definition by the student of features that help others identify him. However, self-presentation is the manipulation of the self-affirmation. Self-affirmation refers to the frontstage settings which are things they student lets other people see while self-presentation encompasses both the backstage and the frontstage settings. Sofia stated that she sometimes sent smileys to people while she was not

actually smiling. This behavior falls into the backstage settings. Peter has no problem receive sexual contents from a female friend while he himself is not willing to do the same thing. Thus, as an indicator of the impression management, the self-presentation does not only obey to the fantasies of the user of social media but also the norms of the technical apparatus as well as the expectation of other people. Carl decided not to post any picture with the Rasta wig anymore because he had been rebuked by some friends. This behavior is conceptualized by Swann and Bosson through the notion of identity-negotiation. They emphasize: “the process through which people strike to achieving their interaction goals and satisfying their identity-related goals (Swann & Bosson, 2014, p. 449).” Accordingly, the process of negotiation becomes a product resulting from the terms and conditions of the online platforms and the tactics of the users.

Impression management also refers to the notion of gratifications. Edmond has built a sarcastic character on social media, and he acknowledged that many people started following because of his subtle fun-related posts. In the process of image management, gratifications are used both as reward and feedback. If the feedback is positive, the user is more likely to reproduce the same behavior in another post. Edmond thinks of his followers as a fan base. “There are some people, once they receive the notification that I have posted something, they eagerly open it to see what it is about”, he said. Peraya and Meunier (1999) view such a situation as the relationship with oneself through the others. Edmond became aware of his talent in sarcasm through the gratifications he had received from others.

Accordingly, the Haitian students manage their image through the presentation of an idealized self. The frontstage serves as a role-playing stage and the backstage as a place to keep up appearances. None of the students assumed a lack of authenticity in their online behavior. However, they all showed an evaluation attitude towards the use made by others of social media. As for a similar view of the phenomenon, in an article entitled “Presentation of self in the age of social media”, Bernie Hogan (2010) argues that self-presentation is split between performances and exhibitions. Thus, in order to create the best impression possible, the user has to sharpen his performance abilities. However, the fact that someone thinks that he is self-aware is different from being actually self-aware. In “the presentation of self in everyday life”, Goffman, although in a different context, pictures such behavior as follows:

When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (Goffman, 1956, p. 10).

It should be inferred that the online impression management tends to create a valorizing image of self. Every action is considered an act of performance. All the participants, whether implicitly or explicitly, subscribe to the idea of having positive gratifications from their audience. The need for positive gratifications (front stage) is counterbalanced by the manipulation of the appearances (backstage). The online behavior is somehow shaped by the virtual environment; thus, the perception of self is also subjugated to the cultural and cognitive grip of the technical devices. Negotiating one's identity is not a dialogic transaction between the user and his audience, but a trilogy formed by the user, his audience and the technical device. Thus, managing his impression can only be the manipulation of the audience since the device still has a dominant position.

### **5.5. Network building**

Network building refers to the commonality of interests, aspirations, and actions in order to carry out an idea, a project, or a certain action of which the outcomes impact both the individuals and the network as a whole. To some extent, the Haitian students in Turkey can be considered as a network. Although life on the screen is fundamentally individualistic, it should be admitted that there would be no individual satisfaction without a sort of collective gratification resulting from what one shares online. The notion of network-building was brought out both from the interviews and from the content analysis of the Facebook group called: The Haitian students in Turkey. In this study, we have considered two of the various characteristics of network building as for an analytical grid. These characteristics are the awareness of the network's issues which is translated into information and interaction, and the network outreach which is translated into mobilization and motivation.

The online networks are viewed in research as postmodern tribes (Maffesoli, 1996), mediactivism (Castells, 2015), or a counter-public sphere (Fraser, 1990). The interviewees mostly showed a sense of belonging to a certain network on the basis of what they like or aspire to. To that end, they show a profile and contents emphasizing their social status or

their intellectual assets. “If you check out my YouTube, you will have an idea on things I care for. I mostly watch videos related to dreadlocks”, said Sofia. By following pages related to dreadlocks, Sofia displays two ethos, one of identification and one of solidarity. The ethos of identification rests on the commonality of interest regarding the products used to take care of the braids and the sense of pride given by the fact of being a “rasta” validated by her peers. The ethos of solidarity displayed by Sofia rests on the fact of feeding the need for more subscription to the group. As for Edmond, motivation to go online increases with the sense of belonging to a network of sarcasm. This inclination for sarcastic contents is closely intertwined with Edmond’s outlook of social relationships. “I sometimes get inspired by some funny videos since I also use sarcasm and irony in my posts”, he acknowledged. Thus, being sarcastic is not only a way for Edmond to emphasize the aspect of his personality that he wants others to see, but it is also the expression of who he really is since he follows other sarcastic people. All this consists of a sort of self-categorization which leads to the social identity of the student.

