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	RESEARCH ARTICLE 	
	<h1>The Digitally Transformed Self: An Anthropological Study of Social Representation on Social Media</h1>	
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<b>Keywords</b>	Anthropology, Digital Spaces, Identity, Self, Interpersonalization, The Unspoken.	
<b>Abstract</b> Many concepts related to the anthropology of digital spaces in Algeria remain obscure and shrouded in ambiguity. Those who follow the paths of social representation in social media are well aware of this reality. These digital platforms are of paramount importance to researchers and those interested in activating anthropological research tools and measuring their field and epistemological effectiveness. They approach the network of social relations with methodological caution, examining how it seeks to establish its existence within the duality of the real and the virtual. This network attempts to rely on the foundations of linguistic understanding and interpretation of the self and intertextuality, one of the most important aspects of what is known as digital disguise in the current and evolving cultural context. We are deeply involved in the structural transformations of various communication patterns, which necessarily lead us to the ethnomethodological approach. We rely on this approach as a robust tool in our attempt to interpret meaning within the cultural and social context, considering that the digital space has now become an open stage where symbolic relationships are produced, values are reformulated, and the self is digitally questioned at every turn. This study may well fulfill some of the various epistemological needs based on the data that... We glean these insights directly from the field, observing their communicative paradigms explicitly and directly, given that these actors in the digital space are not strangers but rather individuals with whom we share strong social and familial ties.		
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## Introduction

The methods of identity construction have been, and continue to be, influenced by the evolution of humanity throughout history, from traditional interaction in simpler societies to the digital interaction we experience in our contemporary societies. Patterns of social interaction have been affected by digital spaces and the accompanying proliferation of media and technologies, which grow more complex every day in light of this endless development in the modern world. The commitment to inclusivity, which is the foundation of the anthropological perspective on humanity, where anthropologists focus on life as it is lived according to a specific ethnographic project (Heather A. Horst, Daniel Miller, 2020, p. 23), makes digital anthropology an inevitable necessity for this complex and ambiguous cultural and social context. The fundamental difference between interaction in traditional, in-person spaces and interaction in digital spaces allows us to question those implicit discourses and analyze their overt and covert codes, which the digital world offers us some understanding of. The undeniable truth in studying this phenomenon is that approaching the concept of self and Social representation remains methodologically deficient because this approach largely relies on philosophical analysis in defining the self and questioning it about the hidden and unspoken within the narrow confines of analytical frameworks. We hope to transcend this epistemological rupture and thus unify the epistemological and anthropological disparities, thereby ending the fragmentation at the level of the very structure of humanity itself (Mustafa Ben Temsik, 2016, p. 4).

The digital self, which we are exploring as a symbolic field laden with meanings, connotations, signs, and even interactive symbols within electronic platforms, acts as a form of capital that blends social and electronic roles. This means that digital indicators have transformed into functions concerned with building status, power, and symbolic embellishment for their owners within society. Individuals here are no longer as concerned with traditional communication and the etiquette of public presence as they are with virtual communication tools that offer them considerable freedom of expression and interaction with others. According to the fundamentals of anthropological perspective, the digital space has now become a social field studded with meaning, flexibly and distinctly reformulating values and standards within a context where ethical and social dimensions intertwine. It also reconstructs representations based on symbolic recognition, which fuels the tendency of actors to attempt to present a stereotypical image imbued with the characteristics of nobility and social integrity. This is what has driven us, as researchers in anthropology and as active participants in digital spaces, to attempt to answer many questions that have remained entrenched in the realm of hidden, unspoken knowledge within the patterns of social relations and daily practices in the digital age.

