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Exploring Rotterdam adolescents'
urban identity construction
through social media engagement

Anne K. van Eldik



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Een onderzoek naar de constructie van urban identity door
het social media gebruik van Rotterdamse adolescenten

Anne K. van Eldik

Cover and Leaflet

Mosaic R'DAM - *Rotterdam mosaic of the Diversity of Adolescents' Media* made from Smalti by Melanie van Eldik, designed together with Anne van Eldik. The piece is based on the design of the dissertation and emphasizes certain themes of its content. The skyline is based on that of Rotterdam, there are several references to the many forms of (social) media worked into the buildings, and the colorful content not only reflects Rotterdam's identity, but also its super-diverse aspect. The choice for mosaic as a medium emphasizes the various perspectives and experiences that together make up the city.

Omslag en inlegvel

Mozaïek R'DAM - *Rotterdam mosaic of the Diversity of Adolescents' Media* gemaakt van Smalti door Melanie van Eldik, ontworpen samen met Anne van Eldik. Het kunstwerk is gebaseerd op het onderwerp van de dissertatie en benadrukt bepaalde thema's van het werk. Zo is de skyline gebaseerd op die van Rotterdam, zijn er verschillende verwijzingen in de gebouwen verwerkt naar (sociale) media in al haar vormen en weerspiegelt de kleurrijke invulling niet alleen de Rotterdamse identiteit, maar ook het super-diverse aspect. De keuze voor mozaïek als medium benadrukt ook de verschillende perspectieven en ervaringen die samen de stad maken.

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Thesis

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by command of the
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by

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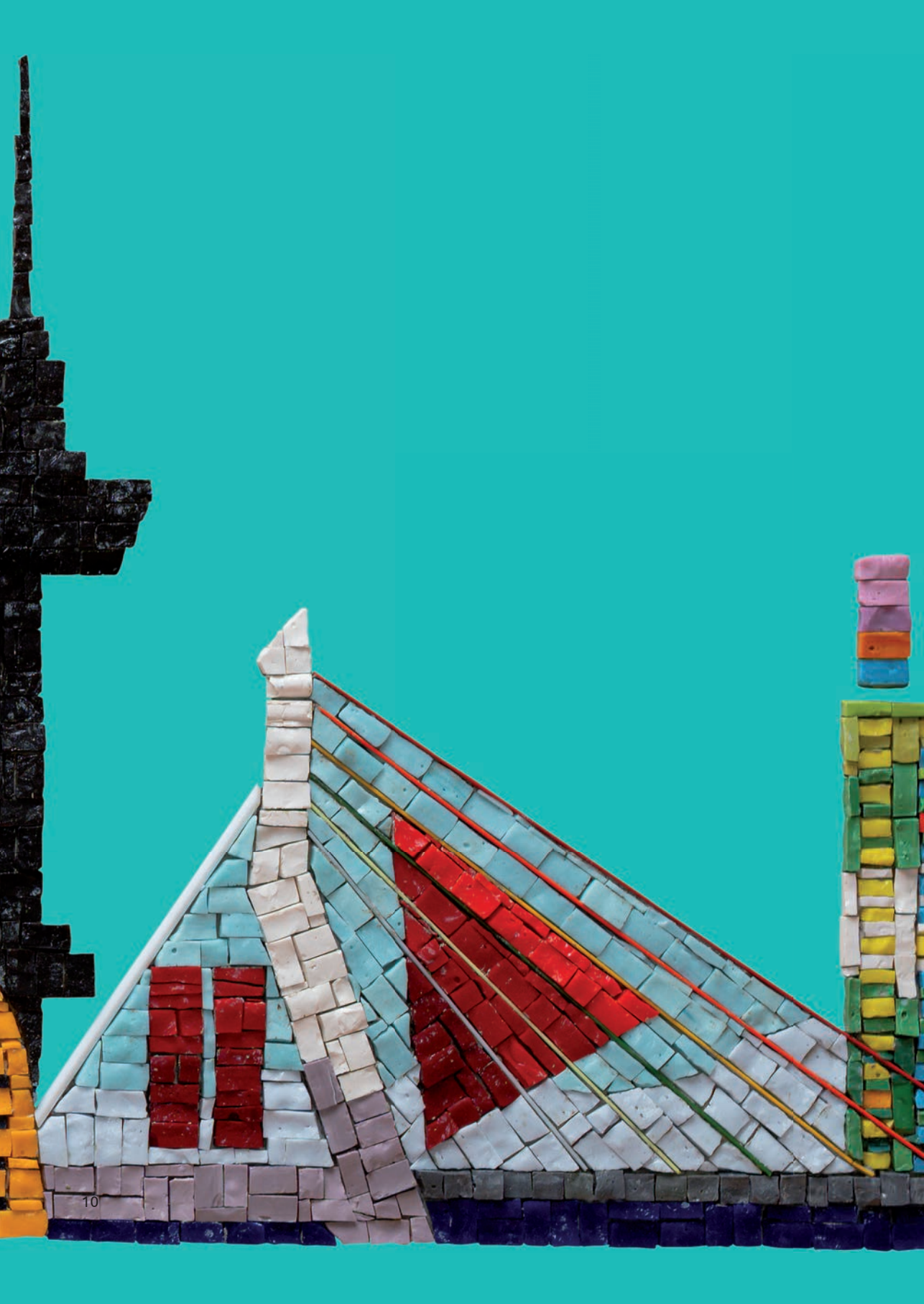
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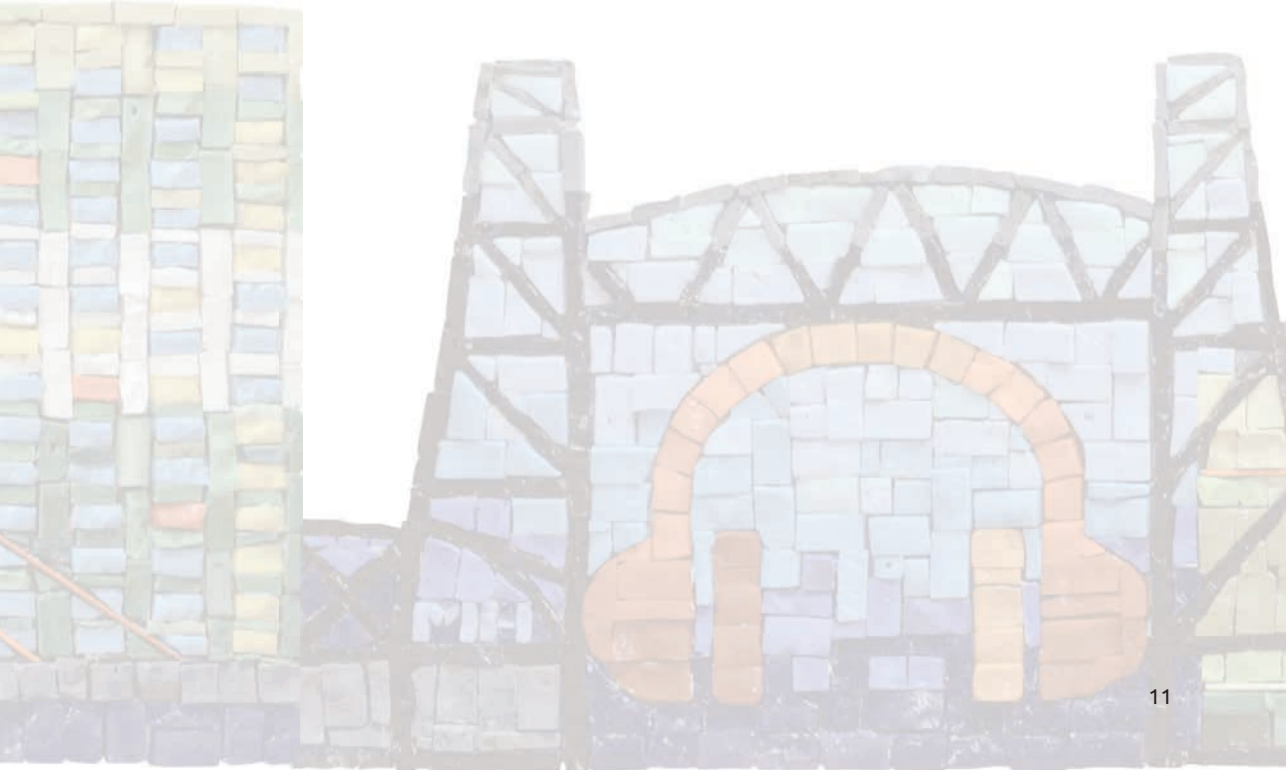
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1

General Introduction



It was in the third year of my PhD trajectory when the simple reality of my research topic presented itself to me in the most personal, everyday way. Of course, I had been thinking about the concept, I had seen it in my participants' expressions, and I had actively reflected on the theory and tried to apply it to my own experiences. After all, it was a concept applicable to everyone, yet generally so hidden in the everyday mundane that a person is rarely explicitly aware of it. But it was in the simple moment while taking a relaxing stroll through my hometown in the Achterhoek region during the pandemic – passing what used to be my elementary school, my piano teacher's house, the park where I used to walk our dog, my grandmother's old flat – that I really deeply

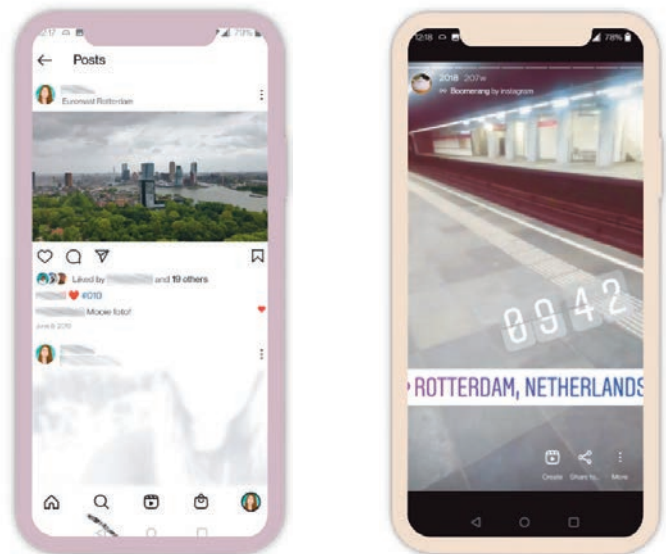


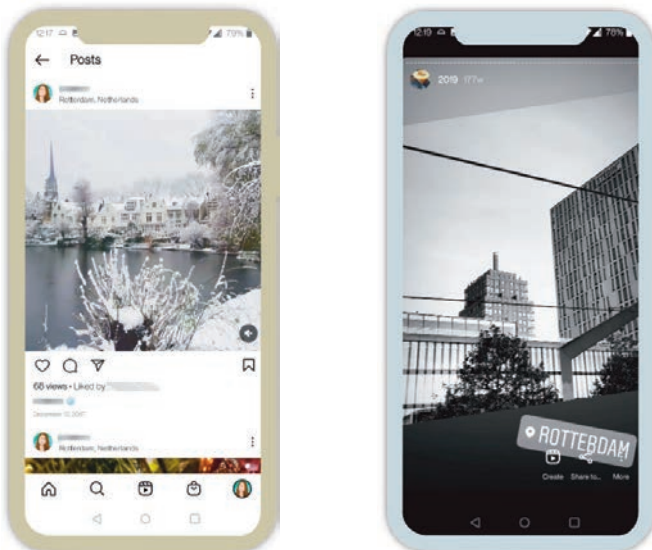
Figure 1.1 A small selection of my personal place-related Instagram posts.

felt the *importance* of the environment and how much of my identity was interwoven with this town and the people living in, especially during those important formative years of childhood and adolescence. I noticed my sense of belonging to place, and its interconnection with my identity.

My recent years in the city, I reflected, had given me similar experiences on a heightened level – constructing my big city *urban identity*. Since moving to Rotterdam to pursue a PhD, I felt a strong sense of belonging to this new, big,

vibrant city – despite being a newcomer. This truly urban environment added a whole new dimension to the experience. There is something particular about this city – the rebuilt city, the city of diversity, the city that was historically formed by migrants (Scholten et al., 2019a; Van de Laar & Van der Schoor, 2019) from inside and outside this country, and for different reasons. The creative city. The city of the ‘can do’ mentality. The city that was so different from what I had anticipated before moving here.

I started to ask myself questions why this city made me feel so at home, what it takes to feel a sense of belonging, and how it differed from my participants who had been and were still growing up here. And what actions had I taken that



had strengthened this sense of belonging? When scrolling through my Instagram page, I started to notice pictures that I had taken from around the city, pictures from my bedroom window, pictures of the Rotterdam skyline and the activities I participated in. In some of these pictures, I tagged my Rotterdam friends, and even added location tags. Below one beautiful picture of the Rotterdam skyline, viewed from the Euromast, I even posted: “<3 #010”, which represents a heart and a hashtag with the area code of Rotterdam.

