

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL IDENTITY AMONG YOUTH IN MOZAMBIQUE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

REDES SOCIAIS E A CONSTRUÇÃO DA IDENTIDADE DIGITAL ENTRE
JOVENS EM MOÇAMBIQUE: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA DA LITERATURA

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the influence of social media on the development of digital identity among young individuals in Mozambique through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The swift growth of digital technologies has transformed social interactions, establishing social media as essential platforms for self-expression, socialization, and identity development. Nevertheless, current studies predominantly focus on contexts within the Global North, leaving African environments insufficiently examined. This review systematically evaluates the existing literature regarding the ways in which Mozambican youth utilize social media to shape their digital identities. It investigates prevalent theoretical frameworks, methodological strategies, frequently analyzed platforms, and the sociocultural, educational, and technological elements that affect identity formation. The research highlights significant gaps in the literature, emerging patterns, and specific contextual factors, thereby enhancing the understanding of digital identity in Mozambique. Additionally, it offers valuable insights to inform future research, public policy, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive and context-aware digital practices among young people.

Keywords: Digital Identity; Social Media; Youth; Mozambique; Systematic Literature Review.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa a influência das redes sociais na construção da identidade digital entre jovens em Moçambique, por meio de uma Revisão Sistemática da Literatura (RSL). A rápida expansão das tecnologias digitais tem transformado as interações sociais, posicionando as redes sociais como espaços centrais de auto-expressão, socialização e construção identitária. No entanto, a

literatura existente concentra-se maioritariamente em contextos do Norte Global, deixando as realidades africanas ainda pouco exploradas. Esta revisão examina de forma sistemática como os jovens moçambicanos utilizam as redes sociais na construção das suas identidades digitais, analisando os principais enquadramentos teóricos, abordagens metodológicas e plataformas mais estudadas, bem como os fatores socioculturais, educacionais e tecnológicos que influenciam esse processo. Os resultados evidenciam padrões emergentes, especificidades contextuais e lacunas relevantes na literatura, particularmente na articulação entre condições sócio-técnicas locais e práticas identitárias. O estudo contribui para uma compreensão mais contextualizada da identidade digital em Moçambique, oferecendo subsídios para futuras investigações, bem como para a formulação de políticas públicas e estratégias educativas voltadas para práticas digitais inclusivas e críticas entre jovens.

Palavras-chave: Identidade Digital; Redes Sociais; Juventude; Moçambique; Revisão Sistemática da Literatura.

1. INTRODUCTION

How people communicate, socialize and create identity in today's world has changed tremendously due to the rapid development of digital technology and the growth of social networking platforms (BOYD, 2014; CASTELLS, 2010). Originally just used as a way to share information, these types of platforms are now the main source for socializing, involvement, and self-expressing, particularly for young adults who utilize these types of platforms for establishing friendships, sharing content, and negotiating their social visibility (LIVINGSTONE, 2019; JENKINS et al., 2016).

Young people experience the most extreme effects of social media due to their engagement in various processes related to exploring new social situations (their generation) and obtaining a sense of belonging (social conformity) while constructing their identity. There are three areas involved in this process of self-discovery and re-creation when using social media as forms of "networked publics" for usage and maintenance of identity: narrative construction; negotiation of self-representation; and continuous reconfiguration of identity based on responses or feedback from others regarding narratives (BOYD, 2014; PAPACHARISSI, 2011).

The presence/absence of mechanisms for social validation (e.g., likes, comments, sharing) through social media has been shown to have a measurable impact on how women perceive themselves and how they will adjust their self-representations relatively to the extent that they use social media as a source of social validation (VALKENBURG; PETER, 2011; NESI, 2020). Despite growing interest in research on digital identities and social media, studies still focus primarily on the Northern Hemisphere. Consequently, there are gaps in research on young people's experiences in the African context (MABWEAZARA, 2015; WILLEMS; MANO, 2017).

In Mozambique, the expansion of access to mobile internet and digital platforms aims to maximize opportunities for youth participation and expression, even though its implementation occurs amid a landscape of socioeconomic inequality, cultural diversity, and barriers to accessing digital technologies, which play a fundamental role in shaping these young people's digital identities (MÁRIO; SALOMÃO, 2017). Existing studies on social media, youth, and digital identity in Mozambique remain quite scattered and fragmented. They tend to focus on isolated aspects, such as online

risks, digital citizenship, or the educational use of technology. This lack of connection between the topics clearly highlights the need for a more systematic analysis. This would help to better understand the patterns, theoretical approaches, methodologies used, and contextual factors that influence the formation of digital identity among young people (ITU, 2022).

