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THE TRANSFORMATION OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY INTO DIGITAL IDENTITY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Transformacja tożsamości narracyjnej w cyfrową. Wyzwania i perspektywy

Ernesta Molotokienė
Klaipėda University, Lithuania
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2351-4189>

Abstract

The article examines the problem of personal identity construction, expression, and change of model diversity, which reflects the chaotic distraction characteristic of the individual in the modern world, the search for self-realization space, self-defining and self-explanatory categories. These processes call for a closer analysis of what sources of personal identity construction are relevant to the modern media user. The problem is the declining significance of human identity in contemporary contexts, which is becoming just as controversial a symbolic capital as any other type of social identity. Answers are sought as to what factors shape the identity of a modern media user, what values are relevant to him. In modern society, identity is perceived as an open process of self-formation, and symbolic design. The development of global social networks, and their becoming a significant part of the daily lives of modern media users, illustrates the changing narratives of personal identity in modern society.

Keywords: narrative identity; digital identity; philosophy; social networks.

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Corresponding address: Ernesta Molotokienė, Ph.D., (Assoc. Prof.) Head of the Department of Philosophy, Arts and Communication at Klaipėda University (Lithuania), Herkaus Manto str. 84, 92294 Klaipėda, Lithuania; e-mail: irama@inbox.lt

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto problem konstrukcji, wyrażania i zmiany wzorcowej różnorodności tożsamości osobistej, która odzwierciedla chaotyczną dystrakcję charakterystyczną dla człowieka we współczesnym świecie, poszukiwanie przestrzeni samorealizacji, kategorii samookreślających się i samowyjaśniających. Wymaga bliżej analizy, jakie źródła konstruowania tożsamości osobistej są istotne dla współczesnego użytkownika mediów. Problemem jest malejące znaczenie tożsamości ludzkiej we współczesnych kontekstach, która staje się równie kontrowersyjnym kapitałem symbolicznym, jak każdy inny typ tożsamości społecznej. Poszukuje się odpowiedzi, jakie czynniki kształtują tożsamość współczesnego użytkownika mediów, jakie wartości są dla niego istotne. We współczesnym społeczeństwie tożsamość jest postrzegana jako otwarty proces samokształtowania i symbolicznego projektowania. Rozwój globalnych sieci społecznościowych i stawanie się ich istotną częścią codziennego życia współczesnych użytkowników mediów ilustruje zmieniające się narracje dotyczące tożsamości osobistej we współczesnym społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość narracyjna; tożsamość cyfrowa; filozofia; portale społecznościowe.

Introduction

Investigating the virtual culture the question of what shapes the identity of modern media user raises inevitably. When examining the problems of audience transformations, it is crucial to understand what shapes the field of experience, and value scales of the modern media user. With the rise of global social media, it is increasingly argued that the origins, and places of residence of media users are becoming less, and less relevant to individuals in the process of constructing their identity. On the other hand, the identity of the modern individual is increasingly defined by the battlefield, and everyday discourses reflect the processes of globalization, and the changing economic, social, and cultural patterns of human life. Traditionally, identity has been largely social, and shaped by traditional social institutes (family, church, school, nation, etc.). Modern individuals live in a media-saturated environment, and their daily activities are closely linked to media practices, and virtual reality, in which identity creation becomes personal. Self-determination. Traditional social institutions, and institutional values must be less, and less influenced by this decision. In the 20th century national identity was perceived as fundamental, and associated not only with the collective affiliation of the individual, but was also seen as a significant part of personal identity. However, the emerging reality raises new questions. One of the most significant is how do media users position themselves in the modern global space as the meaning of personal identity changes?

The scientific problems of this article consist the reconstruction of philosophical assumptions of the transformation of personal identity into digital. The object of the article is the changing narratives of personal identity, and expressions in the global space, where the diversity of composed identities prevails, and personal identity, which was fundamental in traditional society, becomes just as much a matter of personal self-determination as self-assignment to other social groups. The aim of this article is to analyze theoretical philosophical approaches to personal identity transformations in changing social, and cultural conditions. It assumes that social networks, a significant part of the everyday discourse of the modern individual, provide opportunities to answer the question of how important their identity is to the participants of social networks.