Throughout the past years, I had noticed more and more instances where social media, the topic that had been the center of my study, was closely related to the connection to the city in everyday life. I recognized Rotterdam in social media videos and photos by peers and social media influencers. I tagged friends in memes about the city. And it excites me – this sense of recognition, this understanding and sharing, this symbolism, and this connection to others from the same area. This city is an undeniable part of our lives – even online.

Now, I might be biased in my feelings for this city due to the subject of my work, which focuses on people’s (online) connection to and identification with Rotterdam, but obviously my conclusions were not based on my personal Instagram page alone. I noticed plenty of everyday examples of expressions of urban identity in an online environment throughout this journey. This ranged from the Facebook pages and Instagram accounts that are dedicated to the sentiment of being a Rotterdammer, to aiding a participant to 3D print her Instagram username that featured “010” (referring to Rotterdam) and “west” (referring to part of the city) in a creative after-school course from a local philanthropic initiative. It even appeared during the COVID-19 crisis and riots where, in an online video, mayor Aboutaleb critically addressed the young rioters emphasizing their urban identity – as Rotterdammers – and the responsibility they share to their surroundings and fellow inhabitants (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2021). All of this proved to me, time after time, that the topic of place-bound identity in an online context was worth exploring in-depth.

With its young population (Erdem et al., 2020), Rotterdam is a city full of inhabitants in their formative years – inhabitants that belong to an age group that are avid users of social media, and for whom identity construction also takes place online (boyd, 2014). While research has been conducted on young people’s media use in their identity construction (e.g., boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2008; Granic et al., 2020; Lane, 2019), and scholars have started to explore *urban* or other place-related identities online for older or broader age groups (e.g., Farman, 2015; Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014; Wilken & Humphreys, 2021; Yılmaz & Kocabalkanlı, 2021), little research has combined the role of social media in the construction and negotiation of place-based urban identity among urban youth specifically. However, growing up in a superdiverse city, questions

of belonging are crucial, and the local environment and one's fellow inhabitants have previously been found as important elements with which young people identify (Day & Badou, 2019; Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008). By looking at various forms of engagement with social media we can examine the role of the online environment and its potential connections to urban identity for adolescents. In this dissertation, I therefore explore urban identity – this sense of connection to and affiliation with the city both through its built environment and its social dynamic – through the unique lens of social media as a space for identity construction.¹

1.1 Researching (Online) Urban Identity Construction in Rotterdam among Adolescents

Investigating online urban identity construction among adolescents requires an interdisciplinary approach. In order to explore and neatly unfold the various layers that hold together the research topic, in the following section I will disentangle and articulate these different layers to create a contextual framework for this research, and will simultaneously explain the relevance of our focus on the adolescent group.

1.1.1 Urban Identity and Rotterdam as a Case Study

The city has been an object of study within various disciplines, focusing on not only its physical structure (its built and natural shapes and infrastructures) but also on its inhabitants, cultures, history, politics, economy, and so on. Such points of view and disciplines have also been combined. In the second half of the 20th century, several humanistic geographers started to study place and the city from a phenomenological perspective by turning their attention towards the human experience of the city. Scholars such as Tuan (1974, 1977) and Relph (1976) directed their attention to the importance of how space is experienced and how it becomes a meaningful place. Environmental and social psychologist

¹ This project was conducted as part of, and funded by, the Erasmus Initiative "Vital Cities and Citizens" which focuses on research that investigates questions of quality of life in cities in various ways (Erasmus University Rotterdam, n.d.).

Proshansky (1978) emphasized the importance of the urban environment on the individual from a cognitive perspective and coined the term *place identity* to describe how part of an individual's self-identity is related to physical environment one inhabits. Place has an important role in helping us position ourselves in relation to our environment and other people, and therefore place identity helps us to make sense of what this environment means in our life through the memories, experiences, and ideas we have of it (Proshansky et al., 1983). This concept was further explored and developed a few years later by outlining its definition and functions (Proshansky et al., 1983). However, while Proshansky's (1978; Proshansky et al., 1983) place identity was originally discussed in the context of the city, investigations of place and identity have been applied on several levels of scale, including the home and the neighborhood (e.g., Easthope, 2004; Burgers & Zijderwijk, 2016; Lalli, 1992). In response to Proshansky's (1978; Proshansky et al., 1983) and other scholars' work (including environmental psychologists and human geographers such as the aforementioned Relph and Tuan), Lalli (1992) further developed the concept of *urban identity*. Urban identity zooms in on the specific level of the city, and in particular its importance for the individual's identity. The concept of urban identity differs from place identity in a couple of ways. Most notably, while urban identity builds on place identity in its positioning as a part of one's self-identity, Lalli (1992) argues that earlier understandings of place identity need further emphasis on the social aspects. Urban identity therefore not only encompasses the relationship with the city as one's physical and symbolic environment, but also with those with whom one shares this physical and symbolic environment (and how they differ from those who live elsewhere). More recently, other scholars have explored urban identity and place identity from different angles, ranging from highly personal, experience-oriented to predominantly social-oriented understandings of the concept, and have used them to investigate various topics, such as the local social impact of urban identity, urban identity's relation to globalization, and the connection between urban identity and environmental behavior and attitudes (e.g., Belanche et al., 2017; Cheshmehzangi, 2015; Valera & Guàrdia, 2002). In Chapter 2, I further explore the roots and (conceptual) context of urban identity and discuss the concept in more detail.

While the human experience and interpretation is central in our understanding of urban identity, it is also important to recognize the characteristics of the city at hand, as each city is unique and this contributes to how inhabitants (and visitors) experience the city (Lalli, 1992; Stedman, 2003). The city under investigation, Rotterdam, is the second biggest city of the Netherlands. In June 2021, Rotterdam counted 651.284 inhabitants, which is roughly 200.000 inhabitants less than the biggest city, Amsterdam (Statistics Netherlands, 2021a). Various elements may be seen as spatially characteristic for Rotterdam. As Nientied (2018) describes, Rotterdam is characterized by its connection to water, due to its location close to the North Sea and next to the New Meuse river and its related ports and bridges. Its spatial environment is also strongly characterized by the impacts of World War II, when in 1940 the city center was bombed and now little of it remains (Nientied, 2018). The rebuilding of Rotterdam resulted in a city characterized by a modern architectural style, setting it apart from other Dutch cities, and has ever since been the home of internationally-recognized architectural icons (Nientied, 2018). From a socio-cultural perspective, diversity is one characteristic for which Rotterdam is known and that makes it unique within the Netherlands. This diversity also extends to many of its suburbs (Jennissen et al., 2018). Similar to big cities such as Amsterdam and The Hague, Rotterdam can be considered a majority-minority city, which means the majority of its inhabitants have a migration background (Jennissen et al., 2018). But diversity in Rotterdam goes beyond this simple percentage. There is also a great diversity amongst the countries of origin of its inhabitants (Jennissen et al., 2018). Moreover, Rotterdam is considered a superdiverse city (Scholten et al., 2019b). This super-diversity, a term coined by Vertovec (2007), pertains to the level of complexity and diversity within the existing diversity, capturing the numerous variables that are interconnected. This not only includes diversity in terms of national and cultural background, but also, among others, socioeconomic status, education levels, age, gender, and reasons for migration (Crul et al., 2019; Scholten et al., 2019a; Vertovec, 2007). As Van de Laar and Van der Schoor (2019; Scholten et al., 2019a) have explored, this diversity has a historical origin that dates back to the 17th century, with continued waves of migration for various reasons over time. Currently, Rotter-

dam holds more than 200 different nationalities (Jennissen et al., 2018) from all over the world. This includes individuals from, among others, Surinam, Turkey, Morocco, Antilles, Cabo Verde, Germany, former Yugoslavia, Poland, China, Pakistan, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Jennissen et al., 2018). Within this diversity of ethnic, national, and migration backgrounds, other levels of diversity exist as well, such as in education background and (development in) socio-economic circumstances (see Crul et al. (2018) for more detail). This diversity is also reflected in Rotterdam's status as a cultural center. Rotterdam is, among others, known as an important center for hip hop, a genre that was both inspired by and addresses urban diversity (Brurs & Vries, 2012; Hart, 2009), and holds three soccer teams that play in the national leagues, providing collective fandoms to different communities in the city (Spaaij, 2008). On top of that, people who immerse themselves in the city will also notice its richness in terms of art, dance, food, and many other cultural elements related to diversity. Rotterdam's super-diversity has even become part of its city branding, albeit with a predominantly economic focus (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019). While it is accepted as part of the general perception of Rotterdam and cannot be denied as part of its DNA (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019; Nientied, 2018), issues with a broader inclusion of diversity within the city branding strategies itself are still "inherently connected to issues regarding social in/exclusion, belonging and identity" (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019, p. 221).

Research has shown that Rotterdam's identity is embraced by many of its inhabitants: 74% of Rotterdammers declared to be proud of the city, 23% was a little proud, and only 3% said that they were not (OBI, 2021). Moreover, in this same study, 84% of inhabitants said they consider themselves a "Rotterdammer" – going beyond a demographic fact and directing towards a sense of belonging as an inhabitant of the city (OBI, 2021). What makes this particularly interesting is the findings by Entzinger and Dourleijn (2008) and Van Bochove et al. (2009) that showed that identification with the city was particularly important to people with a migration background. The city therefore can be argued to play an important role in one's sense of belonging. A sense of belonging, in turn, has been linked more generally to well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lambert et al., 2013), thus having a positive impact on people's lives.

Many of Rotterdam's inhabitants are spending their formative years in this city. Rotterdam has a large young population: In 2019, 33.1% of the Rotterdam population was under 27 years old (Erdem et al., 2020). More specifically, in 2021, Rotterdam counted 33.008 inhabitants between ages 10-15 (Statistics Netherlands, 2021b) – these (early) adolescent years are crucial in terms of identity construction (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993). In these years, young people's development is centered around questions of who they are and their sense of belonging (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019). As a sub-structure of one's identity, urban identity may therefore also develop around this time. This entails the meaning of one's environmental and social surroundings in one's everyday life, as well as the idea of being an inhabitant of a city and belonging to a fellow group of inhabitants. Moreover, the earlier discussed findings by Entzinger and Dourleijn (2008) and Van Bochove et al. (2009), but also Day and Badou (2019) demonstrate the importance of the urban identity in a city characterized by super-diversity, especially for youngsters. We therefore direct our attention to urban identity construction and negotiation among Rotterdam adolescents.

1.1.2 (Social) Media, Adolescents, and Identity

Today's online media environment is one which affords ordinary people, who were previously considered passive consumers of such media messages, the opportunity to produce and contribute to the internet, in addition to its earlier use as a source of information (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). The importance and value of people being connected, as well as the central role of the platform are what makes this Web 2.0 environment distinctive to its users (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012; O'Reilly & Battelle, 2009). Social media are considered such platforms – an online space where user activity takes place and where user-generated content can be uploaded.

Various studies have shown that these social media platforms gratify various (social) needs (Davis, 2012; Khan, 2017; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Shao, 2009), which may explain their huge success among many different groups of people. One of the phenomena dependent on these platforms and testifying of the professionalization of user-based practices are social media influencers

(Morreale, 2014; Abidin, 2017) (in this dissertation also referred to as influencers and sometimes abbreviated to SMIs). As a form of microcelebrity (Senft, 2008), and increasingly also larger scale celebrity, social media influencers can be understood as users that have gathered a significant following on one or multiple social media platforms (Abidin, 2017). With current earning models, this often user-generated content inspired form of labor has become a career on its own in recent years (Abidin, 2017). The social media influencer and its relation to urban identity are discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. The current online environment therefore comes with a lot of affordances for its users, but the case of SMIs demonstrates how phenomena such as professionalization within online spaces may also evolve from and expand understandings of these new dynamics.