In this context, this article presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the aim of critically investigating how social media influences the formation of digital identity among young people in Mozambique. Specifically, the study seeks to understand: (i) the main theoretical and methodological approaches used; (ii) the most studied platforms; and (iii) the sociocultural, educational, and technological factors involved in the formation of digital identity. The aim is thus to provide an integrated and contextualized portrait of the phenomenon, contributing to research, public policy formulation, and educational practices focused on the critical, inclusive, and safe use of digital technologies among Mozambican youth. This study also contributes to discussions on education and digital inequality by providing evidence to inform policies and educational strategies that promote inclusive and critical digital literacy among Mozambican youth.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between social media and digital identity construction among young people. Drawing on contributions from developmental psychology, youth sociology, media studies, and digital communication research, identity is conceptualized as a dynamic, relational, and context-dependent process shaped by

social interactions, cultural representations, and technological environments. The framework integrates key theoretical perspectives on identity formation, self-presentation, youth participation, and digital media practices, providing an analytical lens for examining how young people construct, negotiate, and express their identities through social media. Furthermore, it supports the interpretation and discussion of the findings generated by this Systematic Literature Review.

2.1. Identity, Youth, And Social Transformation

Contemporary understandings of identity reject the notion of fixed or permanent essences. According to Hall (2006), identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through social relations, cultural representations, and symbolic systems that shape individuals' experiences within specific historical and social contexts. Identity therefore emerges through processes of interaction and meaning-making, encompassing both individual and collective dimensions.

The construction of identity in Mozambique presents particular characteristics shaped by historical, political, and cultural processes. Mazula (1995) argues that Mozambican identity has evolved through a complex interaction between tradition and modernity, influenced by post-independence nation-building efforts and contemporary processes of globalization and cultural diversification. Similarly, youth should not be understood merely as a biological category, but rather as a social construct influenced by access to resources, opportunities, and power relations (BOURDIEU, 1983).

Young people play a significant role in processes of social transformation, particularly within digitally connected societies. According to Castells (2012), digital networks have expanded young people's capacity to influence their social environments by enabling new forms of civic engagement, social mobilization, and collective action. In Mozambique, youth have historically contributed to political and social change through resilience, creativity, and participation in community initiatives during periods of economic and social challenges (CRUZ; SILVA, 2001).

Identity development is especially relevant during youth. Erikson (1968) conceptualizes this stage as a period marked by identity exploration, during which individuals seek coherence between personal aspirations and social expectations. In the Mozambican context, Ngoenha (2004) argues that young people must develop the capacity for critical reflection and autonomous action in order to transform inherited forms of identity into project-oriented identities capable of engaging with both local realities and global opportunities.

Together, these perspectives portray Mozambican youth as active social actors whose identity construction is influenced by socioeconomic inequalities, cultural dynamics, and technological transformations. Digital identity provides an important analytical lens through which these processes can be examined in contemporary digital environments.

2.2. Social Media, Self-Presentation, And Visibility

The emergence of social media platforms has significantly transformed the ways individuals communicate, interact, and

construct their identities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp function not only as communication tools but also as environments where users actively manage how they are perceived by others (BOYD, 2014; PAPACHARISSI, 2017).

Digital identity can be understood as the collection of representations, interactions, and traces that individuals generate through their online activities. This process is closely related to Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which conceptualizes social interaction as a performance in which individuals strategically manage impressions before an audience. In digital environments, self-presentation involves selecting content, images, narratives, and interactions that communicate particular aspects of identity while responding to perceived social expectations (BUCKINGHAM, 2016; PAPACHARISSI, 2017).

The architecture of social media platforms amplifies these processes through features such as content permanence, replicability, scalability, and audience visibility (VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WAAL, 2019). These characteristics increase the visibility of users and create opportunities for continuous feedback through mechanisms such as likes, comments, shares, and reactions. Consequently, identity construction becomes an ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and impression management.