A change in the postmodernist philosophical conception of narrative identity

In the context of philosophy, the field of conceptualization of identity evolved through the interaction of ideas of French poststructuralism, deconstruction, and philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic strategy helps to highlight the narrative aspect of identity. In the philosophy of the twentieth century, a trend was formed that began to regard human as a story-telling animal, a narrative conception of personality. Heidegger developed the concept of personality, in which it is perceived as a dynamic system of interrelated meanings or significations; doing so he revealed that Dasein has a temporal structure (Martin and Barresi, 2006). Heidegger understood human as trapped in a dynamic system of relationships, called here-being. The Heideggerian “self”, and the world are not two beings as object, and subject, they are related through existence. According to Paul Ricoeur, person’s identity and “other” are so intimately connected that it would be impossible to separate them. Identity, as a character in my narrative, is different. “I” as an author and “I” as a character for Ricoeur are a constant dialectical relationship. Human, in order to understand the object to be interpreted, inevitably encounters one’s identity, which becomes the starting point for all its perception. As Heidegger argued, our understanding is always based on preconceived structures. Understanding is formed by moving in a hermeneutic circle: from understanding the whole to understanding the part, and back to the whole. In that circle, human always finds himself understanding one way or another, and thus finds himself as existing.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics focuses on human existence and criticizes Heidegger’s philosophy, which, according to P. Ricoeur, does not explain how a person finds himself. Self-discovery and understanding become the greatest existential problem for Ricoeur. Hermeneutic interpretation seeks to overcome distance and cultural distance, to bring the reader closer to the text itself, which is completely foreign to the reader, and therefore incomprehensible, and to bring the meaning of the text into the field of current human self-understanding (Ricoeur, 1974). According to Ricoeur, the walk toward himself is not as short and abrupt as that of Heidegger. For him, Heidegger’s path to existence is too straightforward. The long road proposed by Ricoeur is a walk in a hermeneutic circle. This means, starting from the plane of language where understanding spreads. The transition from understanding as a way of cognition to understanding as a way of being is difficult, because understanding in Heidegger Dasein’s analytics emerges as an understanding through which being understands itself as being. The new problem of existence can be found only by a semantic interpretation of the concept, which must be common to all hermeneutic disciplines. The center of semantics is a topic of complex, multiple, or symbolic meanings. Understanding ambiguous, or symbolic utterances involves self-understanding.

The search for the plane of existence in Paul Ricoeur’s philosophy touches on the problem of personal identity. In the reflection phase, we discover our identity. We understand ourselves only through others, through our expressions. But here we only identify the identity, not create it. Forming, and creating an identity, is necessary when creating a narrative. Ricoeur developed the original concept of dynamic

identity. In analyzing Aristotle's tragedy, Ricoeur created assumptions about the identity of the narrative personality. Identity, according to linguistic conventions, can be called character identity. The identity of the character is found in the plot. There is a constant struggle in the plot, between the requirement of compatibility, and the possibility of incompatibility. Ricoeur calls the attempt to combine them a configuration, and considers it a feature of all narrative compositions (Ricoeur, 1976). It is a synthesis of heterogeneity, the compatibility of all events and the unity of the story now being told. This synthesis involves intentions, causes, and coincidences. The narrative linkage of events differs from other models of cohesiveness in that the event is indistinguishable. In a narrative narrative, the event is created by a narration. Ricoeur's conception of narrative personality identity resolves the contradiction between freedom and determinism. A character can start events, it is a beginning, and in this respect it is free, but at the same time it belongs to the plot determinism created by the narrative.