Furthermore, the sense of belonging expressed through an ethos of solidarity rests on technical support to which the participants have access when they are stuck whether with their academic issues or with their phone itself. Leticia is used to asking for help when she faces problems with her phone or computer. She stated that she always strongly hopes that her problem would be solved within a few minutes. The fact of being able to rely on others in order to solve her problem gives her a sense of solidarity. Similarly, Melissa always reaches YouTube when she struggles to solve some mathematical exercises. Carl found the idea for his final project on Instagram in a group related to Architecture.

Accordingly, the users of social media tend to build a sense of belonging on the basis of real issues they are facing in physical life. Becoming a member of an online group consists of an alternative response to the existential problems of the students. Some students follow Football pages, music and art pages to share their passion with others. Some others follow newspapers to stay informed while also voicing their opinion. Some others follow religious pages to strengthen their faith. Some others follow drama, love-related pages in order to feed their relational lack. As for the groups, they are likely to get more followers, shares, and comments in exchange for their apparently free support to their network. These dynamics

subscribe to the logic of network building since all the pages followed by the Haitian students in Turkey overflow with interactions. Interaction regarding a shared issue or passion being the essence of network building. Since network-building takes place within groups, the reconstruction of the Facebook group called “The Haitian students in Turkey” in the following segment consists of a further analysis of the network-building dynamics among the Haitian students in Turkey.

#### **5.5.1. Network building: Reconstruction of the Facebook group “The Haitian students in Turkey”**

The “Haitian students in Turkey” is a group where the Haitian students share ideas and show support to each other. The idea reflects, at first sight, a sense of belonging to a community. Dorian and Richard state that identity is clearly related to the concept of community. The information and interaction pattern showed a sense of rapprochement. Although most of the students have not known each other before they came to Turkey, the contents they show on the group page express brotherhood, solidarity, and concern for each other. For instance, the announcement of the death of Jack shows the grief regarding the departed person, and a concern for the alive students as well. This ethos of solidarity showed by the group refers to the expression of concern and sameness.

Moreover, the Facebook group of the Haitian students in Turkey also brought out a pattern of mobilization and motivation. One of the students posted the following: “Hey, does this group still exist?” This question consists of a call for reaction from others. The question stresses the need for interaction. Interaction consists of the matrix of any network or community. Since the group shows a lack of interaction between its members, the need for motivation becomes necessary. The motivational contents shared on the group aim at encouraging each other on the pursuit of their goal in Turkey. In the context of this study, the situation refers mostly to the academic life of the students. Apart from being from far from their family, most of the students have to cope with the Turkish language which is the main medium of instruction in most of the universities in Turkey. Thus, the academic performance is not only affected by the environment in which the students live, but also by the difficulty to learn and command the Turkish language. Most of the students confessed this fact along the lines. Besides the motivational contents, the group also displays contents that denote the

students' spiritual devotion. "Ayibobo" or "Almighty Jesus", are among phrases that show their belonging to a certain religious faith or denominations.

In short, whether it is from the data collected or the content analysis of the Facebook group called "The Haitian students in Turkey", the findings revealed paradoxical patterns in the online behavior of the students. The patterns "self-affirmation and self-restraint", "connectedness and remoteness" show that the students' perception of the use of social media is influenced by many factors. The influential factors are psychological and technical. The psychological factors refer to the strategies of the user in managing his social presence. The technical factors refer to the constraints related to the machine. However, their Facebook group shows a significant sense of belonging from the students. From the name of the group to the nature of the contents shared on it, the students show an ethos of solidarity, a sense of rapprochement, and a sense of concern for each other. Although it remains very important for the students to assert themselves as different from others, the fact of having the same nationality remains a significant factor in their bond. Being able to share mutual concerns in languages (Creole and French) they all command participates in bridging the gap between their personal identities and their belonging to a community.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study explores the process of identity construction among Haitian students in Turkey. The context of the study refers to the dynamics of cultural adaptation since leaving in a new cultural context requires certain regard to the customs and mores of this culture. Thus, the objective of this research falls within a prolegomenon to a digital identity-negotiation theory. To that end, it turns out to be necessary to understand the students' perception of the use of social media, as well as the relationship between the use of social media and the students' identity building process.

