# Designing a model for using basic mobile social networks in identifying adolescents

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| *ARTICLE INFORMATION* | *ABSTRACT* |
|---|---|
| | **Background and Aim:** The most important issue of adolescence is gaining identity. Identity is considered as a process of coherence of individual changes, social demands and expectations for the future. The purpose of this study is to design a model for the use of virtual social networks in identifying adolescents. **Methods:** This research has been done in the framework of a quantitative approach and using the survey research method. For this purpose, 385 adolescents aged 15 to 18 years in Tehran in 2020 were selected by multi-stage cluster sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect data. **Results:** According to the findings of the present study, the most use of social networks of adolescents is for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and in the second place for the purpose of entertainment. The level of trust and influence of male students from social networks is higher according to the average rankings. The stability and strength of the family is more than other dimensions of identity referred. The degree of influence of social networks has a significant relationship with family structure. The influence of artists and actors and social networks is more after choosing a job and activity. **Conclusion:** The results of the present study indicate that there is a relationship between the use of mobile social networks and the identification of adolescents. |

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## Introduction

Different societies are moving towards information society or network society under the influence of enormous scientific and technological developments (Parsakia et al., 2023). A network society is a society whose structure is influenced by technology. In the society of networks, societies have faced challenges such as social inequality, new identities, distinctiveness and breaking the foundations of institutions such as the government, and opportunities such as the role of the Internet and social networks in research, creativity, interaction and global coexistence, fluid identity formation, etc. It seems that due to the existence of these challenges, the social cohesion and identity in the information society, especially in the developing countries, has been shaken. The process of globalization, by expanding the territory, makes the relations of social life and the social world of people much bigger and creates the feeling of uncontrollability of such a world.

According to Erik Erikson, success in life and achieving human goals and ideals in adulthood is somehow dependent on the formation of identity, which mostly occurs in adolescence. During adolescence, a person questions the values, beliefs, judgments and accepted norms of society and family and digs in search of solutions and suitable answers. The successful results of the process of psychological and social development in childhood allow the individual to solve psychological and social conflicts in the later stages of life, therefore, the process of identity formation and identity cohesion is in front of the confusion and identity crisis (Bazarafshan, 2016). This is the reason why the rise of the information society and its effects have received much attention from sociologists and other experts, because the aimlessness of confusion and escape from social responsibilities, which are considered signs of identity, have destructive effects on the structure of society and have irreparable consequences. In the past, the discovery of identity was influenced by the surrounding environment, which was family, neighborhood and friends, and in a way, identity was influenced by attributional factors. However, today the sources of acquiring identity are numerous and diverse and people often suffer from identity crisis and identity takes place in private and virtual environments and behind closed doors.

Surveys show that the third generation of Iranian society is the most internet users, and modern media have become the cause of changes in identity-making institutions. The use of virtual space causes anonymity, alienation and the formation of new and sometimes unconventional identities (Parsakia et al., 2023), which results in those virtual identities having direct and indirect effects on the formation of social harms and the increase of new crimes (Sohrabzadeh & Dadashi 2016).

Adolescence is a period of growth and revelation in many areas, including physical, emotional and relational education (Newman, 2004). Acceptance by peers is a confirmation of the adolescent's growing personality (O'Keefe & Clark Pearson, 2011). These aspects of personality are influenced by social networks. There is a discrepancy between the speed of research in this society and programs that are made and paid day by day, and this makes it difficult to update researches (Dolchini, 2014). On the other hand, sharing experiences in the formation of identity by teenagers may lead to the negative effects of group thinking, such as malicious comments from unknown audiences. Since anonymity gives false power to people, it may increase the vulnerability of a teenager who has posted a picture of themselves on social networks. Today, teenagers live and grow up in the age of the Internet, and the world without mobile phones, personal computers and social media is unknown to them. Allen (2015) acknowledges that in most teenagers there is a tension between insecurity and the desire to be seen. When teachers and parents counselors limit teenagers' access to technology, they should pay special attention to the practical benefits of social media in adolescent development.