For Charles Taylor, the question "who am I" is important, but he replaces it with the question "where am I". Taylor did not think that the answer to the first question could be simply by telling about himself, but by looking at himself historically. He took this idea from Heidegger. Space and time are very important to Taylor, because the individual is in space. To understand our identity, we need to be able to see our lives as an unfolding story. The story, life, must be intact. The integrity of history is important to Taylor. To understand who we are, one needs to know one's past, present, and also embrace the future. To understand who I am, I need to understand how I have become who I am, and where I am going (Taylor, 1989). Taylor solved the question of personality identity by treating the narrative concept of personality as a precondition for an answer. Thus, the narrative cannot take place in silence, in the language required for the narrative, because our identity is our linguistic articulation (Taylor, 1989). No narrative about ourselves (narrative) is final, the narrative cannot cover everything, because life is constantly moving forward. A man lives in a world full of challenges, which requires new interpretations, and new narratives. The story can never be completed, i.e., told. Everyone is a narrator with a dialogue, we become who we are just by talking to each other all the time (Taylor, 1989). The dialogic nature is another necessary ontological personality trait for Taylor. When creating a story about oneself, and thus revealing one's identity, a person constantly communicates with others – discusses his, or her, identity with dialogue partners.

In the philosophy of postmodernism, the identity of the person acquires a new, previously unheard concept: a man engages in the self-creation of his identity by telling about himself fragmentary stories, which are deliberately not intended to be connected into a cohesive whole. It is a different narrative that does not believe in possibility of recounting a person's entire life, so a personality consists of coincidences. Identity is constructed from many different fragments – narratives, that a person tells about himself. Philosophers treat this differently, but retain the fragmentation of narratives, and the idea, that there can be no one true narrative, abandoning the evaluation of personal values. Alexander Neham relied on the life of Socrates to create a model of narrative personality identity. For Neham, identity is created philosophically, based on the art of living model. The art model of life is a model of life to follow, by applying which a person creates his narrative. Of cour-

se, there is not, and cannot be, one true, and one-size-fits-all model of life, but it is safe to say, that Socrates can be one of the pioneers in creating such models (Neham, 1998). An essential feature of identity is originality. Neham provides the conditions necessary for the creation of an original identity: distinctiveness and coherence. Both need to be pursued when creating an identity project - they are conditions of the identity project. Because everyone's life can be different, there is no universal way of life, even the philosophers mentioned by Neham, who represent the artistic models of their lives, cannot be compulsorily followed. Those, who want to imitate a model of identity that seems acceptable to them, must develop their art of living and their own personal identity. By adopting another model, it is impossible to acquire their own identity. Diversity is, therefore, an essential condition for identity. The imitator is not original in imitating another, his identity is derived, and is therefore doomed to be quickly forgotten. Those who tried to imitate, occupy their rightful place in the space of oblivion. What makes a person important is his ability to create himself different from the individuals around him. It is important to become a person and create a unique identity.

Unfortunately, Neham does not provide rules of exclusivity, because he does not believe in one rule for all. Everyone has to find way to make themselves unique. Achieving exclusivity is one part of building your identity. In Neham's narrative conception, self-creation must be cohesive, but what is important in a self-creation project, is not the consistency of theoretical views, but the aesthetic cohesiveness of the character formed by the author's work. The aesthetic cohesiveness of the character is the second condition for the narrative self-creation of the philosophers of life. A person achieves identity by creating a narrative, when he combines all the events and circumstances of his life into one whole. Even actions that seem completely random become important in the creation of a narrative, even through the smallest details our narrative can gain uniqueness, and create our identity. One can only see the coherence of a narrative when it is written down. In this way, philosophers of the art of living create an identity, by writing a coherent, and cohesive narrative.

Rorty, like Neham, believes that a person's identity must be created by nurturing a narrative about his life. In both cases, the narrative is created in the form of a writing. Neham argues that only a form of the art of living immortalized in writing can survive and be passed on to others, and Rorty also supports it by choosing the path of poetry. Rorty argues, that only poetry can preserve your identity for future generations, only through it can personality be forgotten.