The 15 in-depth interviews show that Haitian students in Turkey consider the use of social media as a way to communicate with their family and friends and to create bonds with new people. Nevertheless, they paradoxically consider the use of social media as a way to remove themselves from any sort of unpleasant reality they are coping with in real life. The students also see the use of social media as a platform for self-affirmation. With a sense of belonging to a certain group, movement or idea, asserting themselves is a way for the students to stand out from others while standing up for what they believe in. However, many students are shared between the drive for self-affirmation and the duty of self-restraint. In fact, the students purposefully refrain themselves from displaying online certain aspects of their personality. The study also shows that the use of social media is considered as entertaining as boring. The entertainment dimension refers to fun-related posts, stress-relieving contents, and time-killing objects that are displayed on social media. Paradoxically, the boredom of social media results from its silent violence, communication-distorting, and time-consuming aspects.

As for the relationship between the use of social media and the identity-building process, the results show that the Haitian students' perception of social media deeply determine the way they share contents on the digital stage. Since the students are living in a culturally different context, relying on social media to reach like-minded people is a peaceful exit that is related to the paradoxical pattern "communication and remoteness". Thus, their online behavior subscribes to a network-building approach. The Facebook group called "The Haitian students in Turkey" shows mutual concerns and the need for motivation and network outreach. Since loneliness is one of the most shared situations of the participants, it becomes

important to create bonds with people that share the same lifeworld with them. The findings also show a pattern of impression management. In social psychology, impression management is the impression that one person has about another person. Goffman uses the word theater as a metaphor of social life. The reality for the first person is, therefore, the impression given by the second. Since the students consider the use of social media as a dynamic of self-affirmation and self-restraint, the screen becomes a stage and the contents displayed become a performance. As a performer, social media user takes advantage of the curtain that the screen represents. Hence the necessity of the backstage and frontage settings. The impression management is mostly motivated by the need for validation and gratifications from others.

As for the implications, this study shows the complexity of human behavior in the digital era. Edgar Morin, credited with introducing the theory of human complexity, must have more to say at present with regard to the grip of social media over the postmodern man. The use of social media making communication easy consists of a commonplace. However, this study joins other research that looks at reality from another perspective. The paradoxical pattern “entertainment and boredom” show the craving for easy satisfaction and an inclination for the less demanding interaction. Interacting with a computer may be positive as long as it mediates a communication fundamentally human. In the case of social media, the entertaining contents meet the need of the entertainment industry to distract and divert attention. Everything becomes a spectacle, and the spectacle is closely intertwined with the commodification of social relationships. The race for gratification and validation is operationalized through the number of views and likes. As it is revealed in the interviews, this apparent entertainment leads to boredom for it is not humanly oriented. The participants in this study acknowledge their attachment to social media and see them as a no-return point. They go as far as to admit that the use they make of social media was not right. Is it a sign of digital dementia like suggested by Simon Sinek? To go further than Bauman, is this phenomenon the harbinger of postmodern liquidity where the “us” is completely consumed by the “me”?

The presentation of self in the era of social media is rooted in universal values that subjugate cultural diversity. Social media is a culture, its norms rule out the. In the

postmodern era, computer-mediated communication consists of the way for the human to redefine his relationship with himself and others. This study implies the fact that the online identity is gradually ruling out the offline one since, and as the students acknowledged it, life is also gradually migrating from the offline territory to online space. Nevertheless, the lack of reliability of online relationships remains a concern for researchers. The emotional investment in online bonds remains lower than it is in physical life. This is explained by the fact that at some point the individual has to face his reality without the screen. Considering the present study and other research, life on the screen is not complementary to life offline, it is rather a way to escape from the physical-life-related concerns.

*In fine*, this study shows the way social media modify the relation of the Haitian student with his own person. When assessing the pros and cons of the use of social media, the students use their own personality as a reference framework to assess the pros, and an imaginary another person to assess the cons. He thinks that the proper use of social media should be the same as the use he makes of it while criticizing the way others misuse them. This attitude of biased evaluation underlies a submersion into the liquid postmodernity enhanced through social media. If with social media communication is made easy, the nature and essence of this communication should be questioned. How does this communication relate to fundamental human values? Is computer-mediated communication a distortion or enhancement of human relationships? These questions imply the limitations of the present study and consist of a call for a further investigation regarding the concepts of social media and identity.