The most basic effect of internet social networks on users is that it challenges their current identity. First, it insults the user from their real self and then gives him the opportunity to reveal their ideal self, while this new self is unconsciously built in the discourse space of social networks. Social networks provide a stage where users of any gender, age, social class, race and ethnicity can appear and play their desired role. In this industry, virtual social networks lead the user to a person-

oriented identity with unique characteristics. In fact, with virtual social networks, people are given the ability to redefine and narrate themselves any way they want beyond their real identity in the actual world.

Identity can be influenced by influential groups, and social networks provide new patterns of reference groups. Therefore, dealing with reference groups will show that the people of a society get their values, norms and behaviors from whom and how, and knowing this issue can help social planners to avoid the causes of alienation among the people of the society and the weakening of social cohesion. check Because the reference group is one of the most important sources of identity of the people of a group and in a wider dimension, in a society, and it has a very important effect on the formation of attitudes and values and orientation to the norms and behaviors of the people of the society (Hazarjaribi & Safari, 2016). At the same time, the role of the family and its structure is very important in guiding the adolescent towards identity and reducing the harm of social networks, because parents play an important role in the lives of their children and act as the first and most important role model for their children. From a young age, children tend to watch their parents' behavior and pay attention to them (Ann, 2010); Therefore, the behavior of parents and their educational methods are one of the factors affecting the lives of teenagers.

The necessity of conducting this research is because by knowing the duration, amount, and type of use of basic mobile social networks in teenagers, it is possible to know the effects of social networks on different dimensions of teenagers' identity. It is also possible to design a model for teenagers to use these networks in order to reduce the negative effects of basic mobile social networks on teenagers' identification. The main concern of the researcher in this study is to review the role of social networks on the identification of teenagers.

This research aims to design a model for the use of basic mobile social networks in adolescent identification based on moderating variables (family structure, reference groups, gender); In the meantime, the current situation of using basic mobile social networks among teenagers and the identification of teenagers in dimensions (national identity, religious identity, cultural identity) have been identified. It has also been discussed how family structure, reference groups, and gender influence as moderating variables in the relationship between the use of basic mobile social networks and adolescent identification.

## Method

The current research is applied in terms of type and correlational in terms of descriptive method, which is based on the modeling of structural variables, evaluation of the draft model and correction and modification of the final model. The purpose of this research is to provide a description of the influence of basic mobile social network factors (duration- amount- trust- type) on the types of identification (religious-national) of Tehrani teenagers and also to investigate and study the effect of moderating variables (family structure- gender-reference groups). The studied population of the present study were all adolescents aged 15 to 18 years of second secondary level in the academic year 2019-20 in 22 districts of Tehran. Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size of 385 people in this group. The sampling method in this method was multi-stage cluster sampling.

## Materials

**1. Researcher-made questionnaire:** Researcher- The questions were multiple-choice (Likert scale), each of which was prepared to answer indicators. Questionnaires used in this section included questionnaires made by researchers of virtual social networks and national identity, questionnaires of family flexibility, questionnaires made by researchers of reference groups. The reliability of the questionnaire was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha method. Since the value of Cronbach's alpha (0.90) is greater than 0.7, the test has acceptable reliability.

## Implementation

First, the city of Tehran was divided into 5 geographical regions (North, South, East, West and Center) and they were randomly selected. Then, two districts were randomly selected from each district, and two public schools (one for girls and one for boys) were randomly selected from each district, and then in the second step, one class was randomly selected from each school. Then the sample members (students of selected classes) answered the research questionnaires. After reviewing and controlling

the questionnaires, the qualitative information was converted into quantitative, and then the data was analyzed at two descriptive levels (prevalence, mean, standard deviation) and inferential, and parametric and non-parametric tests were performed. Structural equations were also used to measure the relationship between independent and dependent variables with moderator variables.