Boyd (2014) introduces the concept of "networked publics" to describe digitally mediated spaces where social interaction takes place. Within these environments, young people can experiment with different forms of self-expression, establish social connections, seek recognition, and develop a sense of belonging. At the same time, these spaces may expose them to pressures associated with

social comparison, conformity, and idealized representations of reality. Therefore, social media simultaneously create opportunities for identity exploration and challenges related to visibility, validation, and social acceptance.

2.3. Sociocultural And Educational Dimensions Of Digital Identity

Digital identity formation cannot be understood independently of the social, cultural, and educational contexts in which young people live. Social media practices are embedded within broader social structures that influence access to technologies, patterns of interaction, and opportunities for participation.

Young people engage with digital technologies through the lenses of their cultural backgrounds, linguistic repertoires, educational experiences, and social environments. Families, schools, peer groups, and communities play important roles in shaping digital practices and influencing how individuals understand and represent themselves online. According to Livingstone (2019), digital participation contributes not only to communication and socialization but also to the development of critical thinking, digital literacy, civic engagement, and social learning.

At the same time, unequal access to digital resources and educational opportunities can generate disparities in digital participation. Differences in connectivity, technological infrastructure, digital skills, and institutional support influence the extent to which young people can effectively engage in online environments. Consequently, digital identity formation reflects not only individual choices but also broader social and educational inequalities.

From this perspective, digital identity should be understood as a socially situated process shaped by interactions between personal agency, social relationships, educational experiences, and technological conditions. Examining these dimensions is essential for understanding how young people construct and negotiate their identities in contemporary digital societies.

2.4. The African And Mozambican Context

Research on digital identity has been largely dominated by studies conducted in the Global North. However, scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of examining digital experiences within African contexts characterized by distinct historical trajectories, cultural diversity, and socioeconomic conditions (NYAMNJOH, 2015).

In Mozambique, digital participation occurs within a context marked by significant inequalities in access to technological infrastructure, educational opportunities, and economic resources. These structural conditions influence how young people access digital platforms, participate in online communities, and gain visibility within networked environments. Consequently, digital identity formation reflects not only individual practices but also broader social and contextual factors.

Despite these challenges, the expansion of mobile internet and social media platforms has created new opportunities for communication, self-expression, cultural participation, and learning among Mozambican youth. Digital environments increasingly serve as spaces where young people negotiate personal identities, express cultural affiliations, maintain social relationships, and engage with local and global communities.

The Mozambican context therefore highlights the importance of understanding digital identity as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of historical experiences, cultural values, socioeconomic realities, educational opportunities, and technological access. This perspective provides a contextual foundation for interpreting how social media contribute to identity construction among young people in Mozambique and supports the analysis developed in this systematic literature review.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to identify, analyze, and critically interpret existing literature on how young Mozambicans construct digital identities through social networking sites, with particular attention to the interrelation of sociocultural, educational, and technological factors. Digital identity is therefore understood not as a purely individual or technical construct, but as a socially produced phenomenon emerging from cultural practices, communication processes, and digital interactions. For this reason, a systematic and transparent methodological approach was adopted to ensure rigor, reproducibility, and analytical depth.

To address the complexity of digital identity formation in Mozambique and the broader African context, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology was employed. This approach follows predefined inclusion, exclusion, and evaluation criteria, thereby reducing bias and increasing the reliability of findings (KITCHENHAM et al., 2015; PETTICREW; ROBERTS, 2006). The SLR is particularly suitable for interdisciplinary research as it enables the mapping of trends, identification of gaps, and synthesis of evidence across diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Furthermore, the SLR allows the contextualization of global scientific production within local realities, including structural inequalities in access to digital technologies, cultural diversity, and specific socio-digital dynamics in Mozambique. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which ensure transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor in systematic reviews (PAGE et al., 2021). The protocol was conducted between February and March 2026 and included the following stages: definition of research questions, formulation of search strings, selection of databases, establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria, study screening, quality assessment, and data extraction and analysis. The methodological framework was guided by Kitchenham et al. (2015), consisting of seven key steps: (i) definition of research questions; (ii) formulation of search strategy; (iii) selection of databases; (iv) definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (v) quality assessment of studies; (vi) study selection; and (vii) data extraction and synthesis.

3.1. Research Questions

The review was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does the scientific literature describe the construction of digital identity among young social media users in Mozambique?
- RQ2: Which social media platforms are most frequently studied in this context?
- RQ3: What sociocultural, educational, and technological factors influence the construction of digital identity among young Mozambicans?