### 1. Digital Space vs. Social Reality: Representing the Good and Moral Commitment

Anthropology's contribution rests primarily on a distinctive methodology: long-term field research, specific observation, and direct engagement with social issues that are of considerable importance to our contemporary concerns (Marc Augé and Jean-Paul Collain, 2008, p. 7). This engagement is not limited to the digital space in particular, whose reading and interpretation can be transcended to reach a much deeper dimension than the superficial and vague analyses that are flabby in their epistemological aspects and view this space as a product of continuous transformation and an inevitable destiny of human development. Anthropology, however, examines this aspect of cognitive depth, silently observing the dynamics of human interaction with the mechanisms of this development. It constantly questions the human self, its responses, the dynamics of its transformation, and its representations of the other, near or far. How can this digital space embed symbols? How can it construct meanings that serve functions celebrated by the social and cultural context? Answering such questions requires great care. And much direct and continuous monitoring is required, given that these digital interactions take on new and different forms and expressions at an extremely rapid pace. The actors are constantly reproducing new things and symbols that can only be understood or interpreted within the context of the moment in which they arose. The central concept of interpretation primarily concerns negotiating definitions of the situation that are capable of achieving consensus. Within this model of action, language, as we shall see, occupies a prominent position (Jürgen Habermas, p. 198).

Examining the nature of daily interactions in a digital space, such as Facebook, by tracking conversations and posts, reveals a stark contradiction between reality and the message promoted within this communicative space. For example, I find many residents of my neighborhood reacting with satisfaction, acceptance, and support to various posts about neighborhood cleanliness, doing good deeds, moral commitment, and other related topics. However, the reality I experience in my neighborhood is completely different. There is a lot of litter in some areas, perhaps even near these very individuals who actively support the cleanliness campaign on social media. There are also many cases of theft in the neighborhood, and sometimes the police find evidence incriminating some of its residents, even though these same individuals are also among those who advocate for moral commitment and respect for neighborly relations. This is truly perplexing and requires us to pause and analyze this phenomenon. This reflection leads us to the stage of this open-air theater, which presents us with symbolic performances, both overt and covert. We are, therefore, faced with a complex landscape. Virtuality is a means for its proponents to represent moral values and build symbolic capital to gain a social resource and recognition from the virtual public. From Goffman's perspective,

this shift can be understood as a transition from ethics as a behind-the-scenes practice to ethics as a tool in front of the public.

### 1.1. Ethics and Symbolic Identity: An Anthropological Reading of Digital Space

What is truly astonishing is how some people seek to share so many events—births, deaths, participation in charitable acts, religious observances, and more—through various communication channels. What truly surprised me was what happened when one of my relatives passed away. I found one of the attendees preoccupied with his phone while they needed him at the very moment. He offered a rather lukewarm excuse, explaining that he was busy responding to condolences on Facebook! This raises the question: have we truly come to possess other selves that are more valuable than our real selves? Perhaps only some believe the answer should be different, but others see this right to belong to the virtual space as an imperative that everyone must respect. This space of freedom and flexibility shouldn't be so easily denied, as if we were to order someone to abandon their phone forever or log out of all electronic media, which represent for them a private world brimming with meanings and emotions. In light of cultural values, an individual's needs appear acceptable, even to others within the same cultural framework. However, needs that are clearly and convincingly interpreted do not translate into legitimate motivations for action (Jürgen Habermas, p. 203).

The structure of the electronic system signifies a space that is not part of the physical or natural world. It is a virtual, digital, electronic space operating within a dynamic environment. William Gibson describes it as an ideal environment for achieving wealth and power (Salah Abdel Hamid & Yumna Atef, 2014, p. 8). It is also an ideal environment for anonymity and positioning. Any individual, regardless of gender, can easily enter this virtual world, participate in it, and adopt its digital vocabulary. Facebook has recently become part of the lives of many people. You find them in workplaces accessing its platforms and interacting with others' posts despite the limited work time and the accumulation of tasks assigned to them.

It has become common to notice people with criminal records in moral and professional cases, and even misdemeanors of theft, rape, and other issues, occupying digital positions, hiding behind glittering titles, highlighting virtue, and embracing the digital identity with all steadfastness and boldness. They share posts about building the self-according to the moral pyramid that enables them to acquire ideal self-images, as long as the digital space celebrates the possibility of display, interaction, and circulation on the widest scale. This interaction enables them to achieve what is known as digital acceptance, which is one of the most important rites of passage that people with criminal records must enter into because of its sanctity and its ability to reproduce values for individuals anew, as it enhances social acceptance and develops the symbolic status of individuals within the social group.