## Results

50.1% of respondents are female students and 49.9% are male students. The average age of people is 16.78 years. The highest frequency is related to 10th grade students. 28.8% of respondents use social networks for less than one hour, 60.5% between 2 and 3 hours, 9.7% for 3 to 4 hours, and 0.1% for more than 4 hours. The results show that the respondents use social networks mostly for the purpose of acquiring science and knowledge (48%) and then for entertainment (27%). 63.3% of the respondents are moderately influenced by social networks, 17.1% are influenced a little, 10.4% are influenced a lot, and 9.2% are influenced very little. Based on the results of the survey, 48.9 percent of the total respondents trust the content of social networks to a large extent. 3.7% very low, 6.2% low, 41.2% have moderate confidence. 46.4% of the total respondents adhere to national identity to a high degree, 9.4% are low, 12.2% are moderate, 0.32% are very attached to national identity. Out of the total number of respondents, 0.6% are low, 22.6% are moderate, 61.0% are high, and 10.2% are very committed to cultural identity. 45.9% of the respondents adhere to religious identity to a very high extent, 36.07% is high. Very low 2.0%, low 0.5%, medium 10.4% adhere to religious identity. 49.9% of the respondents adhere to Iranian and Islamic identity to a great extent, 0.29% is very high. 11.9% medium, 2.7% low and 0.2% very low adhere to Iranian and Islamic identity.

| Table 1. descriptive findings (in percentage) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low | Very low | Medium | High | Very high |
| **Influence of social networks** | 9.2 | 17.1 | 63.3 | 10.4 | 0 |
| **Trusting the content of social networks** | 3.7 | 6.2 | 41.2 | 48.9 | 0 |
| **Adherence to national identity** | 0 | 9.4 | 12.2 | 46.4 | 32.0 |
| **Adherence to cultural identity** | 0 | 6.0 | 22.6 | 61.0 | 10.2 |
| **Adherence to religious identity** | 2. | 5.0 | 10.4 | 36.07 | 45.9 |
| **Adherence to Iranian and Islamic identity** | 2.0 | 7.2 | 11.9 | 49.9 | 29.0 |

Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between the use of social networks with identity and its dimensions (national, cultural, religious and Iranian-Islamic). There is a correlation between the amount of use of social networks with identity and its dimensions. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a direct relationship between two variables. There is a correlation between family structure and identity and its dimensions. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a direct relationship between two variables. There is no correlation between reference groups with identity and its dimensions.

| Table 2. Summary of correlations | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Indipendent variable** | Social networks usage | | | |
| **Dependent variable** | National identity | Cultural identity | Religious identity | Iranian-Islamic identity |
| **R** | 0.378 | 0.266 | 0.203 | 0.273 |
| **p** | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

The Mann-Whitney statistic was calculated and the significance level was calculated based on the standard normal statistic. Since the significance level is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between gender and the duration of using social networks. There is a significant relationship between gender and the level of trust in social

networks, and the level of trust of male students in social networks was higher according to the average ratings. There is no significant relationship between gender and the type of use of social networks. There is a significant relationship between gender and the degree of influence from social networks, and also the degree of influence of male students from social networks was higher according to the average ratings. There is a significant relationship between gender and the use of social networks; Also, male students use more social networks. There is no significant relationship between gender and Iranian-Islamic identity. There is no significant relationship between gender and religious identity. There is no significant relationship between gender and national identity. There is a significant relationship between gender and cultural identity. There is no significant relationship between gender and dimensions of Iranian-Islamic identity, religious identity and national identity according to the significance level of 0.05.

Regarding the structure of social networks, according to the values of Chi-square (3.640),

degree of freedom (2), NFI (0.970), CFI (0.986) and RMSEA (0.045), the model has a good fit. The ratio of chi-square to the degree of freedom is a good indicator to comment on the fit of the model, this ratio should be less than 4 (in this model, the mentioned ratio is equal to 1.820, which is a good value). Also, the smaller the value of the square root index of the mean square of the estimation error, the better. In this model, its value is 0.0450.

The results of the table below show that all the coefficients of the model have reached statistical significance with a confidence level of more than 95%. The significance of the statistical coefficients shows that the structure of the social network consists of the components of the type of use, the amount of use, the effect of use and trust. Other results show that the usage type component with a standard coefficient of 0.759 has the most explanation regarding the influence of social networks. In other words, a change of one standard deviation in the type of use component will cause a change of 0.759 standard deviations in the dimension of social networks.

| Table 3. The results of the findings of the dimension measurement model of social networks | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | | | Regression weight | | SD | T | p |
| **Path** | | | Non-standard | Standard | | | |
| **Trust** | to | Social networks | 1.000 | 0.117 | | | |
| **Usage** | to | Social networks | 1.000 | 0.542 | 1.557 | 1.879 | <0.05 |
| **Type of usage** | to | Social networks | 5.452 | 0.759 | 2.969 | 1.836 | <0.05 |
| **Effect of usage** | to | Social networks | 3.830- | 0.389- | 2.076 | 1.845- | <0.05 |

