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Contents

IT Use and Identity: A Review and a Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Over the last 40 years, IT use has become essential to how individuals interact with the world. From ordering meals to taking classes and even consulting a physician, so many aspects of daily life are bound up with IT that effective participation in the world demands IT use. The ubiquity of IT in work and personal lives has created a shift from IT as a tool to IT as a basis of identity formation and verification. In a genuine sense, IT use has become fundamental to how we see ourselves and act in the world.

The essential role of IT use in all aspects of daily life and social interactions has drawn IS researchers' focus to identity issues. In this stream, IS scholars have examined relationships between IT use and social, role, and person identities and, more recently, IT use as identity (IT identity). Within IS, there is substantial research interest in understanding the complex and constantly changing relationship between

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people and IT. However, a theoretical review to organize diverse perspectives on IT use and identity to facilitate new theorizing has yet to be conducted.

To that end, this monograph reviews 90 conceptual and empirical IS studies to identify major themes, examine their theoretical foundations, and suggest an agenda for future research on IT use and identity. In total, 24 of these collected papers cited the concept of IT identity (Carter and Grover, 2015). We summarize the trends of the current IT identity research in various fields.

1

Introduction

Information technology (IT) use has become embedded in all aspects of individuals' personal, professional, and social lives, influencing how individuals see themselves (i.e., their identities) and how they interact with the world (Carter and Grover, 2015; Floridi, 2010). The identities that people claim represent the shared meanings and expectations that they internalize for their behaviors (Stets and Biga, 2003). Therefore, conducting an updated review of research on IT and identity is vital for understanding how people engage with a constantly changing digital world.

Within IS, there is substantial interest in the complex and constantly changing relationship between individuals' identities and the IT they use. To that end, existing approaches have often examined relationships between IT and social, role, and person identities from one of three perspectives: (1) IT implementation and use as a determinant of identity; (2) IT use as a medium for communicating and protecting identities; or (3) IT adoption and use as a consequent of identity (Carter *et al.*, 2020a; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Mishra *et al.*, 2012; Sarker and Sahay, 2003).

Scholars have examined IT implementation and usage as a *determinant* of identity. Various articles have revealed that IT implementations

may negatively affect role and social identities by transforming proce-
dures and places in which individuals work (e.g., Alvarez, 2008; Mishra
et al., 2012). New IT can also present opportunities to improve existing
identities or construct new ones (e.g., Boudreau *et al.*, 2014; Lamb and
Kling, 2003; Stein *et al.*, 2013). IT usage as a *medium* for communi-
cating and protecting identities has been investigated in the context of
organizational virtual environments (Schultze, 2014), social networking
(Bateman *et al.*, 2011; Lin *et al.*, 2021), e-commerce (Forman *et al.*,
2008), and online communities (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Vaast and Levina,
2015). Finally, some IS research has examined IT use as a *consequent*
of identity. In this stream, research has shed light on how identities
influence IT use, e.g., in online communities (Ren *et al.*, 2012; Tsai and
Bagozzi, 2014), technology adoption (Pethig and Kroenung, 2019), and
how social identities provide a context for IT use (Walsh *et al.*, 2010).
Thus, IT as a determinant, medium, and consequent of identity has
been part of IS research for some time.

   In recent years, a fourth perspective – *IT use as identity* – has
garnered interest within the IS literature (Carter and Grover, 2015).
From this perspective, individuals' IT use is motivated by positive self-
identification with using information technologies they are familiar with
(Carter and Grover, 2015). IT identity has been used as a theoretical
foundation for behavioral research in various contexts, including health
informatics (Esmaeilzadeh, 2020; Henkenjohann, 2021), social media (Li
et al., 2019), enterprise systems (Hassandoust and Techatassanasoontorn,
2021), and IT for development (Gomez, 2016). Additionally, research
has shown that individuals who strongly self-identify with technology
are more likely to engage in feature and exploratory usage (i.e., richer
IT usage) vis-a-vis those who do not identify with IT (Carter *et al.*,
2020a,b).

   In sum, the IS literature on identity is rich and varied. But these
works suggest that research in this area holds even more promise for
expanding understanding of human behavior. However, for this promise
to be realized, a theoretical review to organize the diverse perspectives
on IT use and identity is needed to facilitate new theorizing. To that
end, we systematically review and analyze research on the relationship
between identity and IT from 1995 to 2021 in the IS domain. In doing

so, we focus on five major research trends. Our review provides a foundational schema of IS research on identity and IT use and suggests future research directions to build accumulated knowledge in this area.

The review is organized as follows. After providing an overview of identity theories that serve as the theoretical foundation for our review, Section 3 describes our literature review process. In Section 4, we present our findings, including the major themes, theoretical foundations, and methods of the collected papers. Section 5 identifies research opportunities and suggests promising avenues for future research. The monograph ends with a brief conclusion.

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