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Testing Identity Group Theory: Towards an Empirical Research Agenda for Identity Economies

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Abstract

The development of new social theories requires not only conceptual innovation but also systematic strategies for empirical evaluation. Identity Group Theory (IGT) has recently proposed that social life can be understood through identity economies in which actors allocate and exchange multiple forms of value across competing identity formations. While the framework offers a novel approach to understanding identity, power, and social organisation, important questions remain concerning its empirical applicability.

This paper develops an empirical research agenda for testing the core propositions of IGT. It identifies key theoretical constructs—including identity narratives, interpellation, allocation, regulation, conversion, and identity economies—and discusses how these may be operationalised across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research designs.

Drawing on examples from political discourse, institutional life, social movements, and organisational settings, the paper outlines potential pathways for evaluating the explanatory power of IGT. Particular attention is given to questions of measurement, data collection, and hypothesis generation.

Rather than presenting IGT as a completed theory, the paper positions it as an emerging research programme and invites critical engagement with its assumptions, concepts, and empirical implications. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to broader discussions concerning theory development, interdisciplinary research, and the future study of identity and social organisation.

Keywords: Identity Group Theory (IGT); Recognition Theory; Identity Economies; Social Identity; Discourse Analysis