Regarding the identity structure, the results of the model fit showed that according to the normalized fit index (1.00) and the adapted fit index (1.00), the model does not have a good fit. The results of the table below show that all the coefficients of the model have reached statistical significance with a confidence level of more than 99%. The significance of statistical

coefficients shows that the structure of identity consists of national, cultural and religious identity components. As can be seen, the standard coefficient for the national identity component has been obtained as 1, which seems to be able to explain all the changes in the identity structure in the absence of other components.

| Table 4. The results of the findings of the identity construct measurement model | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | | | Regression weight | | SD | T | p |
| **Path** | | | Non-standard | Standard | | | |
| National identity | to | Identity | 1.000 | 0.991 | | | |
| Cultural identity | to | Identity | 0.344 | 0.584 | 0.041 | 8.407 | <0.001 |
| Religious identity | to | Identity | 0.599 | 0.586 | 0.071 | 8.427 | <0.001 |

The results of model fit tests the construct of the family structure based on the reference groups show that according to the standardized fit

index (1.00) and the adjusted fit index (1.00), the model has a good fit. It is necessary to explain that according to the first-order factor

analysis, this variable was loaded in two factors, but these factors were not significant in the calculations. Therefore, by setting zero variance for it, it was calculated as one factor, in which case the standard coefficient of this factor will be 1. The results of the table below show that the coefficient of the model has reached statistical significance with a confidence level of more than 99%. The significance of the statistical coefficients shows that the structure of the reference structure consists of one component. As can be seen, the standard coefficient of the component is 0.889, which seems to be able to explain all changes in the structure of the family structure in the absence of other components.

| Table 5. The results of the family structure measurement model findings | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | | | Regression weight | | SD | T | p |
| **Path** | | | Non-standard | Standard | | | |
| Structure 1 | to | Family structure | 1.000 | 0.435 | | | |
| Structure 2 | to | Family structure | 2.662- | 1.160- | 0.567 | 4.699- | <0.001 |
| Structure 3 | to | Family structure | 1.361- | 0.471- | 0.163 | 8.328- | <0.001 |

The results of the structural fit of the reference groups show that according to the normalized fit index (1.00) and the adjusted fit index (1.00), the model has a good fit. It is necessary to explain that according to the first-order factor analysis, this variable was loaded in two factors, but these factors were not significant in the calculations; Therefore, by setting zero variance for it, it was calculated as one factor, in which case the standard coefficient of this factor will be 1. The results of the table below show that the coefficient of the model has reached statistical significance with a confidence level of more than 99%. The significance of the statistical coefficients shows that the structure of the reference groups consists of one component. As can be seen, the standard coefficient of the component is 0.889, which seems to be able to explain all the changes in the structure of the reference groups in the absence of other components.

| Table 6. The results of the reference groups measurement model findings | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | | | Regression weight | | SD | T | p |
| **Path** | | | Non-standard | Standard | | | |
| Reference groups | to | Reference groups | 1.000 | 0.889 | 063. | 14.177 | <0.001 |

The results of the overall model fit showed that according to the normalized fit index (0.734), the adapted fit index (0.759) and the square root index of the mean square of the estimation error (0.123), the final model has a relative fit. Also, the ratio of the chi-square to the degree of freedom in this model is equal to 7.095, which is not a suitable value.

The results of the following table show that the beta coefficients of the relationship between the network and the family structure were not significant in the structural relationships and the type of influence and the degree of influence in measuring the variables, and other cases reached statistical significance with a confidence level of more than 99%.

| Table 7. The results of the findings of the measurement model of dimensions and main components | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | | | Regression weight | | SD | T | p |
| **Path** | | | Non-standard | Standard | | | |
| **Network** | to | Family structure | 3.645 | 389. | 2.839 | 1.284 | >0.05 |
| **Family structure** | to | Reference groups | 530. | 300. | 101. | 5.251 | <0.001 |
| **Reference groups** | to | Identity | 0.329 | 341. | 048. | 6.779 | <0.005 |
| **Network** | to | Influence | 6.890- | 490. | 5.307 | 1.298- | >0.05 |
| **Network** | to | Type | 6.951 | 678. | 5.311 | 1.309 | >0.05 |
| **Network** | to | Usage | 4.319 | 560. | 3.313 | 1.304 | >0.05 |