However, most users do not fall within the influencer category. Social media have been recognized as important spaces used for building and maintaining relationships, providing entertainment, gathering information, and more (e.g., Baym, 2015; Shao, 2009; Pelletier et al., 2020; Whiting & Williams, 2013). But with their unique affordances to, among others, present and express oneself in front of large or select audiences (consisting of other users), through synchronous and asynchronous interactivity, and various ways of engagement with different types of content, they has also been recognized as spaces that can be used for identity construction, particularly for adolescents (e.g., boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). During this developmental stage, individuals are developing ideas of who they are and where they belong (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993). Granic et al. (2020) highlight the broadness of such digital identity construction by not only emphasizing the importance of one's own practices and expressions, but also the importance of interaction with peers and one's positioning in a wider cultural narrative. Indeed, boyd (2014), too, emphasizes the importance of the presence of peers, one's imagined audiences, and context of the platforms used in this process. Social media thus provide spaces where individuals can present and express themselves and experiment together with their peers, (mostly) away from parents and other supervision (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

The current online environment affords unique circumstances to construct and negotiate identities online. Media messages have become easier to share,

search and find, with select or large audiences, and which can persist for both long or limited amounts of time (boyd, 2014; Choi et al., 2020; Triêu and Baym, 2020). The content, audience, platform (affordances), and persistence of messages may impact the experience of, and/or choices made during, the sharing of content (boyd, 2014; Choi et al., 2020; Triêu and Baym, 2020). In light of the ubiquity of social media in the everyday lives of many, social media use has also been debated in the context of self-esteem with ranging conclusions (e.g., Meeus et al., 2019; Steinsbekk et al., 2021; Valkenburg et al. 2021), the potential decrease in self-concept unity (Matsuba, 2006; Davis, 2013), and other complexities of social situations that adolescents have to navigate, such as cyberbullying (see Chun et al. (2020) for an overview).

If we understand social media as important spaces for identity construction among adolescents, we can therefore assume that urban identities can also be constructed in these spaces. The online environment affords a multitude of ways in which users can convey messages about the city and their affiliation with and sense of belonging to it, whether these messages are intentional or unintentional. Not all experiences and perceptions of urban identity will look the same, and therefore it could be argued that expressions of various users might counter each other. As both the produced content itself as well as the audiences' response to it shape a presented identity (boyd, 2014), these different understandings could impact each other. Previous research has argued that adolescents may even decide to produce counternarratives to existing representations to better fit their experiences and ideas (Granic et al., 2020; Leurs et al., 2018). Chapter 2 will dive deeper into the discussion of online urban identity construction and provide a conceptual model to further explore this.

All in all, while media in and about the city can also be investigated from the light of legacy media, professional productions, or even media created by companies or the municipality, the focus on the online environment as a participatory space allows us to look at media productions consumed and created by the city's inhabitants. In this dissertation I therefore choose to focus specifically on the unique role of the online environment, social media in particular, in the urban identity construction of urban adolescents.

1.1.3 Social Media and Different Types of Engagement

In this dissertation, various ways in which users engage with social media are taken into account to explore how these practices relate to (online) urban identity construction. One can differentiate between various activities that users partake in, including consuming (e.g., viewing content), participating in (e.g., liking, disliking, sharing), communicating (e.g., commenting, messaging), and producing (e.g., posting and/or uploading own content) media content (Jansz et al., 2015; Shao, 2009). Scholars have explored these various degrees of involvement from a Uses and Gratifications approach and have found these to be selected for specific purposes, among which entertainment for consumption, social interaction for participating and communicating, and expressing oneself and presenting a certain image through production are common (e.g., Shao, 2009; Khan, 2017).

The possibility of engaging in these different ways does not mean that all users engage equally and in similar ways. Not everyone may have equal access and opportunity. Brake (2014) argues that various forms of the digital divide may create barriers, and that content creation may predominantly be done by a privileged group of users. In the Netherlands, a first level of divide through access might not be as relevant anymore (e.g., Statistics Netherlands, 2018b; Van Dijk, 2005), as the Dutch are among the leading countries in the EU when it comes to digital literacy skills (Statistics Netherlands, 2020). However, the way in which, and the quality of, ICTs are used can still determine whether it can be used for one's own benefit (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Laar et al., 2017). Moreover, research by Scheerder et al. (2019) has demonstrated that usage patterns and routines of the internet differ in the context of families with different educational backgrounds.

To deepen the complexity of participation, various scholars have argued that many users rather only or mostly consume the content, but do not contribute themselves – something that is termed “lurking” (Kushner, 2016; Shao, 2009). More specifically, Jansz et al. (2015) found that Dutch adolescents spent most of their time consuming and communicating, whereas only a small group engaged in more active way, for instance through production. However, this does not make the existing engagement any less meaningful. Moreover,

participation and production can be done with various levels of investment and intention (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2019; Picone, 2019). Whereas some forms of engagement can be very active and require a lot of focused time and energy (e.g., creating and sharing a civic engagement campaign video), other forms of engagement are more casual and everyday (e.g., liking a picture or commenting on a video). Picone et al. (2019) argue that while not everyone partakes in forms of engagement that require a lot of investment and intention, many users do participate through “small acts of engagement,” referring to practices such as commenting, sharing, and liking media content. On top of that, with new platforms for which uploading one’s own content has an increasingly low threshold (in terms of, for instance, equipment and time investment) and possibility to filter audiences (e.g., Instagram stories, TikTok, Snapchat), one may wonder to what extent active participation and production of original content has increased, and, perhaps, to what extent people are able to put this to use in a way that is beneficial to them.

Returning to the previously identified types of engagement – consumption, participation, communication, and production (Jansz et al., 2015), they can be considered to contribute to (online) identity building and negotiation in several ways. Consumption of media content may provide users with examples and ideas of other identities, and what it means to belong to certain groups (e.g., Cover, 2012; Gleason et al., 2017; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Granic et al., 2020). Participation and communication can be used in a way to debate, negotiate, or reinforce identity (e.g., boyd, 2014; Cover, 2012; Granic et al., 2020; Jansz et al., 2015), for instance through providing one’s approval, sharing content with others, but also commenting and discussing topics related to one’s identity. Finally, production is perhaps the most commonly recognized form related to building identity and expressing oneself, as we have explored before. Shao (2009) specifically identified production motivated by its potential for self-expression and self-actualization. We therefore investigate Rotterdam adolescents’ engagement and investigate this in relation to urban identity by looking at consumption of local social media influencers on the one hand, and participation with and production of their own social media content on the other.

1.2 Research Questions & Setup: Aim, Methodologies, Chapter Overview, and Limitations

1.2.1 Research Aim and Research Question

To investigate the urban identities of adolescents in the context of the super-diverse city of Rotterdam, and to examine what role the online environment – and social media in particular – plays in it, I formulated a guiding central research question:

How and to what extent does Rotterdam adolescents' social media use contribute to the creation and negotiation of their urban identity?

To answer this question with a breadth fitting the explorative aim of this dissertation, I opted to investigate the phenomenon from various angles, and each chapter targets this question from a different direction. Figure 1.2 gives an overview of how these different sub-queries relate to my overall understanding of the phenomenon (based on the *trans-spatial urban identity model*, which will be introduced in Chapter 2). First, in Chapter 2, I conceptualize the core theoretical foundations of online urban identity by means of introducing a conceptual model. In Chapter 3, the urban identity related social media ecology of Rotterdam adolescents is surveyed in general. Chapter 4, I specifically target the potential consumption practices of adolescents by investigating the presence of urban identity in the content and networks of local social media influencers. Finally, in Chapters 5 and 6, the focus shifts to an exploration of production practices, focusing on urban identity construction through production of audiovisual social media content, and the potential impact of related participatory action research. I will discuss the different steps and the methodological choices made in the sections below.

1.2.2 Methodologies and Scope: An Explorative Case Study with a Mixed-Method Approach

Exploring the online construction of urban identity among adolescents from a

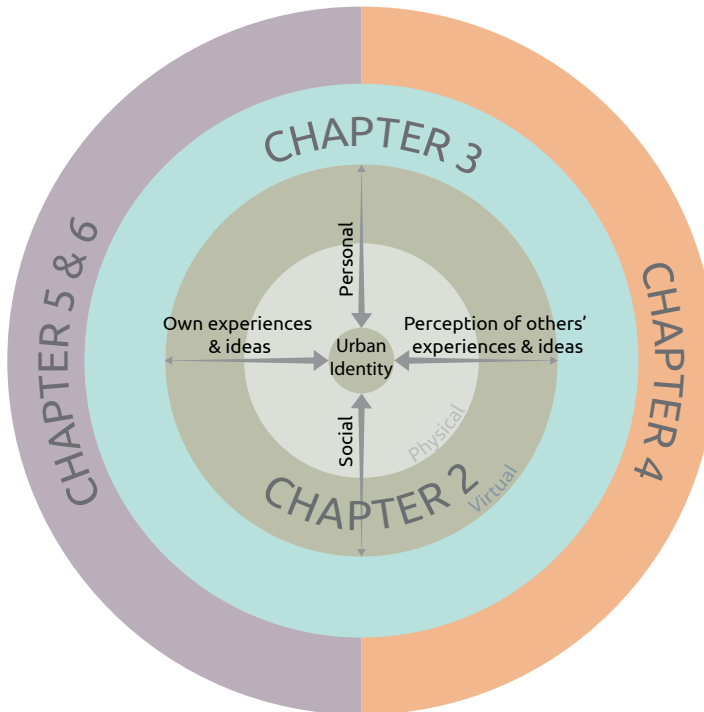


Figure 1.2 Investigating online urban identity construction from various angles through different chapters.

variety of angles requires a variety of methods. The topic at hand was approached through an iterative design where each step in the research (in)formed the next. Taking this mixed-method (between the chapters) and multi-method (within some of the chapters) approach also enabled us to explore the phenomenon from various perspectives. An outline and explanation for these methodological choices are presented below. The specific details of each method can be found in the accompanying chapter. Some of the chapters in the dissertation were previously published as research articles.

1.2.2.1 Survey

We started our exploration with a quantitative survey among adolescents (Chapter 3), examining their general media practices, urban related media practices, and sense of belonging to the city based on self-report. This research was conducted to capture the current media practices and urban identity of Rotter-

dam adolescents and see if and how these are related. With an eye on a more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon later on in the project, we opted to start with a solid empirical basis that would further inform the next steps in our research. There is a large tradition of quantitative research focusing on media use and practices. Similarly, research on identity and identification has also been conducted from a quantitative approach (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1999). We therefore used this approach to explore the relationship between adolescents' media use, urban identity (from a personal and social perspective), and other personal factors and outcomes.

1.2.2.2 Thematic Analysis and Network Analysis

In order to investigate Rotterdam adolescents' favorite local social media influencers (Chapter 4), a mixed approach of two different methods was used. The influencers investigated in this study were based on findings from the survey study. This study combines a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore the urban related content produced by these influencers, and a quantitative network analysis (e.g., Barabási, 2017; Rieder, 2015) to look at the role of recommender systems and affiliation networks in how the city and urban identities were presented online. These two approaches were combined to capture a more complete image of what the viewer could perceive about the local influencer – both content- and context-wise. This was done considering the importance of the digital environment, and its visible and invisible infrastructures, in which the content is produced and consumed (Hutchinson, 2021). Combining findings on the social media content and combining this with network analysis has been shown to contextualize online content and provide information on larger debates (e.g., Lutkenhaus, et al., 2019). Findings of this study therefore provide us with an indication of the possibilities of urban identity construction by influencers on YouTube, both in terms of their content and their network, as well as provide an understanding of how the two are connected and either strengthen or undermine each other.

1.2.2.3 Video Making Course – Participatory Action Research

With the findings of study 1 and 2 in mind, the combined study 3 and 4 (descri-

bed in Chapter 5 and 6) takes a participatory action research approach (PAR). Building on the knowledge of the media repertoires of adolescents and the produced media content of their favorite local influencers, I worked with adolescents to create their own Rotterdam-related content. Through a collaboration with a philanthropic local initiative in the west of Rotterdam that provides free after-school creative courses, we provided a course that not only focused on obtaining data for our research on urban identity itself, but also aimed to provide the young participants with a space to learn, develop and empower themselves with the acquisition of new hard and soft skills, as is the goal of the philanthropic local initiative. We worked with a small group of 10 participants for 10 weeks. To be able to explore the research question with a phenomenological approach towards urban identity (Lalli, 1992), we relied on a participatory action research approach (e.g., Darby, 2017; Day Langhout & Thomas, 2010). With videos both as the object of study and a creative way to talk about identity, this approach allowed us to explore the topic at hand together with the participants. The media production course was delivered in subsequent sessions moderated by the researcher and a teacher from the local philanthropic initiative. In this unique setting, we aimed not only to gather various forms of data, but to also build a relationship with the participants to help understand their thinking and create a safe and trusted environment for them to express themselves.

1.2.3 Chapter Overview

Throughout Chapters 2 to 7, this dissertation aims to answer the research question step by step and from various perspectives. In Chapter 2, the concept that lies at the heart of this project, urban identity, is explored. Based on this conceptual analysis, the chapter introduces the *trans-spatial urban identity model*. This conceptual model captures the understanding of urban identity in an online environment as it used throughout the dissertation. In this chapter, the model and its theoretical origins are discussed, including the variety of perspectives and specific characteristics relevant when investigating urban identity. Finally, cases are outlined that further explore both the relevance of the model and discuss contextual factors that could be considered in online urban identity-related research.