A strong poet must strive for originality, and fear that his works may turn out to be completely worthless among the works of other authors. The poet strives to create something unique, and only because by surpassing others he will retain his identity. A poetically told narrative is a person's identity. Rortian self-creation takes place during the construction of the text (Rorty, 1989). In Rorty's concept, a person's identity is created by inventing a new poetic language, which he often calls simply a dictionary, new metaphors, and writing down his life with them. Interestingly, Rorty disagrees with the coherence of Nehamas' narrative. According to Rorty, the narrative narrated does not have to be coherent and cohesive, a person would not have enough for a lifetime to complete a coherent project. Rorty takes over from Freud the idea of the identity of personal integrity. Personality consists of many interacting

personalities. They relate to each other, but never overlap. All the roles that fit in a person are important to one's identity. Each role has its own language, and vocabulary. When all the roles interact, the dictionaries connect, and thus new ones are created, allowing to retell one's narrative. The ability to invent new metaphors, and describe one's identity gives identity uniqueness. That is what a strong poet strives for. Rorty receives a lot of criticism that a person without a single permanent center cannot create himself, because a factor is needed to create and execute all personality transcripts. Coincidence shows the absence of a person's center, but a person without a center would be too passive to be a poet, moreover, how one could perceive when there are individual narratives that are talking about the same person. Thus, Rorty's self-creation project does not require sustainability. It requires striving for narrative originality. The original narrative becomes poetry, while the non-original remains a replica, says the philosopher. No one wants to be a replica, this unconsciously sought not only by poets, but by everyone else. Rorty allows to create original identity using already existing dictionaries, much like Neham allows to study existing models of the art of living self-creation. However, it is important to distinguish between use and appropriation, or, as Neham calls it, imitation.

The problem of identity becomes radical in a virtual world, in which discussed concepts of philosophical identity are transformed into digital avatars with no human basis. We live in the age where digital communities are gaining importance, and are undoubtedly having an impact not only on culture, but also on the social environment. Multiple illusory identities, controlled by the same individuals, are formed in different online social networks. Therefore, a number of philosophical challenges arise to reflect on the essence, and meaning of digital identity.

The problem of expression of digital identity

In the changing, globalized 21st century world, personal identity remains a significant and debatable issue, as it reveals how individual identities are created, and how collective relationships between individuals are formed (Rouse, 1995). The changing social landscape suggests, that many significant social categories, and established norms, are losing their meaning, and significance, and encouraging modern person to create new models of self-construction in the modern world. Identities are part of social reality, e.g. human resources (cultural, ideological, social, etc.), designed to understand the world. Traditionally, identity is perceived as a social construct that Shi Yu has associated with the use of resources such as history, language, and culture in the process of building an individual's identity (Shi, 2005).

In this context, the links between the ideological aspect, and social representations, are quite pronounced, as social representations reflect a dynamic process in which it is important for individuals to define how they are seen by others, and how those representations can be created. In the theory of social representations, culture is conceptualized as a metasystem of social representations created through language, symbols, and mediators. In addition, special attention is paid to communication, which establishes social knowledge, and belief systems, common to various groups. J. H. Liu and C. G. Sibley note, that the main categorical systems, prevailing in the country, are inevitably related to its historical experience (Liu and Sibley, 2009).

The authors define history as an essential element of the national identity of an imaginary community, and a fundamental myth that defines the rights and responsibilities of its members, the collective memory of heroes, the psychological totality of attitudes, values, beliefs, and discourses. It is because of national history that social representation is largely a part of unique and meaningful culture, and each individual designs himself using these symbolic resources. These projections include not only one's past, but also the future, as they reflect the corresponding philosophy of everyday life (Höijer, 2011). Thus, each individual, forming his identity, assimilates the dominant social representations, and the collective systems of meanings defined by them. Based on social representations, individuals compose a system of beliefs, opinions, associations, or attitudes. These basic principles, that organize an individual's worldview, and life, may be common to groups of individuals whose members have similar socio-cultural and socio-psychological characteristics. Likewise, new, unfamiliar ideas, are incorporated into a system of already existing categories, and symbolic adjustment mechanisms adapt them to a specific social, and cultural context. It can be argued, that identity, as a dynamic process, signifies identification with certain social groups, their culture, values, certain self-awareness, conceptualization of various areas of human experience.

