

Keynote Speech 11 (14:00 to 14:45 HKT, 12th July 2024/D1-LP-02)

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Identity construction in AI-powered online social networking

Abstract

In this talk, I consider the ways in which youth identity formation has been transformed by recent technology on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociocultural levels. As the boundaries between the physical and the virtual worlds continue to blur, we seem to be constantly switching identities while jumping between spaces. Online social networking (OSN) seamlessly flows into everyday life. Youths encounter both opportunities (e.g., forging diverse identities, enlarging social communication), and challenges including a) lack of self-concept clarity (SCC) due to fragmentation between virtual and physical realities, and b) identity incongruence as a result of discrete identity presentations across different OSN settings, which will be detrimental to their overall well-being and development. While we (together with our avatars) reflect on what and who we have become, we must also tread the ethical quandaries that emerge. The fact that this would require a critical use of technology brings us to the research domains of digital literacies, digital citizenship and the impact of AI-powered systems on individuals' decision-making and human agency and autonomy, where digital activities are observed and investigated. By referring to two of my empirical studies, I elaborate on a qualitative inquiry into the social, cultural, and educational practices of multilingual university students in their formational and enactment of digital citizenship, showing that diverse linguistic and semiotic recourses were among the toolkits at play. In the quantitative investigation with multi-level SEM, I investigate the effect of content-self-environment interaction on identity in OSN. The implications for future research are discussed.

Biography

GU Mingyue Michelle is Professor of Sociolinguistics, and Dean of Graduate School, the Education University of Hong Kong. Professor Gu explores the individual-context interplay mediated by languages and semiotics and her major research areas include: multilingualism and mobility, identity, digital literacies, and family language policy. Professor Gu is a prolific scholar with 79 journal articles appearing in top journals such as *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *Higher Education*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of Migration and Ethnic Studies*, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *Computer-assisted Language Learning* and so on. She has a strong record in securing external competitive research grants as PI. She received the President's Award in Individual Research Excellence in 2022 at EdUHK, the Research Excellence Award in 2017 and the Young Researcher Award in 2015 at CUHK.