These questions address both conceptual and empirical dimensions of digital identity, enabling the identification of patterns, platforms, practices, and research gaps in the literature.

3.2. Search Strategy

The search was conducted across four major academic databases: ACM Digital Library, Google Scholar, SpringerLink, and SAGE Journals, covering literature in technology, education, communication, and social sciences. A bilingual search strategy (English and Portuguese) was applied using the following search string:

("digital identity" OR "online identity") AND ("self-presentation" OR "impression management") AND ("social media" OR "social networks") AND (Mozambique OR Africa)

The initial search yielded 526 records. After removing duplicates, 440 studies remained for screening.

3.3. Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

The study applied the following inclusion criteria: research focusing on young people (aged 10–35) and digital identity in Mozambique or Africa; studies addressing social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, or similar; publications between 2010 and 2025 in English or Portuguese; and studies with full-text availability.

The exclusion criteria were: studies focusing exclusively on technical aspects of social media; research outside the African or Mozambican context; studies involving populations outside the defined age

range; and non-peer-reviewed publications or works lacking methodological rigor.

3.4. Selection Process And Data Extraction

Study selection was conducted independently by two researchers to minimize bias. Title and abstract screening excluded 278 records that did not meet eligibility criteria. A full-text review of 31 articles was conducted, resulting in the inclusion of 59 studies, including 28 identified through backward snowballing techniques.

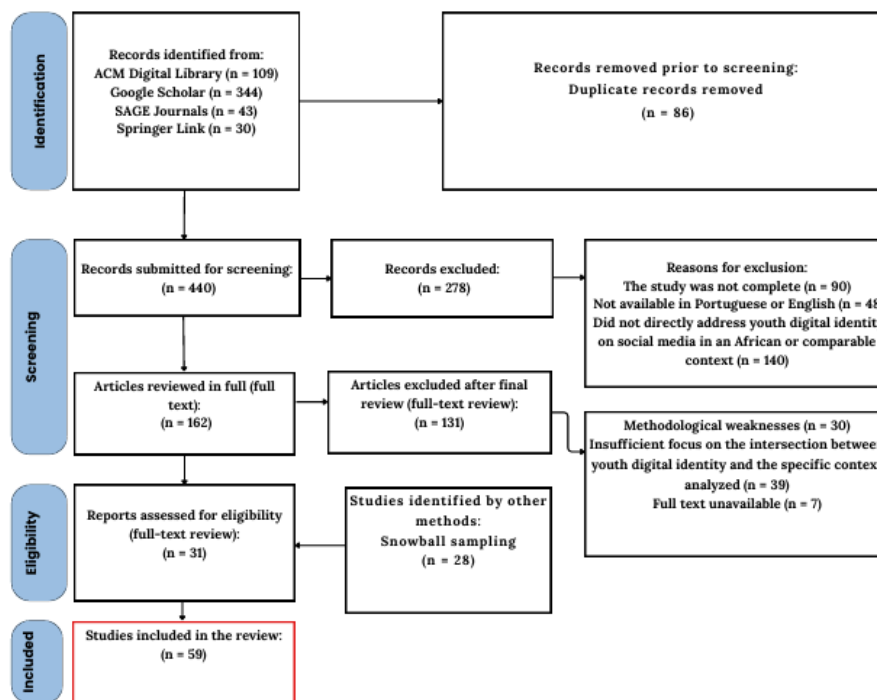
Data extraction was performed using a structured form capturing: author(s) and year of publication; research objectives; methodological approach (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods); sample characteristics; social media platforms analyzed; and key findings and implications.

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, conceptual categories, and gaps in the literature. Quality assessment considered clarity of objectives, methodological rigor, appropriateness of samples, robustness of data collection and analysis procedures, and coherence of conclusions.

3.5. Methodological Rigor

The combined use of PRISMA 2020 guidelines, dual independent screening, thematic analysis, and backward snowballing ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and reliability. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) summarizes the entire selection process, providing a clear overview of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages.

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram with studies identified through snowball sampling.



Source: Authors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on how digital identity is constructed among young people in Mozambique. The analysis focuses on identity construction practices, social media platforms, and the sociocultural, technological, and educational factors influencing digital identity formation. The discussion integrates empirical findings with theoretical perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the results.