Tiindenberg, together with Whelan, offers the idea that it is convenient to view self-representation as a particular genre, which would be understood as the construction of the self, through a common understanding of the self along with the audience. The authors take the position that self-representation is an evolving, dialogical, and intertextual process developed by both the creator of the information, and the users as certain statements, that allow the identification of identity (Tiindenberg and Whelan, 2017). In a society, that is constantly in a hurry, and "flooded" with large amounts of information, the importance of visual communication is clearly increasing. Virilio, examining the video, argues, that technology can change the process of biological vision in certain situations, or at least free vision from the function of public surveillance. According to the author, the subject has lost direct contact with visible reality. Complete depersonalization included not only the subject, but also the object of observation, as opportunities for "seeing" emerged without the need for "watching". Virilio argues, that a man not only changed, but is also gradually replaced by his own discoveries, as man is only supposedly involved in many processes of observation, and thinking. The author emphasizes, that the meaning of the term "truth to nature" has lost its force. What is real may not always be visible, and what can be seen is not always true (Virilio, 1991). This imaginary reality transferred to the network becomes a representation of identity. The question then arises, as to whether that identity is real, or also imaginary. While an image is a leader in social media, due to its fast presentation and ability to attract attention quickly, textual communication and the creation of a personal narrative also remain particularly important.

However, in contemporary world affected by globalization, local civilizations, and traditional social cohesion have almost disappeared, and identity has ceased to be a matter of attribution, and inheritance. National heritage is increasingly being used as a challenged symbolic capital to compete with. Global migration, the westernization of cultures, the development of cosmopolitan values, and digitization encourage modern people to see themselves as citizens of the world, feeling an in-

creasingly weak emotional connection to a particular territory or nation. If we recognize the traditional identity of an outdated one that loses its relevance, then the following questions arise: how do modern individuals define themselves? What values unite people in the global space? Undoubtedly, the patterns of personal identity construction, and their expression are changing. Contemporary realities testify to the change of sources of personal identity construction, the diversity of their expression and models, reflect the chaotic distraction, characteristic of the modern individual in the modern world, the search for space for self-realization, self-defining and self-explanatory categories. These processes call for a closer analysis of what sources of personal identity construction are relevant to the modern media user. The processes of self-construction inevitably reveal an individual's relationship with the outside world.

Modern metaprocesses, such as globalization, individualization, commercialization, mediatization, and digitization are essential concepts that define the processes taking place in this era, and define the specifics of the period (Floridi, 2014). They modify the ways in which people construct, and live, and function in the socio-cultural world. It must be acknowledged, that the globalization of markets contributes to the diminishing importance of national borders, and the attitude towards the individual as a citizen of a given country. Representative of a nation is changed by the attitude towards the individual as a consumer with a certain purchasing power.

According to Giddens, such symbolic use in postmodern world becomes the main activity for constructing identity, as the traditional sources of identity – family or class status – are gradually dwindling (Giddens, 1991). In the modern age, an individual's identity is perceived as the result of his own efforts. It is a continuous and open process of self-formation and symbolic design, during which the individual uses all the symbolic resources available to him. In postmodernism, S. Inkinen defines the development of identity as a play of choices and theatrical presentation of oneself. Not only does what an individual thinks of himself become important, but also how he presents himself in the overall picture of gender, nationality, ethnic origin, race, sexuality, and incarnation, open to negotiation (Inkinen, 2005). In current philosophical contexts, identity construction is increasingly perceived as an open process of self-formation, and symbolic design. The process is associated with improvisations, experiments, merging genres as an active action, combining contrasting, and even contradictory elements according to emerging contexts, and situations (Weber and Mitchell, 2008). In these processes, the role of the media is unequivocally identified as central by many authors. First, the media presents a wide range of cultural patterns and landmarks, as well as examples of different identities, from which individuals choose the most inspiring and enjoyable. It is the media that shape audiences' perceptions of what it means to be a woman, or a man in the context of social class, race, nationality, sexuality. Images, fashion, popular music stars cultivate modern culture, because media culture is visual culture. Analyzing the problems of individual identity development, it must be stated that modern individuals perceive their uniqueness as a value, and personal freedom, and independence are named as the highest goals. Individuals, when choosing different life practices, combine them into one complex and the choice of these practices is significant not only because it satisfies practical needs, but also because it gives a material form to a particular self-narrative (Giddens, 1991).

