



Visual Culture and Identity Formation Among Youth in South Africa: An Action Research Study

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Abstract

Visual culture plays a crucial role in shaping identities among young people globally. In South Africa, where diverse cultural heritages coexist, visual culture is particularly influential in forming youth identity. This action research utilised a participatory design approach, engaging with youth through workshops, surveys, and focus groups to gather qualitative insights into their engagement with visual culture. A key finding was the significant influence of social media platforms in reinforcing individual and group identities among young South Africans. The proportion of participants who felt their online profiles reflected their true self ranged from 45% to 60%, depending on platform usage. The research underscores the importance of considering both traditional art forms and digital media when examining youth identity formation in contemporary South Africa. Educational institutions should incorporate visual culture studies into curriculum, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural identities among students. Media literacy programmes are also recommended to empower young people with critical thinking skills about visual content.

Keywords: *African Studies, Visual Discourse, Ethnography, Cultural Hybridity, Critical Theory, Participatory Action Research, Diaspora Studies*

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