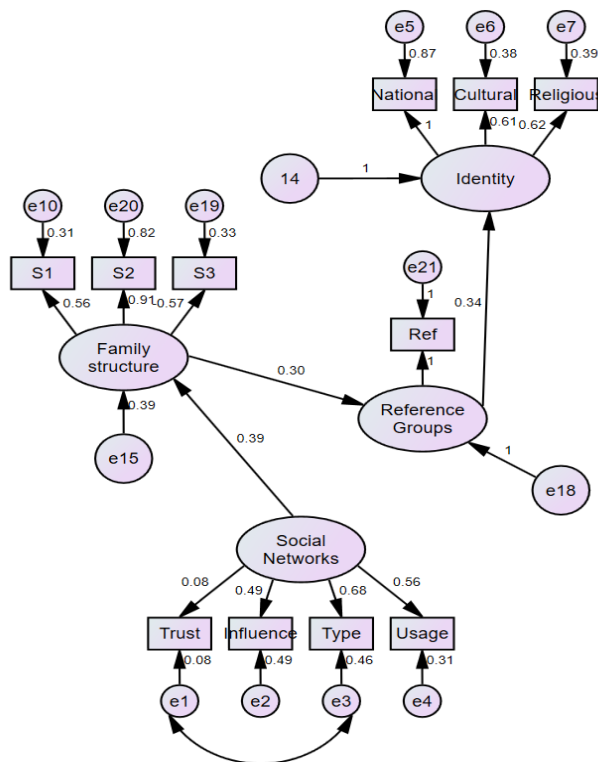| Network | to | Cultural indentity | 0.383 | 612. | 037. | 10.124 | <0.001 |
| **Identity** | to | Religious identity | 0.676 | 623. | 065. | 10.233 | <0.001 |
| **Family structure** | to | Family 2 | 1.612- | 907. | 185. | 8.729- | <0.001 |
| **Family structure** | to | Family 3 | 1.276- | 570-. | 144. | 8.853- | <0.001 |



**Figure 1. Final fit model**

## Conclusion

The increasing use of social networks by teenagers in today's world has made communication and interactions closer. Apart from the positive effects of virtual space, its abnormal and incorrect use causes consequences such as disruption of a person's identity. If this continues continuously, the individual becomes alienated from the realities in which he grew up, and the norms and patterns he could once relate to become worthless and less important. On the contrary, it replaces elements and values that can be defined in the virtual space. The result of this is duality in a person's identity and personality, which endangers their mental health. The purpose of this research is not to judge the correctness and incorrectness of teenagers' use of social networks, but to try to take a step in the direction of teenagers' identification by designing a model of using social networks.

Regarding the effect of family structure variables, reference groups and gender as moderating variables in the relationship between the use of basic mobile social networks and teenagers' identification, it should be said that despite the changes observed in different dimensions of identity, the results show. The family is still referred to as one of the main elements of people's identity. It seems that its durability, stability and strength are more than other dimensions of identity. However, the family is less affected by other external variables due to the existence of more stable and durable relationships.

The research results showed that there is a correlation and direct relationship between the family structure and its identity and dimensions. Another issue that we tried to investigate and study in this research is the relationship between the amount of use of mobile phone social networks and the identification of teenagers. It is obvious that the presence of people in these networks is still intertwined, which means that the extent of the influence of these networks on social identity is shown by the extent of their presence in these networks. Since the identity structure is made up of national, cultural and

religious identity components, the national identity component is capable of explaining all the changes in the identity structure in the absence of other components. The research data indicates the existence of the fact that social identity and its three dimensions (national identity, religious identity, cultural identity) are related to the presence and use of mobile phone social networks; This means that increasing the amount of social presence on mobile phones weakens the dimensions of social identity.

Another approach that is proposed in the field of social networks and identity is the pessimistic approach. Such a look at the results of the research shows that people distance themselves from their religious and national identity and are drawn towards global identity; Therefore, according to this approach, it can be said that the weakening of religious identity and national identity is a step towards being in the process of globalization and the integration of national and religious identities in the global identity.