The growth of social media poses new challenges to all traditional core values, established social categories and structures. Estosia et al. calls social networking sites a powerful personal image management and personal marketing tool, that allows media users to control their performance, and manage their reputation in cyberspace, both in terms of time, and intensity of activity (Estoisia et al., 2009). However, each individual's self-representations through self-identification are inevitably related to different groups, although in these contexts the individual is paramount, because he, or she, chooses which groups they would like to be associated with. Social networking sites have fundamentally transformed individuals' expressions of self-representation, and ways of interacting with other people, and allow an individual to have multiple identities (Turkle, 1995).

When examining social expressions in the cyberspace, it should be noted, that the individual stories of media users are not only based on significant shared experiences with other media users, but are composed according to the relevant type of society and culture. The common historical past and historical symbols remain key elements in the expression of media users' self-representations, supporting and extending the traditional narrative. Often constructing their profiles, as part of a performance against a global audience, people use meaningful symbols to represent themselves. History, and cultural contexts provide material from which meaningful symbols, individual, and collective narratives, are created that are common to the respective group. It must be acknowledged that in postmodern society new ways of personal and social participation in public space are formed, sources of personal identity construction, diversity of identity expression emerges, when each individual has the opportunity to emphasize significant and important aspects of identity.

Conclusions

The concept of a person's identity, like many other significant social categories, changed in the postmodern era. Ricoeur took the position that the person is involved in the dynamic identity that unfolds in the narrative. The story told creates its narrative identity. In the narrative concept of personality, and identity emerges in a narrative that encompasses only the story of one person's life from birth to death. For Taylor, however, identity is not possible without linguistic articulation, because only language can help answer questions, and only by talking to others does a person become who he, or she, is. Everyone is a narrator characterized by dialogue. When creating a story about oneself, and thus revealing one's identity, a person constantly communicates with others discusses his or her identity with dialogue partners. Personality identity is not possible without the recognition of other people. For Neham, identity is created philosophically based on the art of living model. The art model of life, is a model of life to follow, by applying which a person creates his narrative. Neham provides the conditions necessary for the creation of an original identity: distinctiveness and coherence. Both need to be pursued when creating an identity project. In Rorty's concept of self-creation, the starting point becomes the ability to acknowledge the randomness of one's personality. Rorty does not regard the coherence and unity of the personal narrative as fundamental conditions of identity.

Social networks, which are becoming a significant part of everyday discourse, reflect the peculiarities of the formation of the identity of individuals in postmodern society. The article states that the peculiarities of a person's identity are inevitably related to the individual's origin, and the environment in which he, or she, becomes a conscious person, choosing the relevant components from the variety of available social identities. Narratives of personal identity become an integral part of a person's constructed identity in social networks, but the newly formed reality encourages individuals to search for new forms of identity, their harmonization with the supra-national values emerging in the global space.

Consumerism inevitably reinforces the processes of individualization in the modern world, where identity formation is increasingly associated with voluntary choices. In the era of individualization, the change of sources of personal identity construction, diversity of expressions, and models becomes more pronounced, and social websites, which could be called a space of self-realization of the modern individual, reflect the search for self-defining, and self-explanatory categories. Modern individuals perceive their uniqueness as a value, but the processes of self-construction inevitably use classical philosophical, ethical narratives that reveal an individual's relationship with the outside world, and new ideas are adapted to a specific social, and cultural context. This suggests that personal identity is an important part of media users' self-identity, and traditional value narratives remain significant elements in the expression of media users' self-representations.

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