Based on the methodological procedures outlined in the previous section, a total of 32 studies were included in the final analysis. The selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency, traceability, and reproducibility of the review process (PAGE et al., 2021). The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the

identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages of the study selection process.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of publications over time (2015–2026), showing a steady increase in academic interest in digital identity and social media studies, particularly after 2020. This trend reflects the acceleration of digital adoption during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly expanded research attention to online communication, identity, and social media practices.

4.1. Patterns In Digital Identity Construction

The reviewed literature indicates that digital identity among young people is primarily constructed through processes of self-presentation, interaction, and social validation within social media platforms. These processes are strongly shaped by the affordances of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp, which enable users to curate, share, and negotiate their online presence.

The findings align with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize identity as socially constructed and continuously evolving. Hall (2006) emphasizes identity as a dynamic process shaped by cultural and social contexts, while Goffman (1959) highlights the role of self-presentation and impression management in everyday social interaction. In digital environments, these processes are amplified through visibility, persistence of content, and audience feedback mechanisms.

Boyd (2014) further explains that social media platforms function as “networked publics,” where young people actively construct and

perform identity through interaction with peers and broader online communities. Buckingham (2016) also supports the view that digital environments influence how individuals present themselves and develop their sense of self through mediated communication.

4.2. Social Media Platforms And Practices

The analysis shows that the most frequently studied platforms in the literature include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. These platforms are used for communication, content sharing, identity expression, and social connection. Each platform offers distinct affordances that shape how identity is performed and negotiated.

For example, image-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok emphasize visual self-representation, while messaging platforms like WhatsApp facilitate more private and contextual identity expression. Across all platforms, mechanisms of social validation such as likes, comments, and shares play a central role in shaping identity construction processes.

4.3. Sociocultural, Educational, And Technological Influences

The findings indicate that digital identity construction is deeply influenced by sociocultural, educational, and technological contexts. Access to digital technologies, levels of digital literacy, and educational opportunities significantly affect how young people engage with social media and construct their identities.

In Mozambique, socioeconomic inequalities and infrastructural limitations continue to shape unequal access to digital platforms. At the same time, young people in urban and school environments increasingly use social media for communication, learning, and

cultural expression. These practices demonstrate that digital identity is not only a technological phenomenon but also a socially situated process shaped by context-specific conditions.

4.4. African And Mozambican Contextual Dynamics

The literature highlights that digital identity in African contexts differs from dominant Global North perspectives due to structural inequalities, cultural diversity, and different patterns of digital adoption. In Mozambique, youth negotiate identity within a context marked by historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that influence how they access and use digital technologies.

Rather than being passive users, Mozambican youth actively construct identities that reflect both local cultural frameworks and global digital influences. This hybrid identity formation demonstrates that digital identity is context-dependent and shaped by the interaction between global platform structures and local lived realities.

4.5. Integrated Discussion

Overall, the results suggest that digital identity among young people is a multidimensional construct shaped by technological affordances, social interaction, and cultural context. Identity formation is continuously negotiated through processes of visibility, validation, and self-presentation within networked digital environments.

The integration of theoretical and empirical evidence confirms that digital identity cannot be understood outside the interplay between structure and agency. While digital platforms provide structural

constraints and opportunities, young people actively interpret, adapt, and negotiate their identities within these environments.

In the Mozambican context, this dynamic is further shaped by inequalities in access, education, and technological infrastructure. Consequently, digital identity emerges as both a product of global digital systems and a locally situated social practice.

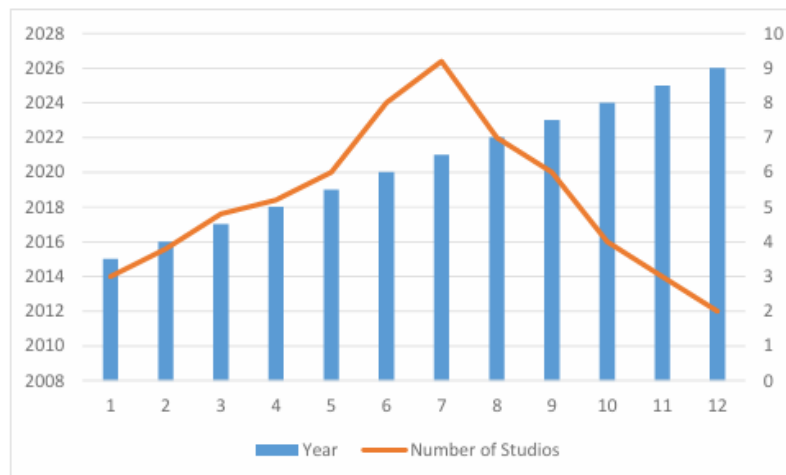
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Based on the methodological criteria previously defined, a total of 32 studies were included in the final analysis. The selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency, traceability, and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Figure 2 presents the evolution of scientific publications on youth digital identity between 2015 and 2026. The data indicate a marked increase in academic output, particularly after 2020, reflecting the expansion of digital technologies and the accelerated adoption of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. Evolution of scientific publications on youth digital identity (2015–2026).