Chapter 3 presents the results of the survey study about the social media practices of Rotterdam adolescents and connects these to urban identity. In this study, questions were asked about their social media use in general, their favorite influencers, as well as their self-esteem and their urban identity (from both a personal and social perspective). The results of this survey are analyzed and discussed in the context of Rotterdam as a super-diverse city, paying specific attention to the importance of urban identity among adolescents with a migration background.

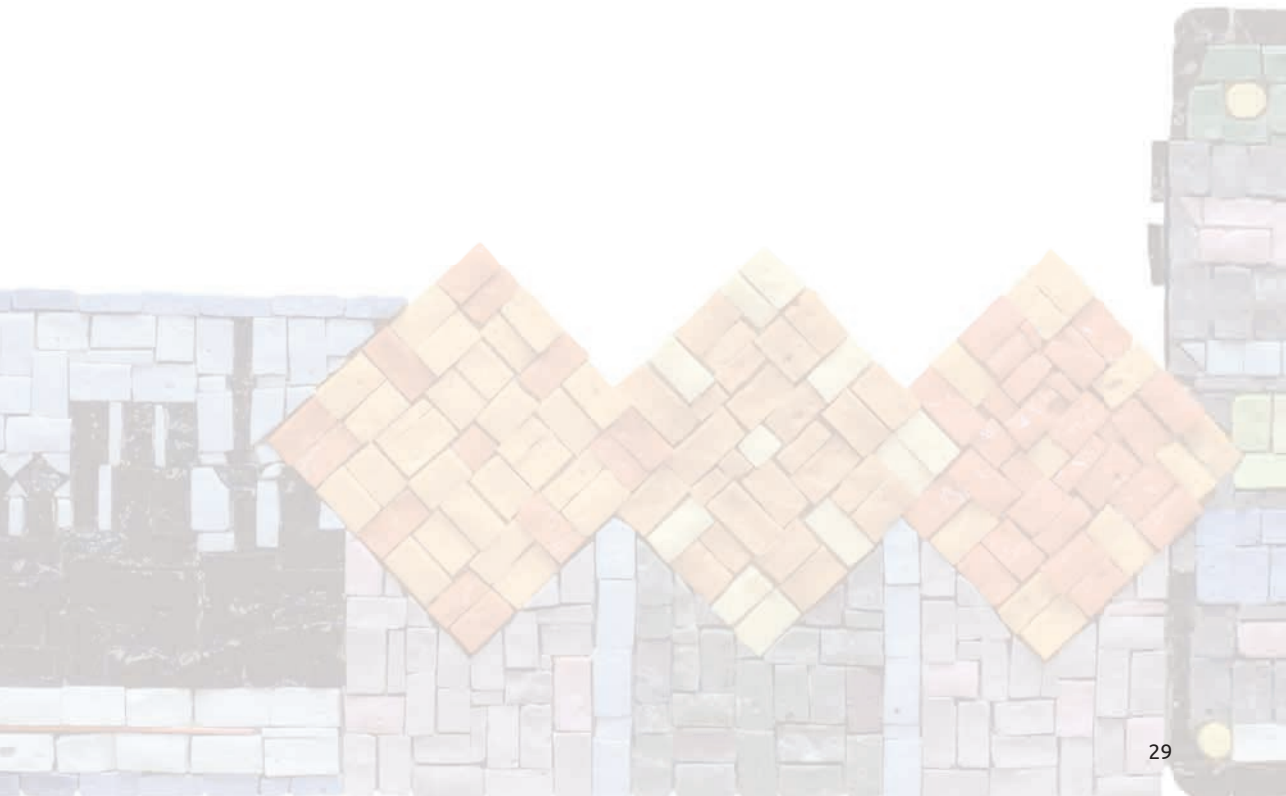
Chapter 4 focuses on local Rotterdam influencers, particularly those identified as favorites in Chapter 3. Concentrating on YouTube as an important platform for adolescents' media consumption, a thematic analysis was conducted of the (urban-related) content that these influencers produced and shared with their viewers. Furthermore, a network analysis was conducted to explore the related channel networks and affiliation networks that contextualized this content. Together these analyses outline the ways in which the city and its inhabitants are represented in the content and networks of these popular local influencers. This chapter also discusses the relevance of including networks in the exploration of such questions.

Chapter 5 moves from adolescents' media consumption to their media production. This chapter outlines how an explorative PAR study was designed by means of a weekly recurring video making course where 10 adolescents created their own videos. This course was constructed to explore how the participants from a diverse neighborhood in Rotterdam constructed and negotiated urban identity in social media videos they made themselves. On top of this central point of focus, the course was constructed in such a way to also inspire media literacy skills and empowerment.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the study designed in Chapter 5. The results of this case study provide an understanding of how the participants' talked and went about their urban identity in the process and how they constructed their urban identity online through various elements in their videos and their discussions surrounding it. Results focus on how participants presented the city and fellow inhabitants, how they related themselves to the city, and reflections on the differences between videos created in the course and at home. In addition,

the chapter also reflects on observations of urban identity, media literacy, and empowerment, and the way in which their subcomponents could potentially be connected.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the findings of this dissertation are combined in the conclusion and discussed in further depth. In this chapter, findings are synthesized to draw conclusions and several directions for further research are suggested. We then reflect on their implications for society and provide recommendations for local policy.



**A slightly adapted version of this chapter
has been submitted as:*

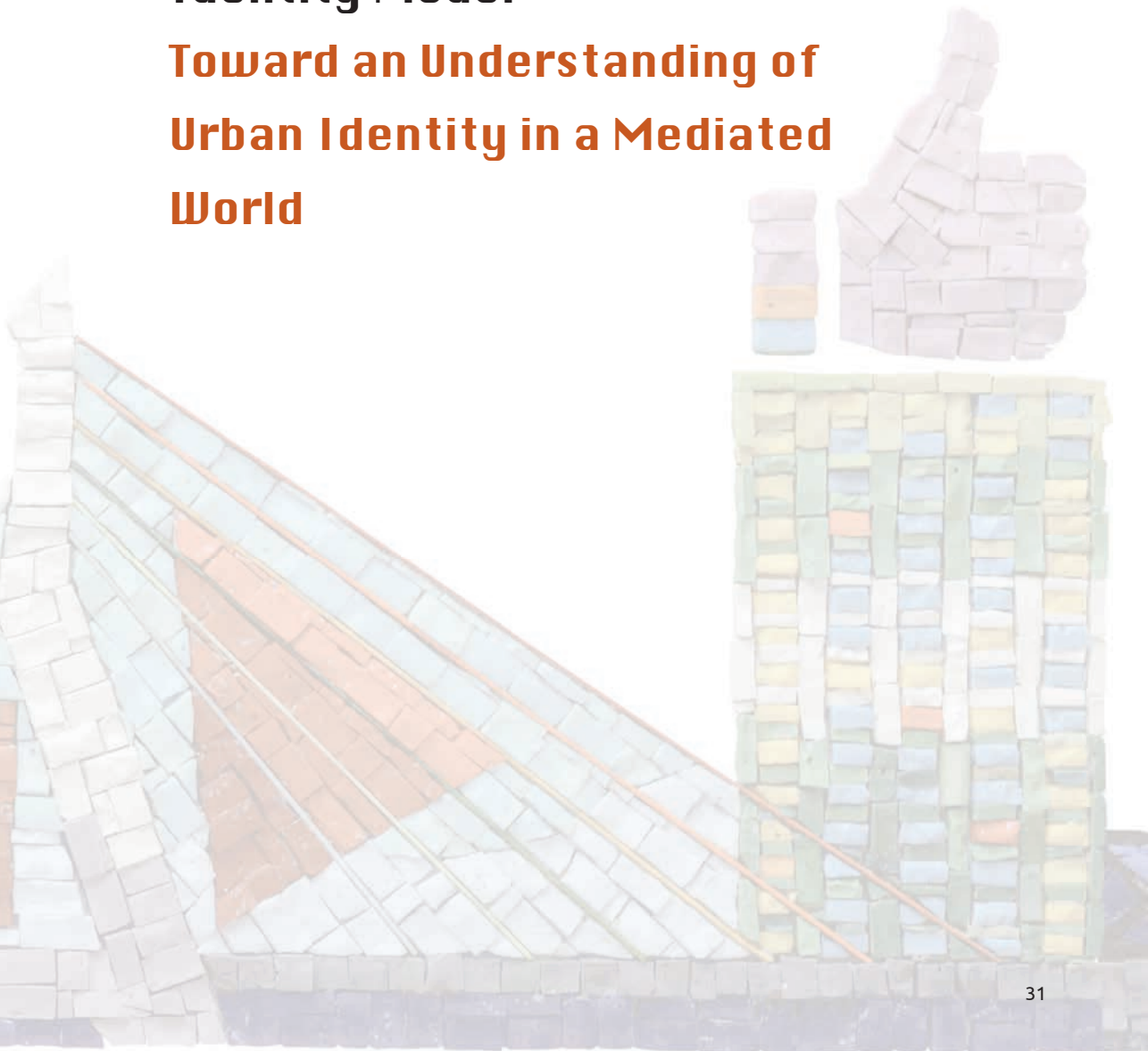
*Van Eldik, A.K., Stoltenberg, D., Kneer, J.,
& Jansz, J. The trans-spatial urban identity
model: Toward an understanding of urban
identity in a mediated world.*



2

The Trans-Spatial Urban Identity Model

Toward an Understanding of Urban Identity in a Mediated World



Abstract

Urban identity conceptualizes the role of people's experiences and ideas about the city in their lives. As the online environment has become an integral part of people's everyday lives and plays a crucial role in identity construction and self-expression, this paper outlines the role of the online environment in constructing, negotiating, and expressing one's urban identity. While the original concept and use of urban identity focused solely on the physical, offline environ-

ment, the current paper emphasizes the importance of recognizing that, in today's age, urban identity emerges from the virtual, online environment, too. This paper therefore proposes a model, the trans-spatial urban identity model, which integrates physical and virtual dimensions of urban identity and understands them as layered. The paper concludes with two cases that demonstrate the conceptual model's value for future research on this subject.

2.1 Introduction

By 2050, an estimated 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas (United Nations, 2018). Living in built environments not only plays a role in people's living conditions and socio-economic status, but also impacts how people see themselves and relate to their surroundings. One can grow attached to a place (Tuan, 1977), feel like they belong to a place (Relph, 1976), and come to identify with a place (Proshansky, 1978). The concept of *urban identity* focuses on the role that the city and its inhabitants play in one's self-perception: it is constructed through everyday experiences in the city and with other inhabitants (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983).

Developed with a focus on the impact of people's physical surroundings and personal ties in close proximity, the original concept of urban identity fails to include modern online experiences of the city, and in times of rapid digitalization, this omission has become increasingly problematic. Studies have begun to investigate the role of the online environment in presenting oneself in connection to place, with a particular focus on location-based services (e.g., Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014). We aim to widen the scope by providing a conceptual model that encompasses the different ways in which urban identity is constructed and negotiated in the online environment in relation to the offline environment. Such a model enables us to more comprehensively map the way in which such an identity is shaped, ranging from very direct affiliations, such as explicit references to one's environment in content or geotags, to the more subtle connections, for instance through local (friend) networks and references in social media content.

This paper therefore proposes the *trans-spatial urban identity model* to understand urban identity as constructed at the intersection of the offline and online environments. The term trans-spatial refers to the goal of the model to go beyond physical space and include the virtual space as an important layer in which urban identity construction and expression takes place. Simultaneously, it recognizes the inseparability of these two realms. The paper introduces the theoretical background of urban identity on which the model is built and outlines the proposed model and its dimensions. Afterwards, it demonstrates the

relevance of adding this online level by exploring how studying urban identity construction differs in an online environment in terms of the consumption and presentation of urban identities.

2.2 Urban Identity in Everyday Life

In the 1970s, human geographers (e.g., Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977) started to study place from a phenomenological perspective. Their focus on the emotional and cognitive link between humans and places inspired a body of literature that has since expanded to many disciplines, including urban planning, psychology, and sociology. Tuan (1977) emphasized that spaces are different from places. Through lived experience and the meaning that is attributed to a space, it becomes a “place”. This attribution of meaning also engenders a strong sense of attachment to place in people (Tuan, 1977). Relph (1976) stressed the importance of authenticity and uniqueness of places and used the terms “insiderness” versus “outsiderness” to explain a connection to place that highlights a subtle sense of belonging. Building on this, Stedman (2003) emphasized the role of the built environment by arguing that the characteristics of the physical environment matter in terms of feeling attached to a place. This does not mean that space is not socially and communicatively constructed, however. On the contrary, spatial sociology highlights that spaces emerge only when social actors perceive objects as relating to one another (Knoblauch & Löw, 2017). Much of this process of understanding spaces and places occurs through communication via media, which highlights the necessity of integrating the online environment as an important space for communication surrounding conceptions of spatial identity.