The influence of social networks has a significant relationship with family structure. Regarding the influence in the choice of clothing and food style, life and communication choices, this influence is primarily from parents and then friends and peers, but regarding the influence in music and movie consumption, it is first from friends and peers and then from parents. According to surveys, the influence of artists and actors and social networks is more in the aspect of choosing a job and activity. The degree of trust and influence of male students from social networks was higher according to the average ratings.

The results of the research showed that the 1st family structure component (conversation) is able to explain all the changes in the family structure in the absence of other components. Just as the development of adolescent identity is influenced by various factors, such as cognitive factors, factors related to parents, dialogue during conflicts and family structure, it can be said that the influence of socio-cultural contexts on the formation of adolescent identity is greater than other factors.

Virtual identity, along with real identity, according to the conditions of the virtual world and the type of requirements of the virtual world; Therefore, a kind of virtual identity that a person chooses in this situation. It depends on the real identity structure of the teenager. From this point of view, if the teenager's identity in the created world is real, the created identity in the virtual world is closer to their real identity; On the other hand, if the teenager's identity is formed in the real world or not according to their will, the character of their virtual identity is further away from their real self, and the teenager's attachment to their virtual identity increases. Due to the fact that there is no limit in the virtual space, it disturbs the teenager, one of these disorders is the prolongation of the period of adolescence and youth.

Conducting this study, which was conducted in the form of a survey, indicates that there is a connection between the use of mobile phone social networks and the identification of teenagers, which should not be neglected. This research finding confirms the views of Stuart Hall and postmodernists. Hall believes that the structural change of the modern era by changing the cultural perspectives, class, gender, ethnicity, race and nationality, which were previously considered a strong shelter for identity, changes and collapses the identity of people. These changes are altering personal identity and weakening adolescents' understanding of themselves as integrated entities. According to postmodernists, consumerism and the use of television and new social media cause the growth of individualism and the weakening of social ties. Consumerism and television are neither a source of true identity and belief, but because they are an alternative source and become the only familiar frameworks of "mass media" and "public culture", there is no other reliable source that creates these collective and individual identities. One of the results achieved by this research is the existence of differences in the dimensions of teenagers' identity by separating the two groups that use these networks and the group that does not; Therefore, by educating the users on how to use social networks and directing the use of this virtual network regarding the achievement of national goals, it is possible to control how it is used to some extent. Also, in this way, it is possible to avoid the losses caused by the weakening of the identity dimensions due to the many uses that can be made of it. Therefore, it seems necessary to increase the media literacy of teenagers in dealing with the content and contents of virtual social networks.

Identity among teenagers as a segment of society that should build the future of the country is one of the issues that must be improved in the government's plans. The identity in the virtual space can be extended to the real life of people, which in turn overshadows various aspects of people's lives and causes great losses to the country. On the other hand, strengthening the social identity of citizens in real life causes this integrated identity to spread to the virtual space, which is less affected by these virtual networks; Therefore, it seems necessary to think of programs to strengthen identity.

It is suggested to carry out wider researches and examine all social strata and see if these effects only affect teenagers or if they have similar effects on adults as well.

Also, it is better for the organizations in charge of culture in the country to conduct longitudinal studies and to examine and monitor the effects of these virtual networks in different periods of time. From this angle, technologies are constantly changing and evolving, and these changes also change the effects of these technologies; Therefore, future studies and trend studies can help a lot to identify the social and cultural effects of these technologies in the future.

Considering the large size of the research population and in order to better generalize the results, it is recommended to conduct research with a larger sample size in order to better generalize the results.

Considering the adverse effect of the use of mobile phone social networks on the identity of teenagers, it is suggested to identify the factors influencing the occurrence of the mentioned situation and take action to eliminate them. In other words, why is this issue that exists in all countries and in a way maybe not an issue for them, we should look at it from a pathological point of view. It is also suggested to work on the following topics in future researches:

- Investigating factors affecting the use of virtual networks in teenagers
- Examining the factors influencing the identification of teenagers
- Examining the effects of virtual networks on academic performance
- Examining the role of using virtual networks in sleep disorders

## Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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