5.1. Patterns In Digital Identity Construction

The reviewed literature shows that digital identity among young people is primarily constructed through processes of self-presentation, interaction, and social validation within social media environments. These processes are strongly shaped by platform affordances that enable users to curate, share, and negotiate their online presence.

The findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize identity as socially constructed and continuously evolving. Hall (2006) emphasizes identity as a dynamic process shaped by social and cultural contexts, while Goffman (1959) highlights self-presentation as a central mechanism of social interaction. In digital environments, these processes are amplified by visibility, permanence of content, and audience feedback mechanisms.

Boyd (2014) introduces the concept of “networked publics”, in which digital spaces function as environments where young people perform identity, seek recognition, and engage in social interaction.

Buckingham (2016) further supports the view that digital media significantly shape identity formation through mediated communication and participation.

5.2. Empirical Trends In Scientific Production

The analysis of scientific output indicates that research on youth digital identity is interdisciplinary, involving communication studies, sociology, education, and digital media studies. A significant increase in publications after 2020 suggests growing academic interest, partly driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and the expansion of digital social interaction.

Earlier studies tended to focus on descriptive analyses of platform use, while more recent research adopts qualitative and mixed-method approaches, including digital ethnography and online behavioral analysis. This methodological shift reflects a deeper interest in understanding identity construction processes rather than merely describing usage patterns.

5.3. Digital Platforms And Usage Patterns In Mozambique

The findings show that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most dominant platforms used by young people in Mozambique, followed by Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This concentration reflects structural constraints such as limited internet access, mobile dependency, and affordability of data.

Unlike highly diversified digital ecosystems in other regions, Mozambique exhibits a more centralized digital environment where a few platforms dominate social interaction. These platforms function not only as communication tools but also as spaces for

identity expression, social learning, and community engagement. Table 2 summarizes the frequency of platform use across the reviewed studies.

Table 1. Digital platforms most frequently studied in the analyzed studies

Social media	Frequency of use
WhatsApp	34
Facebook	29
Instagram	18
TikTok	11
YouTube	7

5.4. Dimensions Of Digital Self-Expression

Digital identity construction is operationalized through multiple interconnected practices of self-expression, including content production, social interaction, social validation, impression management, and sociocultural norms.

Table 3 illustrates how these dimensions interact to shape identity formation processes among youth. Content production enables narrative construction, while social interaction reinforces belonging. Social validation mechanisms such as likes and comments influence self-esteem and perceived recognition. Impression management reflects the strategic curation of online identity, while sociocultural norms shape behavioral expectations within digital environments.

Table 2. Dimensions of Digital Self-Expression among Youth in Mozambique

Dimension	Description	Examples of Practices	Impact on Identity
Content Production	Creation and sharing of textual and visual content	Photos, status updates, short videos	Construction of personal narratives
Social Interaction	Engagement with other users	Comments, replies, shares	Reinforcement of social belonging
Social Validation	Feedback received from the audience	Likes, reactions, views	Influence on self-esteem and recognition
Impression Management	Control over how the individual is perceived	Content selection, image editing	Negotiation between authenticity and acceptance
Sociocultural Norms	Influence of cultural and social values	Culturally aligned content	Shaping of digital behavior and identity practices

These findings reinforce Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation, which emphasizes the strategic management of impressions in social interaction. In digital contexts, this process becomes continuous and publicly visible, intensifying the role of audience feedback in identity construction.