Place helps us understand our position in the world, differentiate ourselves from others and the environment, and understand the role of the environment in our lives, and can therefore be considered part of our identities (Proshansky et al., 1983). Cities have a unique role in terms of these everyday experiences. In contrast to nations, they reflect a personal, more immediate everyday living environment (Lalli, 1992). In contrast to the home, cities as entities are easily recognizable to insiders and outsiders alike, making them prime loci of identi-

ties on a social level, too (Lalli, 1992). That is, cities function as an important level for differentiation, where people compare and contrast between various cities and their inhabitants to make sense of their own identities (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992). Moreover, while differentiation happens between cities, the diversity within a city provides an interesting mix of members from various social identities (ranging from cultural identities, sexual identities, professional identities, and so on) that can all belong to one group of people with a shared city-based identity, yet at the same time represent a variety of personal city-based experiences. As Cuff et al. (2020, p.1) argue: “The city is the social, physical, and political terrain of our collective lives, where we live in geographic proximity to people unlike ourselves, negotiating the varied understandings that comprise our coexistence”. Cities therefore have specific meanings and identities that impact their inhabitants’ identities (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983).

The result of the interrelation between daily lived experiences and bigger societal dynamics is captured by the notion of urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Urban identity focuses on the role of the physical and social environment of the city in the individual’s self-perception (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). The city provides a backdrop to the individual’s everyday experiences, offering them “a sense of stability and continuity” (p. 294) and contributing to a sense of who they are (Lalli, 1992). Whereas original discussions of place identity, from which urban identity is derived, had a mostly personal and cognitive orientation (Proshansky et al., 1983), Lalli (1992), who focused on urban identity, paid more attention to the social construction of the city as well as the social aspects of identity related to being an inhabitant of the city. Urban identity can therefore manifest itself in many ways, ranging from sensing the role of one’s environment in one’s everyday life to identifying with fellow inhabitants as well as the characteristics typically associated with the city and its inhabitants, and differentiating oneself from other cities and inhabitants (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Urban identity has also been linked to a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Belanche et al. 2017; Van Eldik et al., 2019a; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

While previous scholarship on urban identity mainly focused on the role of

the physical environment and the people in it for one's understanding of their identity (e.g., Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, 1983), digitalization has introduced new venues where urban identity can be constructed and negotiated. The online environment plays an increasingly important part in identity construction (Granic et al., 2020; Marwick, 2013). It provides a place where people can express themselves in front of small, large, existing or new audiences, using new, creative tools. Furthermore, one has the possibility to observe and interact with expressed identities of others inside and outside their social network. This leads to continuous expressions and negotiations of one's own identities, and the consumption of others' identities, which are communicated in literal and symbolic, and implicit and explicit ways (Granic et al., 2020). As such expressions of identities are ubiquitous and can take different forms in the ever-changing online realm, it is important to conceptualize urban identity in a way that allows for an understanding of the role that the online environment plays in the construction, negotiation, and expression of urban identity. To do so, we propose a conceptual model that demonstrates the connection between the offline and the online, as well as the personal and social aspects of urban identity.

2.3 Mapping Urban Identity in a Hybrid Environment

While concepts such as place, space, and urban identity are rooted in experiences of the physical, offline world, space-related concepts are inextricably tied to the online environment (Kitchin & Dodge, 2014). Today, the boundaries between offline and online lives have become blurred, making for a less rigid distinction between activities in both spheres (Deuze, 2012; Granic et al., 2020; Hine, 2015). Online environments, particularly social media, are used as important, everyday spaces for social relation maintenance and identity construction (Baym, 2015; Granic et al., 2020; Marwick, 2013). Interacting with and through communication technologies, such as smartphones and computers, we experience the world around us through these devices, while at the same time, these devices are part of the world around us (Deuze, 2012; Kitchin & Dodge, 2014). In turn, we

experience the city partly through media – the images we see of it, the experiences we have in it, and our local social relations. As Lane (2019, p. 2) argues in his ethnographic work on the role of the online environment in street life, such a local environment “bifurcated into two concurrent layers of social life that exist on the physical street and the digital street. Each resembles, shapes, and references the other, and yet distinct forms of sociality become possible on and across each location.” This demonstrates that online interactions allow people to construct, negotiate, and express their (urban) identities through various forms of self-presentation and self-disclosure in a new way (Baym, 2015; Marwick, 2013; Lane, 2019).

The relationship between the online and the offline environment has not gone unstudied. In recent years, scholars have investigated it from a variety of perspectives. Some scholars have explored the role of social media in place-making and constructing the city, focusing on activities and portrayals that contribute to public understandings of the city (Farman, 2015; Boy & Uitermark, 2017; Wilken & Humphreys, 2021). Others have directed their focus towards to more individual-oriented identity construction (Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Haleboua, 2015; Yilmaz & Kocabalkanli, 2021). For instance, Schwartz and Haleboua (2015, p.1647) have used the term “spatial self” to refer to practices on location-based social media services that indicate “a variety of instances (both online and offline) where individuals document, archive, and display their experience and/or mobility within space and place in order to represent or perform aspects of their identity to others.” Recently, empirical studies have also started to explore case studies of urban identity on a broader level (e.g., Van Eldik et al., 2019b). However, much of the previous work has focused on location-based social media and/or placemaking (e.g., Saker, 2017; Wilken & Humphreys, 2021). We aim to broaden this understanding by providing a framework that, focusing on urban identity as a person-oriented concept (Lalli, 1992), not only includes direct expressions of affiliations with the city (such as geo-tags), but also allows for the inclusion of more subtle and/or indirect elements that are crucial to one’s everyday self-presentation and identity construction.

To better understand how urban identity is constructed, offline and online spheres should be viewed as mutually entangled spaces. Instead of thinking of

the two as separate, scholars have proposed the idea of a hybridization, where online communication becomes a new layer of spaces (De Souza e Silva, 2006; Lemos, 2010). Kitchin & Dodge (2014) have emphasized that software and code are not only a product, but also a producer of the world we live in – they create and constantly shape new spaces that are central to our everyday lives. Such a perspective enables us to theoretically integrate both continuities and new, additional mechanisms of urban identity construction, given the ubiquity of online media.

Therefore, we propose *the trans-spatial urban identity model* shown in Figure 2.1. The hybridity, or what we refer to as “trans-spatiality”, between the offline (physical) and online (virtual) environment is central to the proposed model and visually emphasized by the inclusive circular shape of the model. This signifies how the online environment not only functions as a place to communicate experiences from the offline environment, but also provides a new layer in which the city is shaped and urban identity is constructed – emphasizing the inextricable connection between online and offline. The model incorporates two axes demonstrating personal and social dimensions (vertical), and own and others’ experiences, ideas, and expressions (horizontal). The arrows demonstrate the mutual impact of perceptions and experiences on urban identity and vice versa, with an emphasis on the former. Although we understand the online and offline to be interconnected, the model analytically distinguishes between the two layers to demonstrate the addition of the online level and to provide a structural basis for further empirical work.

2.4 The Physical Environment

Experiences and ideas about the city and its inhabitants

Starting from the traditional physical (or offline) perspective of urban identity, the model distinguishes two aspects of urban identity. Following Proshansky et al.’s (1983) perspective, the model firstly incorporates a personal aspect of identity, focusing on the way in which people start to understand themselves in a

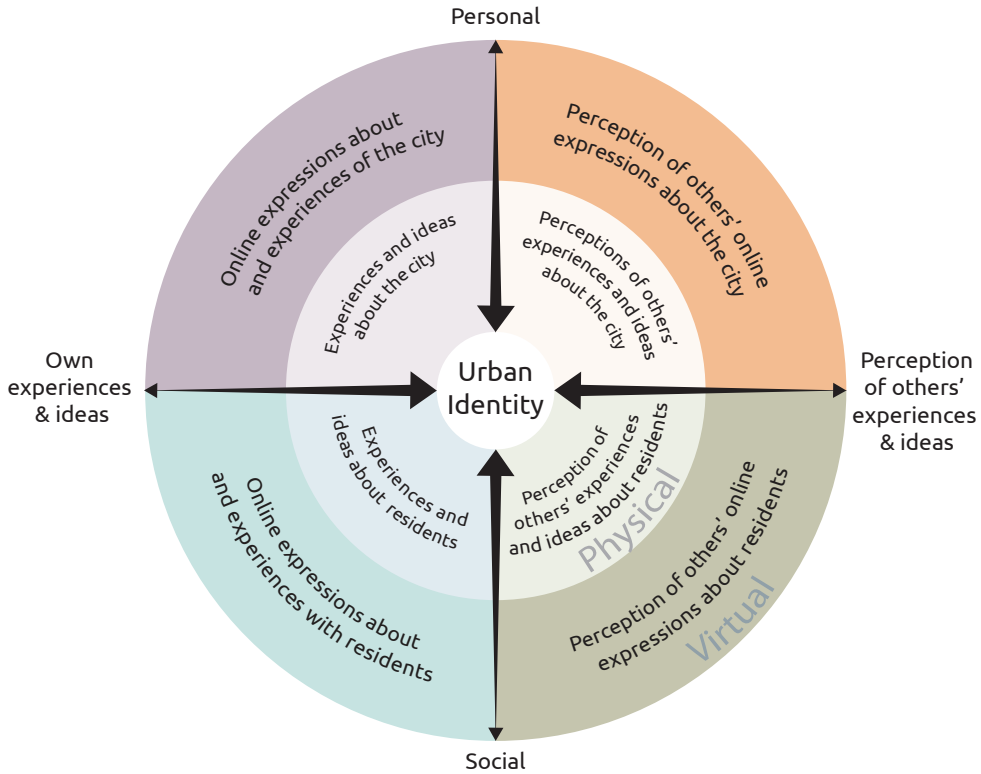


Figure 2.1 Trans-Spatial Urban Identity Model.

spatial environment caused by their everyday experiences in and understanding of their environment. This can include everything that characterizes life in a specific city: from the everyday mundane—commuting to work, grocery shopping, walking the dog in the park—to the many cultural and civic opportunities that the environment has to offer. These experiences range from sensation to conception, and include both emotion and thought (Tuan, 1977). This perspective is focused on self-concept and the cognitive implications of one's environment (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983), and can therefore be considered a part of the personal aspect of urban identity.

Next to its spatial component, urban identity entails elements that function as a social aspect to one's identity (Lalli, 1992; Valera & Guàrdia, 2002). The inhabitants of a city can be understood as a social group based on their shared location of residence. Certain characteristics can be ascribed to this group and

differentiations can be made between inhabitants of one city and another (Lalli, 1992; Valera & Guàrdia, 2002). Because characteristics of the city can say something about its inhabitants (e.g., an industrial character of the city may inform about the occupation of many of its inhabitants) and vice versa (e.g., experiences with inhabitants may shape one's everyday experience of the city), these two factors should be considered as informing each other. In sum, this social aspect includes the individual's notions of what it means to be an inhabitant of this city, what inhabitants look like, how they behave, and what they can be proud of.

Role of perception of others' experiences and ideas about the city and its inhabitants

Other people's expressions of their experiences and ideas play an equally important role in the construction of urban identity. These, too, can include both personal and social aspects. Experiences and understandings of an environment are not formed in a void, and attention should therefore be paid to the role of the social environment in the construction of urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). This understanding is created through the use of symbols, the interaction with other inhabitants or non-inhabitants, as well as deciding who belongs and does not belong (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Other people may evaluate or understand parts of their environment in a different way, because of their different experiences and histories. Through interaction with other inhabitants, one might learn about other inhabitants' experiences of and ideas about the city which may in turn impact their own.

Similarly, notions about what it means to be an inhabitant of the city, expressed and carried out by fellow inhabitants, help shape the individual's understanding of the social aspect of urban identity. Again, such understandings can be emphasized through differentiations, and shaped by repetitive behaviors of fellow inhabitants that can be ascribed to the city (Lalli, 1992). For instance, hearing people around oneself speak in the local dialect may shape the notion that this is part of what it means to be an inhabitant of the city.