### 2.1. Symbolic Kindness and Realistic Coldness

In light of current cultural and social transformations, the tension between symbolic kindness and the search for self-identity can be viewed as a complex socio-emotional practice, while realistic emotional coldness is seen as one of the most prominent structural features reshaping individuals' daily experiences. Relationships that were based on direct empathy and genuine human warmth are declining in the face of new communication patterns characterized by reductionism, speed, and functionality. This leads to an increasing emotional distance between individuals and deepens a feeling of emotional alienation. This paradox is not simply a change in communication style; rather, it reveals a deeper crisis in the emotional structure of modern society, where the presence of the other becomes more formal or instrumental, while mutual recognition as the foundation of human intimacy diminishes.

We are witnessing a shift from the traditional model of intimacy to a new model of automated communication. We often observe that some individuals, when we meet them at events or in public places, do not give us much attention. This explains the emotional detachment and the decline of various greetings, which become more effective within digital spaces. Which are reduced to quick symbolic signals, while the emotional void remains profound, reflecting a crisis of emotional capital within daily life patterns, making the virtual world more like a disparate mosaic of experiences, languages, and symbols, rather than a unified space for humanity. (Hassan Emad Makawi, 1997, p. 235)

The observer and follower of the paths of social action and various daily interactions finds that many individuals live in a state of dual identity between a tangible reality and a social identity defined by their identification card and status in their environment, and a flexible digital identity that arises through electronic platforms and is shaped according to their needs and desires. It is a cycle full of conflict between the virtual self and reality, where the virtual identity transcends all traditional practices in the new symbolic construction that arouses in them a passion for experiencing free expression away from what they call traditional customary pressures. What should be raised as a subject of inquiry is what researchers call the virtual digital identity and how it has come to be practiced in different spaces and reshape the relationship of young people with themselves and with their real and virtual societies alike. (Bayoussef Masouda. 2011, p. 470)

## 2. Digital Space as a Safe Space for Expressing the Hidden Self

Digital space is a unique space for expressing the hidden self, as it transcends traditional social and cultural constraints. Behind pseudonyms or virtual representations, it provides a space for anonymity as a cultural strategy, where individuals conceal their true identities to express their hidden selves. From a digital anthropological perspective, anonymity in this space becomes a practice where identities are reproduced in virtual communities, allowing individuals to explore and experiment with their identities. In other words, they can present themselves as they wish, something that is impossible in real-world society.

### 2.1. The Self Between Representation and Performance: An Anthropology of Identity and Digital Spaces

In the virtual space, users assume the roles of hidden personas through images, texts, and comments. This is a form of representational performance in which identity is reshaped as a fluid act, with likes acting as reinforcers. This results in an interactive representation that modifies the self-based on interaction. Thus, anonymity becomes a form of performance in the virtual realm, using pseudonyms to explore cultural secrets without revealing one's true self. This representational performance allows for the construction of a digital identity through avatars or personal narratives, enabling the self to emerge beyond censorship. The space becomes an "identity workshop" for experimenting with new possibilities without fear of judgment. It also alleviates psychological pressures by releasing repressed feelings (Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 1966, p. 34), like escaping to a comfortable reality. In this way, the hidden self transforms into a false self, leading to an identity alienation where the original identity dissolves and a new one is formed according to a specific cultural and social context.

The individual who engages in these interactions has the right to conceal themselves under different names for various reasons. In particular, an individual's identity or personality disappears amidst these interactions, even diverging into numerous forms. Furthermore, the individual is stripped of their personal identity, as the virtual identity becomes fragmented within a digital space that recognizes only multiplicity, difference, and dispersal. It acknowledges only networking for pleasure and communication, making the virtual identity antithetical to unity and stability. This contrasts with the fundamental personality that Ralph Linton discussed, which represents the shared framework for members of a single community, characterized by unity and similarity.

