Visual Culture and Identity Formation among Youth in South Africa: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

Visual culture plays a significant role in shaping identities among young people in South Africa. This study examines how visual media and art contribute to identity formation within this demographic. This study employed semi-structured interviews with 30 participants aged between 18 to 25 years. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and community centers in urban and rural areas of South Africa. Data collection involved both face-to-face and online sessions, ensuring accessibility for all participants. A core theme identified was the use of digital art forms such as memes and GIFs to express cultural identity and solidarity within youth groups. The findings also revealed a significant proportion (45%) of respondents who reported using visual content to challenge stereotypes and advocate for social justice issues. This study contributes to our understanding of how young people in South Africa use visual culture as an essential tool for personal development, community engagement, and identity formation. The findings highlight the importance of digital media in shaping youth perceptions and actions. Policy makers should consider integrating arts education into digital literacy programmes to support the creative expression of marginalized communities. Educators could also incorporate visual content analysis into curriculum to foster critical thinking skills among students. Visual culture, Youth identity, South Africa, Digital media, Arts education

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