Moreover, how one's fellow inhabitants are evaluated by others can also play an important role in shaping one's urban identity. Lalli (1992) has argued that

the evaluation of a city impacts the self-perception of its inhabitants. People prefer to attribute positive characteristics to their group, which helps them build and maintain positive self-esteem, and will try to avoid or reframe negative characteristics (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel, 1981). An inhabitant may therefore like to see the hard-working mentality that is often associated with their city's inhabitants emphasized but would not like the focus to be on socio-economic inequality. Negative experiences and understandings of their group of fellow inhabitants might be reframed or may discourage them from identifying with the city and its inhabitants, whereas positive experiences and understandings may strengthen this bond. Relatedly, as we will explore in Chapter 3, identifying with fellow inhabitants and the accompanying self-esteem regarding that group of inhabitants has been found to predict overall urban identity (Van Eldik et al., 2019a).

2.5 The Virtual Environment

The virtual (or online) environment is not a mere extension of the physical (or offline) world. Rather, scholars have argued their relation is dialectic as they influence one another (e.g., Kitchin & Dodge, 2014). Urban identity is therefore constructed both offline and online, and these practices are strongly intertwined. Like the physical (offline) environment, the model outlines its four domains for the online environment. As the online environment is inherently interactive, a distinction is again made between one's own expressions and the perception of other people's expressions about the city and its inhabitants. Similar to its physical counterpart, the virtual layer of the model considers personal and social aspects of urban identity.

Online expressions about and experiences of the city and its inhabitants

Based on research on online identity construction and self-presentation (e.g., Granic et al., 2020; Marwick 2013), it can be argued that people express their own urban identity in the online environment, both in terms of their personal experiences of the city and their sense of belonging to the group of fellow

inhabitants. Schwartz and Halegoua (2015, p.1647) have argued, in the context of location-based social media, that online spaces are used in various ways to demonstrate the experiences of an individual in a certain space and use this as a form of identity performance. Similarly, Humphreys and Liao (2011) have argued that users of location-based social media not only communicate about place, but also *through* place, which allows them to tell place-related stories and use place to present themselves and construct their identities. Thus, by making their location explicit, and sometimes connecting further content to it, people express and manage a part of their identity. For example, one may visit a location in the city, take a picture and add a location tag that makes visible their affiliation with this place, whilst at the same time negotiating what this space means to them (see Yılmaz & Kocabalkanlı (2021) for more examples). Beyond the experience of space through location-based media, other forms of online engagement also hold potential connections to urban identity construction. Van Eldik et al., (2019b) have found that social media content, social networks, and algorithms may hold information that demonstrates affiliation with the city, even when this is not indicated by a location tag or explicitly mentioned in the content. For instance, users may create content that takes place in or discusses the city, they may feature fellow inhabitants (either in content or friend networks on profiles), and elements such as hashtags may not only contain city-related terms and demonstrate affiliation, but may also serve as a way to link to more city-related content and thus create a connection with fellow inhabitants. Important to note is that expressions of urban identity may not always be explicit and could be as mundane as a selfie Instagram picture where one's neighborhood is recognizable from the background. Users can therefore utilize the virtual environment in a variety of ways to express their experience of the city, their sense of connection to it, and, whether consciously or not, their urban identity. Such content may pertain to the personal experience of the city and its role in one's life (personal aspect), for instance through visual depictions or sharing of locations, but may also contain information about fellow inhabitants (social aspect), for instance through including, tagging or expressing affiliation with fellow inhabitants. These personal and social aspects of urban identity can, however, easily overlap in online expressions, as expressions about the

city can inform expressions about its inhabitants, including the creator, and vice versa. Identity construction, both offline and online, is an ongoing process, and identities are not static but everchanging through everyday practices of identity management (boyd, 2014). The underlying relation is therefore bi-directional: urban identity could impact the way people negotiate and express themselves online, and, in turn, the way people talk about or engage with their city and its inhabitants online could reinforce their sense of urban identity.

Perception of others' online expressions about the city and its inhabitants

Beyond the individual's own expressions, it is equally important to consider how other people's online expressions of urban identity impact the construction or negotiation of an individual's urban identity. By consuming content made by others and/or engaging with it, one has access to an endless variety of examples of people performing their different identities, which can help one reinforce or negotiate their own identities (e.g., Cover, 2012; Gleason et al., 2017), including urban identity. An individual's experience of and engagement with others' expressions of urban identity can focus on the city and its inhabitants, as well as on direct affiliations, lived experiences and shared symbols (Van Eldik et al., 2019b). For example, a local peer could share text, pictures, or videos of themselves or their surroundings, showing the environment from their perspective or contributing to the idea of who inhabits the city. The online environment functions as an extension of, and added layer to, the physical (offline) environment, which allows for a person to experience the city and fellow inhabitants in a multidimensional way through the eyes of others. Similar to offline accounts of other people, such an environment is curated by the person sharing the content or information and is characterized by their perspective. As today's online environment is inherently interactive, an individual's own expressions of identity and others' expressions cannot be entirely separated, as the two interact with each other. Extending boyd's (2014) approach towards self-presentation in this interactive environment, one can argue that (groups of) inhabitants together shape an idea of what it means to be an inhabitant of the city (social aspect), as well as how the city is represented (personal aspect). Particularly in terms of the social aspect of urban identity, by not adhering to or countering such performan-

ces, the coherence of this identity is endangered. In an online environment, this may happen in comment sections or through video or photo responses, where, by means of reinforcing or countering expressions of identity, identities and meanings are negotiated among users. In turn, these negotiations between users are visible for other users. For example, someone may disagree with how the city is represented by a fellow inhabitant and can comment or post their own counter-representation. Physical and virtual, or offline and online, expressions of urban identity therefore interact to shape urban identities.

The role of platform affordances

Conceptualizing urban identity in a social media environment also concerns the dependencies between users and platforms (e.g., Hutchinson, 2021). Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2020) highlight the role of platform affordances, identifying two central affordances that vary considerably between platforms: connectivity (the ability to construct social ties) and expressivity (the ability to construct content). For connectivity, one may differentiate between asymmetric ties, that can easily create new relationships, and symmetric, acceptance-based ties, that are more likely to replicate existing relationships. These patterns may lead to different outcomes in terms of challenging versus reinforcing one's notion of urban identity based on whose expressions one is likely to encounter. In terms of expressivity, some platforms afford complex, multimedia storytelling (e.g., Facebook), some center around visual communication (e.g., Instagram), while still others are geared towards pointed textual comments (e.g., Twitter). These different forms of expressivity allow for a richness in options to construct or negotiate one's urban identity. Visual and multimedia content rely on the use of symbolic elements and allow for a way to express identities through impressions and metaphors rather than direct and descriptive (verbal) statements (Gauntlett, 2007). For example, the crowdedness of a city can be illustrated by shots of people, or by the presence of constant crowd murmur, while absence of greenery could be emphasized by photographing concrete buildings in cool hues. Likewise, textual content may negotiate urban identity by choices in the discussed themes (e.g., aspects of one's daily life, topics that are (in)directly related to the city or its inhabitants) and presented perspectives.

Another important property of many platforms is algorithmic selection. Algorithmic constructions often prioritize information that is in line with the user's pre-existing ideas and identities based on their online behavior (Hutchinson, 2021). Because encountering like-minded narratives as well as counter-narratives plays a role in the negotiation of identity (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020), it is crucial to consider the impact of algorithms on the different urban identities that one encounters online. For instance, interaction with others on social media platforms in many cases impacts what information the user sees next (Ellison et al., 2014). The overlap between online and offline networks could therefore create a tendency towards people from the same urban area, as well as those with similar views and urban experiences, to encounter each other's content online. Moreover, some social media platforms prioritize content of users that are within proximity (Nagowah et al., 2019). Therefore, what a user sees on their online channels is impacted by their online behaviors as well as their urban social network.

2.6 Applications and Further Considerations

The *trans-spatial urban identity model* is relevant to several sub-disciplines in communication research and can serve to integrate different scholarly perspectives on local and urban communication. To demonstrate, we outline with the help of two cases – consuming and presenting urban identities – how the characteristics of the online environment impact the construction and negotiation of urban identity. In doing so, we simultaneously demonstrate how the framework helps to systematically explore this phenomenon and highlight several contextual factors that should be considered.

2.6.1 Consuming Urban Identities: Urban Social Media Influencers and Diversity

The online environment, and in particular social media, allows for users to be exposed to a heterogeneous set of identity expressions and self-presentations – including urban identities. Focusing mostly on the consumption of others'

expressions of urban identities (right side of the model), the research areas of urban social media influencers and diversity illustrate why studying the perception of others' online expressions requires a framework that pays attention to urban identity construction in the online environment specifically.

With the rise of user-generated content came the opportunity for users to gain a significant following online. No longer dependent on media industry production sites or expensive media production technologies, individuals everywhere have the opportunity to create amateur to semi-professional content that, due to its popularity, (partially) provides an income for them (Abidin, 2017). These (micro)celebrities, also referred to as influencers (Khamis et al., 2017), may therefore reside in the same city as the viewer, providing them with local media figures with whom they can identify. As we will see in our investigation of the role of urban identity in the content of local influencers (see Chapter 4), various elements of urban identity can be found (Van Eldik et al., 2019b), which can be linked to the personal and social aspects that we highlight in this model. These included the presentation of their surroundings (personal aspect), but also their fellow inhabitants, and presenting themselves as an inhabitant of the city (social aspects) (Van Eldik et al., 2019b). While other peers can provide such examples of identities, too, social media influencers have an interesting role as they reach a large audience and can function as important role models (Gleason et al., 2017; Lovelock, 2017). The consumption of this content may build on offline urban experiences and connections. Yet, urban influencers add a new, online-focused layer to urban identity: the interaction with this content and these (locally) well-known individuals becomes a new element of the city and what it means to belong. Affiliating with these influencers, as famous fellow inhabitants, and/or engaging with their content can be understood as a new way of connecting to one's urban identity.

Investigating local influencers may not only provide answers to how they contribute to urban identity construction, but also brings us to a broader issue: To what extent do urban identities expressed online, including those of influencers, reflect diversity? Urban identities should be understood in the context of the enormous diversity and accompanying inequalities that often characterize cities (see, for instance, Leurs & Georgiou (2016) on how inequalities impact the

physical and digital mobilities, as well as the urban imaginaries). These everyday realities of the city have specific implications in the online environment. On the one hand, the online environment is considered more accessible for participation and voicing identities than traditional media or local politics (e.g., Jackson et al., 2020). Moreover, people may encounter others who they would not meet in their everyday lives offline (e.g., Kim, 2011), and relationships and networks become visible due to friend lists, followers, and interactions on profile pages. Together, this can create opportunities to encounter a more diverse set of voices online – in terms of representations of the city (personal aspect), as well as perceptions of its inhabitants (social aspect). On the other hand, inequalities that exist offline, are (re)produced in new ways online. Due to inequality in digital access and skills (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), not everyone has equal opportunity to present themselves online. Previous research has found that the creation and sharing of content is mostly carried out by a small, privileged group catering to members of similar social groups (Brake, 2014). This could create biases in representations of inhabitants of the city. Recent research has added nuance to this argument by arguing that lower effort forms of engagement, such as liking and commenting, are central to identity construction as well (Picone et al., 2019). Yet, even if all people find ways to express themselves online, visibility should be considered. In the abundance of the online environment and given the opaque rules of algorithmic selection, visibility is allocated unequally (boyd, 2014; Hutchinson, 2021; Rieder et al., 2018). Ultimately, the question we might need to ask in this new social environment is: Whose online representations of the city garners attention, and what impact does this have on urban identity construction? A trans-spatial approach can help answer this question by analytically distinguishing between the offline and online experiences. This can reveal the ways in which inequalities in who gets to represent the city and its inhabitants, and narratives surrounding the topic of belonging, are (re)produced or challenged in new digital settings, and who consumes which messages. Ultimately, we may outline the different larger urban identity narratives that may exist in the same city.

The online environment has thus provided new ways to consume urban identities that help shape one's own. Affordances of the online environment,

such as access to large audiences, the microcelebrity, but also its danger of one-sided representations are issues that require further attention, and benefit from a structural understanding of online urban identity construction. By using a trans-spatial approach, we can pay attention to the specific online narratives on urban identity within a certain city and acknowledge its unique impact and interaction with offline experiences. Its division between the personal and social dimensions helps differentiate between narratives on personal and physical experiences of the city on the one hand, and social narratives of who belongs in the city on the other. It enables comparison between the two to investigate how spatiality is linked to certain narratives of belonging. In Chapters 3 and 4 we will further dive into the consumption practices of urban related content, with a specific focus on urban influencers and diversity in Chapter 4.