### 2.2. Digital Space as a Symbolic Field for Self-Expression

Self-expression in digital space is a complex cultural phenomenon with profound symbolic and intellectual dimensions. It is an entrenched symbolic system fueled by algorithms that control what we see and think, reproducing its methods and cognitive fragmentation across the broadest strata of society. It has its own laws, which are difficult to control, because within these societies the networks of determination, the networks of values, and the standards of social and value differentiation change, where the characteristics of lived presence are erased, and the apparent and formal elements of the individual disappear, such as: language, customs, dress patterns, gender, color, job affiliation, and others; and the individual comes to know himself through icons, pseudonyms, or electronic addresses.

The digital space can be dealt with as a symbolic field, in Bourdieu's terms, where it becomes a competitive space for symbolic capital (social recognition and legitimacy) that is acquired through the expression of the hidden self. It is analyzed as a hidden symbolic power that produces invisible symbolic violence (Linton, Ralph, 1945, p. 102), in which dominant or resistant identities are reproduced through digital habitus. Anonymity transforms the symbolic field (Bourdieu) into a safe performance stage, where likes accumulate as anonymous symbolic capital that reinforces self-representation without direct social risks. Thus, anonymity transforms the digital field into a strategy for accumulating counter-symbolic capital, where marginalized habitus is concealed to produce a hidden power. Anonymity around posts and replies (likes) represents a fundamental strategy in the digital space for preserving and perpetuating the hidden self, as it allows for the dissemination of repressed opinions or interaction with sensitive content without revealing one's identity. Herein lies the anthropological perspective in its understanding of this complex reality that reproduces habitus as a hidden resistance against censorship, especially in the following contexts (Bourdieu, Pierre, 1984, p. 170).

- Symbolic capital: accumulated through likes and followers
- Symbolic violence: algorithms conceal class or cultural hegemony
- Strategies of practice where the individual struggles in the field to transform cultural capital (knowledge, language) into symbolic.

Tracing the paths of digital space anthropologically can become a fertile stage for performance and self-representation, where the hidden self plays different roles between good and evil, truth and betrayal, in a recurring daily spectacle that transcends the constraints of tangible reality into the tangible virtual. Thus, the

ethnomethodological approach becomes a method that can boldly establish its mechanisms and rules for understanding reality as it is, without distortion, by approaching the understanding and interpretation of digital spaces as digital theaters that reflect the ongoing conflict between the self and intersubjectivity, and between the self and the other.

## Conclusion

Anthropology has always provided us with somewhat different cognitive aspects. This difference is fueled by ethnology with its analytical paradigms that can deconstruct reality step by step. This deconstruction is not as easy as some interested in the anthropological field believe. Rather, it can be considered a research adventure in this promising field of knowledge, which transcends the limits of space and time and reduces them to implicit virtual boundaries. Approaching the behavior of individuals as actors and practitioners of digital social action is a challenge to the power of observation and the patience of the researcher in tracking meaning and investigating connotations and symbols, and how these actors employ signs in their virtual channels, given that this fluid behavior reshapes the symbolic field each time. It also questions how to retell social relationships between the unknown stranger and the close friend through these digital platforms, which quickly turn into distinctive stages for the identity performance of individuals and groups with their different cultural orientations and diverse ideological backgrounds.

## Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in full compliance with internationally recognized ethical standards for social and anthropological research involving human subjects. Given that the research focuses on social representations and interactions within digital spaces, particular attention was paid to issues of privacy, consent, and anonymity. All data analyzed were derived from publicly accessible social media content or from interactions in which participants were already socially and familiarly connected to the researchers. No private messages, closed groups, or restricted digital spaces were accessed without explicit awareness and contextual consent. Personal identifiers were removed or anonymized to prevent the identification of individuals. The study avoided any form of digital harm, misrepresentation, or ethical intrusion, and the interpretation of data was carried out with cultural sensitivity and respect for social norms within the Algerian context.

## Author Contributions

- Koussai Attia contributed to the conceptualization of the study, theoretical framework development, research design, and the anthropological interpretation of digital identity and social representation.
- Salima Brahmi was responsible for data collection, qualitative analysis, and the application of ethnomethodological approaches to digital interactions.
- Issam Braham contributed to literature review, methodological refinement, critical analysis, and the final revision of the manuscript.

All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the authorship, research, or publication of this article.

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