5.5. Sociocultural, Technological, And Educational Factors

The results indicate that digital identity formation is strongly influenced by interrelated sociocultural, technological, and educational conditions. Access to digital infrastructure, affordability

of mobile data, and smartphone dependency significantly shape participation in online environments.

Sociocultural norms influence how young people present themselves online, determining what is considered acceptable, desirable, or risky behavior. Educational factors further mediate identity construction by shaping digital literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to engage safely and effectively in digital environments (Livingstone, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

These dimensions operate interactively, demonstrating that digital identity is not solely the result of individual agency but emerges from structural and contextual conditions that shape access, practices, and meanings.

5.6. African And Mozambican Contextual Specificities

The literature highlights important differences between Global North and African contexts in relation to digital identity construction. In Mozambique, structural inequalities, limited infrastructure, and socioeconomic disparities shape how youth access and use digital platforms.

Despite these constraints, young people actively construct identities through digital platforms, adapting their practices to local realities while engaging with global digital cultures. This results in hybrid identity forms that reflect both local cultural frameworks and global platform logics.

5.7. Integrated Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital identity is a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon shaped by the interaction of technological affordances, social practices, and cultural contexts. Identity formation occurs through continuous processes of negotiation involving visibility, validation, and self-presentation within networked digital environments.

The integration of theoretical and empirical evidence confirms that digital identity emerges from the interplay between structure and agency. While digital platforms provide the structural conditions for interaction, young people actively interpret and reshape their identities within these environments. In Mozambique, this process is further shaped by infrastructural limitations and sociocultural dynamics, resulting in context-specific forms of digital identity construction.

5.8. Implications And Summary

Digital identity allows young people to construct and negotiate personal narratives, cultural belonging, and social recognition through digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, which function as central spaces of interaction in the Mozambican context.

The findings suggest that public policies and educational strategies should prioritize digital inclusion, critical digital literacy, and safe spaces for youth digital expression. Strengthening these dimensions can contribute to more equitable and meaningful participation of young people in digital environments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provided an in-depth analysis of how young people in Mozambique construct their digital identities, with a particular focus on the use of WhatsApp and Facebook as dominant platforms for communication, self-expression, and identity negotiation. The findings indicate that digital identity formation emerges from a complex interaction between sociocultural norms, technological infrastructures, and educational conditions.

The systematic literature review reveals that research on digital identity in Mozambique and broader African contexts remains limited and fragmented. Existing studies tend to focus on isolated aspects such as online risks, digital literacy, or platform usage, rather than offering an integrated understanding of identity construction processes. Despite these gaps, the evidence suggests that Mozambican youth are active agents in shaping their online presence, negotiating visibility, and adapting identity practices to the constraints and opportunities of the digital environment.

The study further highlights that, even within contexts of infrastructural and socioeconomic limitations, young people demonstrate creativity and agency in their digital practices. This reinforces the need for research approaches that are context-sensitive and that avoid the direct transfer of theoretical frameworks developed in the Global North without adaptation to local realities.

From a policy and practical perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of strengthening digital inclusion through equitable access to technologies, the development of critical digital literacy skills, and the creation of safe and supportive online environments. Such interventions may contribute to improved educational

outcomes, enhanced civic participation, and reduced exposure to risks such as cyberbullying and harmful social comparison.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of digital identity as a dynamic, relational, and context-dependent construct. By integrating perspectives from developmental psychology, youth sociology, and digital media studies, it reinforces the value of interdisciplinary approaches to digital behaviour. The findings also support classical identity theories, particularly Hall's conception of identity as fluid and socially constructed, and Goffman's theory of self-presentation, extending their relevance to digitally mediated and African contexts.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data from published literature, rather than primary empirical data collected directly from Mozambican youth. In addition, the heterogeneity of methodologies, contexts, and analytical approaches across the included studies may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal, mixed-methods, and ethnographic approaches to better capture the evolving nature of digital identity construction. Comparative studies across urban and rural contexts, as well as across African countries, may further enhance understanding of how structural inequalities and cultural diversity shape digital identity formation.

In conclusion, understanding how young people in Mozambique construct digital identities is essential for both academic inquiry and policy development. The study demonstrates that digital identity is shaped by the intersection of technology, culture, and education, while also highlighting the agency of young people in navigating

these environments. There is a clear need for inclusive, culturally grounded, and context-sensitive digital policies that support the empowerment and development of youth in Mozambique and similar contexts.

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