2.6.2 Presenting Urban Identities: The Impact of Audiences and Online Networks

Studying urban identity online requires not only an altered framework for understanding how and what identities are consumed, but also for how people express and negotiate their own urban identities. Even on global platforms, such as Twitter, a lot of content is locally specific, with users publicly discussing events and places in their city of residence (Pfetsch et al., 2021). Focusing mostly on construction and negotiation of urban identity through production practices (the model's left side), we explore the role of audiences, forms of engagement, and online network structures to illustrate that studying online expressions about and experiences of the city and fellow inhabitants, requires a different approach.

First, social media platforms are built around interactivity, and practices on such platforms imply an imagined audience, requiring users to navigate a complex diversity of (sometimes invisible) audiences from different parts of one's life often combined on the same platforms, which makes tailored self-presentation more difficult (Litt & Hargittai, 2016; Marwick & boyd, 2010). Simultaneously, specific platforms can be given certain meanings that affect choices for the type of content and the type of audience for which they are used (Boczkowski et al., 2018). The perception of such combined, yet sometimes also meaningfully

clustered, audiences on platforms have been found to impact self-disclosure in different ways (Him et al., 2020; Vitak, 2012). These unique circumstances may therefore impact where, when, and with whom urban identity is expressed and how this information is curated. Expressions of urban identity might serve different functions in various contexts. Explicitly identifying with the city is symbolically important for a local soccer team, but less so for an internationally oriented gadget reviewer. For an average individual it might be meaningful in their relationship with fellow inhabitants, but less relevant in their online hobby group. By separating online urban identity construction from offline urban identity construction, we recognize the complexity of the online environment, in which local as well as non-local audiences may no longer be separated, or, contrarily, may purposefully be separated.

Secondly, the varied ways in which users engage with social media, including participation, communication, and production of online content (Jansz et al., 2015), may each have its own implications for identity construction (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). Presenting one's urban identity online is not restricted to content production – it may also result from communication between users or other forms of participation that do not necessarily involve content creation. Moreover, not only the creator of the content, but also their audiences can impact the creator's expressed identity (boyd, 2014). Through actions such as "liking"/"disliking", sharing, or commenting, audiences can interact with and potentially impact a user's presented urban identity. Such interactions may add to or recontextualize what is said in the original content—it may either strengthen or alter the context of the original message.

Finally, we require a specific framework due to the unique (online) network structures. Online and offline networks tend to be overlapping and interwoven in their formation (Kwak & Kim, 2017) and structured by homophilic relations where users preferentially interact with those similar to them. Additionally, Lane (2019) has shown that while local relationships offline and online build on each other, they are enacted in different ways. Less is known about the extent to which new ties are formed online in urban settings. Both individual- and platform-specific characteristics may influence the formation of new urban ties online. On the platform-level, different digital media afford different uses

and forms of interaction. For instance, Facebook, with its symmetric “friend” network structure, tends to be more homophilic, and more likely to recreate offline ties than the asymmetric “follow” structure on Twitter, where one may be more likely to follow someone they do not know, merely out of interest in what they post (Valenzuela et al., 2014). On the individual-level, other factors may play a role. Hampton (2007) found that people who reported larger local offline networks were less interested in engaging with their neighbors online. By contrast, Hampton et al. (2011) found that many online activities facilitated stronger engagement in local offline settings, such as volunteering or religious groups, and thereby increased network diversity. Humphreys (2010) has argued that while mobile social networks have not necessarily changed who interacts with whom in public spaces, they may create a stronger sense of commonality and familiarity in the public space. While these findings are focused on behaviors in the urban context, urban identity is a likely underlying factor. If we look at the proposed model, we can interpret these findings in terms of a sense of connection with the environment as a shared space, and a stronger sense of connection with fellow inhabitants through awareness of sharing this space. The online environment may play a unique role in shaping urban identity by making connections visible that otherwise would not be so apparent. The importance one assigns to their immediate environment and how they feel about it, thus likely influences the extent to which they connect with others and vice versa, both offline and online.

In researching the presentation of urban identities online, the model therefore provides a new framework to understand the elements that differ from, but interconnect with, urban identity construction and self-presentation in relation to the city in an offline context. It considers the unique ways in which social media affordances and online audience dynamics may impact the way identities are expressed by the user, with whom they are shared, and how they are interacted with after posting. It also means taking into account that local networks may be impacted by online encounters that, in turn, may facilitate new or changed (online or offline) audiences, and that local networks are now visible for other users to see, also conveying part of one’s urban identity. In the Chapters 3, 5, and 6, we explore expressions of urban identity on social media in the

context of Rotterdam adolescents, focusing both on their platforms of output, created content, and the potential impact of engaging with this identity.

2.7 Conclusion

We have proposed the *trans-spatial urban identity model* that enriches the conceptualization of urban identity by including the virtual, online environment as an added layer to the physical, offline environment and demonstrating their inextricable interaction. The construction of urban identity goes beyond experiences and expressions in the physical world and reaches into virtual spaces. The model includes two dimensions of urban identity: personal and social elements, and the perception of others' as well as one's own experiences and ideas. The online environment requires specific attention in light of these dimensions, as the interactive nature of social media provide new spaces to construct, negotiate, and express one's relation to the city and its inhabitants to various (local and non-local) audiences.

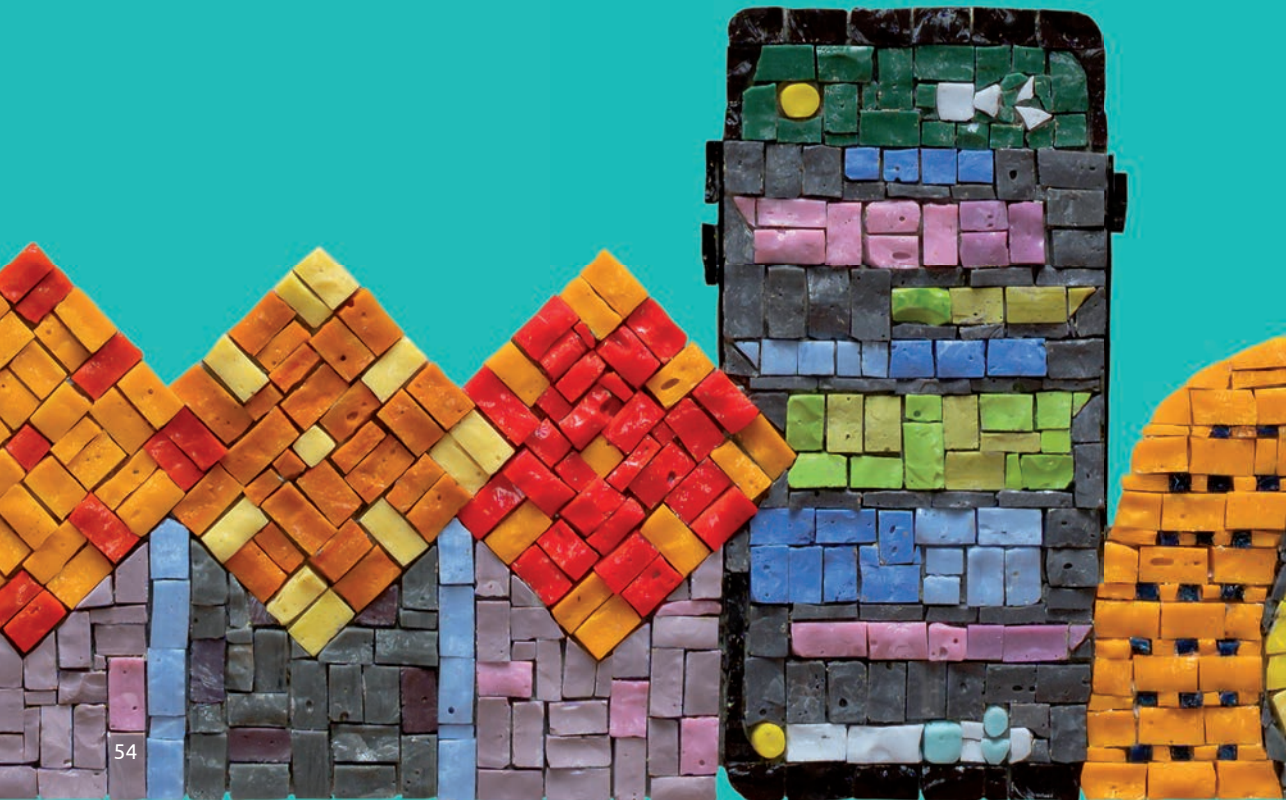
The online environment is not merely an extension of the offline realm but facilitates genuinely new practices of performing urban identity. This includes activities that range from "checking in" on Foursquare or Facebook (Farman, 2015; Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Haleboua, 2014), to higher investment types of activities such as creating and sharing content on social media (Schwartz & Haleboua, 2014; Van Eldik et al., 2019a). Moreover, it facilitates new encounters that may reshape how we understand ourselves in relation to our city, such as with local influencers (Van Eldik et al., 2019b). To demonstrate the relevance and application of the model, we explored the uniqueness of and points of attention for studying online urban identity from the viewpoints of consumption and presentation of urban identities.

While this paper provides a comprehensive model to investigate urban identity construction, it does not come without its limitations. First, the model largely builds on research conducted in mid- to large-sized cities in the Global North, and therefore it might not be equally suitable in every local context. Issues such as internet accessibility or local conflicts impact how urban identity and its

construction should be discussed. Secondly, while we discuss specific affordances and several contextual factors related to online urban identity, this is not an exhaustive list. Empirical research should further explore potential influences on urban identity construction and their relevance to specific contexts. Finally, urban identity is deeply ingrained in our everyday experiences and may intersect with other types of identities. Other personal and social markers, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual identity, could potentially also influence how one interacts with their physical and virtual surroundings. The (online) experiences and outcomes among various inhabitants of the city may therefore differ, which in turn may impact their urban identity. However, this model provides a structure that can be used to investigate urban identity construction while acknowledging this intersectionality.

Online expressions of urban identity and the relation between online and offline urban identity construction is a topic with great potential. Centered in media psychology and sociology, and stemming from environmental psychology, it is relevant for diverse fields such as audience studies, social network studies, political communication and activism, and environmental studies. Where we live and who we live with matters to our everyday existence, and influences many aspects of our lives, from our self-perception and sense of belonging to social cohesion and (political) engagement. The online environment has become an undeniable part of this, and to leave this out of our understanding of urban identity is to neglect a part of our lived experience.

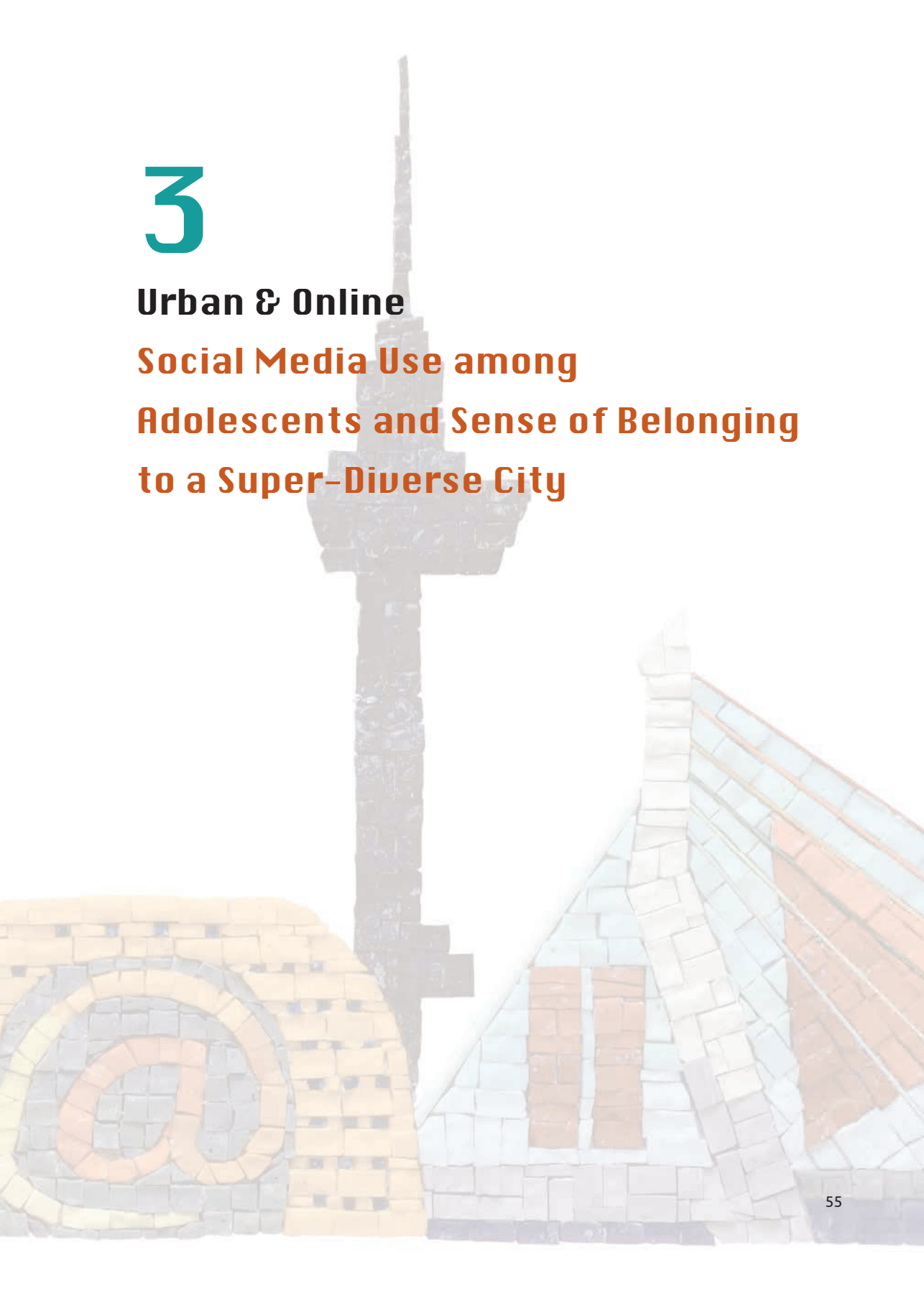
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3

