

eEthnicity: Social media, Italian Americans, and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This study seeks to determine the relationship between social media and various generations of the Italian American community. It also aims to understand if various types of social media posts affect Italian Americans differently depending on their age. Presenting social media as a new host culture for Italian Americans where their ethnic identity serves as their primary point of reference as they navigate the digital world, this study also attempts to determine exactly how effective social media can be seen as a tool for discovering and learning more about one's ethnic heritage. This study was performed via a quantitative survey of 110 respondents, with certain results analyzed via both chi-square tests of independence and Pearson correlation coefficients. Study outcomes assert that an individual's self-concept is built on cultural, social, and personal identities, with all three working together to form a person's overall identity. Survey respondents showed a strong cultural tie to their Italian American heritage that affected their personal identity to the point where they felt it was necessary to seek out Italian American-related content on social media. By participating in Italian American social media sites as either a fan or consumer of content, the respondents showed a social identity in which their cultural and personal identities play a defining role. The respondents' cultural identity was used as the social context within which they operate, showing that it does influence how they interact with social media content.

Keywords: social media, Italian American, ethnicity, intercultural communication competence, symbolic interactionism