## **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS**

This dissertation does not claim to be exhaustive since limited in time and space. Regarding the time frame, the study covers the academic year 2017/2018 and as for the space frame, the sample considered refers only to the Haitian students living in Turkey. With regard to the complexity inherent in the phenomena related to social media, the findings of this research should not be considered or assessed out of context. As an interpretive study, this study refers to a comprehensive understanding of the interpretation the actors make of their own behavior. The researcher interprets the meaning the actor attributes to his behavior through his speech acts. However, in the context of computer-mediated communication, the

necessity of theories enabling the understanding of the new dynamics of social ties is in order. Thus, this research consists of a springboard for further investigations in the field of digital communication. Identity-building in the context of social media shall prepare the groundwork for a better understanding of the relationship between identity, social media, and the rise of nationalism in the world. This study shall pave the way for a better understanding of the concept of identity in the context of globalization. Social media has changed the relationship of the individual with himself as well as the ones with his surroundings. The concept of self gets absorbed into the norms of social media and the expectations of his peers. The presentation of self in everyday life by Goffman moved to the presentation of self on the screen. Hence the interest of the present research resides in the necessity of keeping pace with this tremendous mutation. As limited as it is, this study prepares the groundwork for a doctoral thesis on the relationship between social media and identity building. These findings may also lead to a critical theory of digital identity.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **CONSENT FORM**

##### **Social Media and Identity Construction: A Reconstructive Analysis of the Use of Social Media among the Haitian Students in Turkey**

**Researcher: Marc-Henry Pierre**

**Sponsoring institution: Anadolu University**

The following is a consent form for a research project on the use of social media and identity construction among Haitian students in Turkey. The research is carried by the aforementioned researcher Marc-Henry Pierre, a masters' student in Communication Management at Anadolu University. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the study through being interviewed.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between the use of social media and the process of identity construction among the Haitian university students in Turkey. You must be a Haitian student at any university in Turkey, and also a user of at least one social network. If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you which includes questions about the representation that you make of these social networks; the average time spent per day surfing on them; the gratifications provided by these networks; and the relationship between those online gratifications and your offline behavior. The interview will last about 30 minutes and will be tape-recorded. The following points state your agreement to take part in the study.

1. - I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this study has been explained to me and is clear.
2. - My participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that no reward in cash or in kind will be allotted to me for being interviewed.
3. - I understand that I may decline or withdraw from the interview, and this will happen in complete confidentiality. I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview if I feel uncomfortable during the interview session.

4. - Participation involves being interviewed for about 30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview and audio tape and subsequent dialogue will also take place.

5. - I understand that I will not be identified by my name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this research will remain secure.

6. - I have read and understood the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. - I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

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My printed name

Signature:

Date:

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Printed name of the researcher

Signature:

For further information, please contact me on this number: 546 734 9137 or via email: [mpierre@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:mpierre@anadolu.edu.tr)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **Perception of the use of social media**

How do you describe the role of social media in your life?

What are your motivations to use social media?

How do you monitor your presence on social media? / Could you describe your time/ a typical day spent on social media?

What's your biggest satisfaction with using social media?

What is your biggest disappointment in using social media?

How do you compare your friend relationships on the social network with the one in physical life?

What is your take on people who share posts of sensitive content on social media?

#### **The use of social media and identity construction**

How does life in Turkey affect your presence on social media?

To what extent do social media participate in relieving your loneliness?

To what extent do social media participate in your self-concept: self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-affirmation?

How do you feel about people commenting (positive and negative), liking and sharing your posts?

Are you likely to reproduce the online gratifications in your offline life?

Do you feel secure to share your personal information on social media?

Do you participate in discussion, debate and other kinds of controversies on social media?

Do you bring your offline conflicts/problems to social media?

What is your feeling regarding the image of Haiti on social media?

## APPENDIX C

### OBSERVATION GRID

#### Facebook page: The Haitian Students in Turkey

| Nature of the content shared | Purpose     | Language used | Date              |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Text                         | Information | French        | March 18, 2018    |
| Text and Image               | Motivation  | French        | November 18, 2017 |
| Text                         | Solidarity  | Creole        | June 21, 2017     |
| Text and Video               | Motivation  | Creole        | June 21, 2017     |
| Text                         | Information | Creole        | May 26, 2017      |
| Text                         | Motivation  | Creole        | April 7, 2017     |
| Text and Image               | Information | Creole        | December 28, 2016 |
| Text and Image               | Motivation  | English       | December 4, 2016  |
| Text                         | Solidarity  | Creole        | October 22, 2016  |
| Text                         | Information | Creole        | July 2, 2016      |
| Text                         | Motivation  | English       | July 2, 2016      |
| Text                         | Discussion  | Turkish       | April 24, 2016    |
| Image and text               | Solidarity  | Turkish       | April 12, 2016    |
| Text                         | Solidarity  | Creole        | March 13, 2016    |