Urban & Online

Social Media Use among Adolescents and Sense of Belonging to a Super-Diverse City



Abstract

In a world of continuous migration, super-diverse cities consist of a multitude of migrants and non-migrants from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Yet one characteristic they all have in common is the place where they currently live. In addition, both groups are active users of social media, especially the young. Social media provide platforms to construct and negotiate one's identity—particularly the identity related to where one lives: urban identity. This article presents the results of a survey study (N = 324)

investigating the relationships between social media engagement and identity construction among migrant and non-migrant adolescents in the super-diverse city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. It was found that urban identity was significantly higher for migrants than non-migrants. Certain aspects of social media engagement predicted urban identity in combination with social identity. Finally, social media engagement was found to be positively related to group self-esteem.

3.1 Introduction

In recent history, migration has resulted in the creation of a multi-cultural society. Ranging from forced to voluntary, at the end of their migration process many migrants find themselves in a multi-cultural environment. Newcomers often settle in cities which consequently increase in ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity. Vertovec (2007) has labelled this dynamic urban environment a super-diverse city, a concept that comes with many opportunities and challenges—from cultural richness to socio-economic inequalities and stereotyping. The concept of super-diversity is characterized by the idea that diversity should be viewed beyond ethnicity, and should also take into account a wide range of other factors (Vertovec, 2007). Its complexity covers not only elements such as country of origin and the details of one's migration history but also factors in their current social and living situation (Vertovec, 2007). While the super-diverse group of inhabitants possess a rich array of identities, there is one common characteristic: place. Previously discussed in many fields and from different points of view, place identity can be looked at from an urban perspective: urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983). As the city is a shared space and a shared part of its inhabitants' identity, the urban identity can be considered a connecting element, especially for migrants. We conducted our research in Rotterdam, a super-diverse city in the Netherlands. With 638,712 inhabitants it is the second largest city in the country and home to people from around 200 different nationalities and many different ethnic backgrounds (Jennissen et al., 2018; Statistics Netherlands, 2018a). Rotterdam was chosen not only due to its super-diverse character, but also for its position as a minority-majority city, and its articulated identity and (urban) youth culture (Fortuin & Van der Graaf, 2006; JongRRKC, 2008; Kanne & Van Engeland, 2019; OBI, 2018). Moreover, this city is located in the Netherlands, a country in which nearly everyone has internet access (Statistics Netherlands, 2018b; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015).

Adolescence, particularly early adolescence, is an important period marked by rapid development, including identity (Delfos, 2013; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Answering the "Who am I?" question is particularly relevant in a super-

diverse environment where adolescents have to make sense of their relations to groups with different identities. Research in different countries has shown that media use plays an important role in this development (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Social media, as a shared space with limited parental interference and the strong presence of adolescent peers, affords socializing practices and the construction and negotiation of one's identity (boyd, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Adolescents may use this space to deal with the intricate dynamic environment in which they find themselves and need to position themselves through different forms of social media engagement. The construction of identity, particularly in the context of a city, may create a sense of belonging, which in turn develops self-esteem.

In light of the super-diverse environment in which these adolescents find themselves, and the broader question of identity construction and a sense of belonging, our aim was to investigate the social media use of adolescents in the city and how this is related to a sense of belonging to the city through identity development. Moreover, we aimed to investigate the potential differences between migrant and non-migrant adolescents in terms of their social media use and identity development, and how these two are related to each other. Resulting from these aims, the research questions were:

RQ 1 To what extent does social media engagement influence identity development (in terms of social identity, urban identity, and self-esteem)?

RQ 2 To what extent do migrant and non-migrant adolescents differ concerning social media engagement and identity development?

Answering these questions helps to understand the role of social media in adolescents' everyday lives and its role in the social and psychological well-being of (migrant) adolescents. Moreover, it contributes to the body of knowledge on the role of the urban environment in the everyday life of adolescents, and its importance in making sense of themselves and their group in relation to others. Surveys were employed to explore the multiple relations between (social) media usage of our participants and their social and urban identities.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Social Media Use and Types of Engagement

In this study, we conceptualize social media as online spaces, or platforms, that afford communication and the uploading and sharing of content and thus foster interaction and self-presentation (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Carr & Hayes, 2015). They include, but are not limited to, social networking sites, instant messaging platforms, apps for content sharing, and other content sharing platforms. On these platforms, one can share user-generated content, including in very mundane, everyday ways.

Social media are central to the everyday lives of many adolescents (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010). Throughout the years, various social media platforms have come and gone, gaining and losing popularity. As research by Anderson and Jiang (2018) shows, whereas Facebook used to be most popular, the attention of adolescents has shifted to platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. Research conducted in the Netherlands revealed that while Facebook is still popular among adolescents in the Netherlands, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are challenging Facebook's popularity (Kennisnet, 2017).

Previous studies have identified various categories of social media engagement (Ito et al., 2010; Jansz et al., 2015; Shao, 2009). Shao (2009) differentiates between consumption, participation, and production. Jansz et al. (2015) categorize communication as a separate type of engagement from participation. Studies have found that only a small number of people choose to engage actively (Kushner, 2016; Nielsen, 2006). Due to factors underlying the digital divide, it is more likely that it will be the more privileged minorities who create online content, resulting in material that is largely catered to those groups (Brake, 2014). Migrant adolescents might, therefore, be more inclined not to take part or might feel culturally underrepresented by content creators. However, as the internet has become more easily accessible, and as platform preferences have changed, thresholds for participation and production have lowered in an age of online content creation involving small, private audiences, such as those on Snapchat or Instagram. Adolescents can send pictures or videos to their friends through Snapchat but may choose not to upload public YouTube videos.

Positioning this in the context of our research, we first need to ask about what access migrant adolescents have to social media and the availability of digital devices, such as smartphones, computers, or tablets. We expect the following due to mainly socio-economic reasons (particularly material-, temporal- and social resources) of physical or material access (Van Dijk, 2012):

H 1 Non-migrant adolescents have greater access to digital devices than migrant adolescents.

As a result, we need to question whether their social media use differs from that of non-migrant adolescents.

Q 1 Do migrant and non-migrant adolescents differ in their social media engagement?

3.2.2 Identity Development and Social Media Engagement

Early adolescence is a period characterized by rapid social and psychological development, which includes the construction and development of the adolescent's identity (Delfos, 2013). Previous research has shown that social media plays an important role in the construction and negotiation of identity, where social media function as shared spaces where they can hang out with peers and explore the boundaries of their identities, with parents being mostly absent (boyd, 2014; Delfos, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

Various forms of social media engagement may accommodate identity development. In terms of consumption, media idols play a crucial role. Media idols can function as role models, especially for adolescents because they prefer to identify with someone who is quite similar to them (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Due to the abundance of user-generated content and an increasing amount of social media influencers (SMIs), a diversity of role models have become available from and for different groups in society. Adolescents from different backgrounds may find social media influencers who are similar to them, which helps reinforce their identities. In terms of participation and communication, adolescents can develop their social identity by communicating with peers and sharing their opinions in comments sections or by rating content (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010). Finally, adolescents can express their identities by creating and sharing their own content (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010). The online

environment offers a place where adolescents can test boundaries in their social environment, seeking approval in the process, which helps them in building self-esteem and identity—an essential part of adolescent development (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Developing self-esteem is also saturated by social factors because it is embedded in the groups they belong to.

3.2.3 Migrant Youth, Identity Formation, and New Media

Previous studies on migrant adolescents and media have shown that media production can help construct and negotiate individual and collective identities (De Block & Buckingham, 2007; De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Leurs et al., 2018). From a transnational point of view, research has argued that media afford migrants the opportunity to cross borders and maintain their connections with their (parents') country of origin, yet research shows that young migrants often focus more on their local environment, some creating hybrid identities in the process (Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008). Such hybrid identities offer space for more than one place of belonging (de Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008). This offers young migrants the opportunity to identify with and have a sense of belonging to different places or cultures. Social media can thus play a crucial role in developing an identity and a sense of belonging, especially for adolescents with a migrant background who may have lost their city, family, culture, and with it, consequently, part of their identity.

3.2.4 Urban Context, Migration, and Identity

Rotterdam, as a super-diverse city, holds great ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity, which is partly a result of previous and continuous forms of migration. In 2018 there were 80,742 western migrants (12.6%) and 244,109 non-western migrants (38.2%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2018a). Rotterdam is so-called a majority-minority city, in which the majority of the inhabitants have a migration background from a large diversity of countries (Jennissen et al., 2018). Economic inequality is also present in Rotterdam. In 2016, 20% to 22% of minors were living in poverty (Hoff, 2017). Moreover, it has a high percentage (54%) of schools where more than 80% of the students are non-western migrants (Herweijer, 2008). This "segregation" among schools is reinforced by young people's

socio-demographic backgrounds (e.g., parents' education level and their neighborhoods) and it affects their social networks as well as their opportunities because migrant and non-migrant youth are often separated according to the school that they attend (Herweijer, 2008). Despite these inequalities, previous research has shown that 77% of the population of Rotterdam are proud of their city—a number that has risen from 55% in 2009 (OBI, 2018). This provides an interesting background when investigating Rotterdam's urban identity, as this positive evaluation underlines the importance of the urban environment.

When one lives in a certain place for a while, one begins to feel attached to the environment, and, in due course, people might start feeling that they belong there. Previous research has, from different disciplines and points of view, focused on a sense of belonging and attachment to a place, which can be central to personal and social identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1977). Place identity is constructed through defining oneself in relation to the spatial environments that are central to their everyday lives, which are central to how they understand and experience the world around them (Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1977). Place identity stresses the physical setting of the human being, and how this is perceived in everyday experience and the resulting memories and ideas, without neglecting the individual, interpersonal, and social group factors (Proshansky et al., 1983). Previous research has also focused specifically on the urban environment (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Urban identity entails a similar idea to place identity, yet focuses on the city in particular. Here, the city "provides an identity-enhancing context for one's biography, and thus a continuity which is relatively independent from definite (e.g., social) changes" (Lalli, 1992, p. 294). It also helps inhabitants to differentiate themselves from people in other cities, which creates both an idea of attributes associated with the city, as well as a sense of belonging to a social group (Lalli, 1992).

From a social perspective, Lalli (1992) argues that a sense of "we", and thus belonging to a social group, is created as part of urban identity. Migrant and non-migrant adolescents may, therefore, feel like they belong to "Rotterdamers" as a social group, and thus self-categorize as such. Especially in the context of the super-diversity, where many "Rotterdamers" have a migration

background, both migrant and non-migrant adolescents may feel like they belong to the city. As migrant adolescents may not easily identify with the host country's national identity or any other (national) identity of other social groups in their lives, it should be easier for them to identify with the city they live in.

Thus, we assume:

H 2 Migrant adolescents have higher social identity than non-migrant adolescents.

H 2a Migrant adolescents have higher self-categorization than non-migrant adolescents.

H 2b Migrant adolescents have higher group self-esteem than non-migrant adolescents.

3.2.5 Migration and Media in the Urban Context

Social media use plays an important role in this identification process (De Block & Buckingham, 2007; Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008). Georgiou (2010), who discusses media and place from a diasporic position, emphasizes that identification takes place on various spatial levels: home, city, national, and transnational. These are interconnected and can be combined. For migrants, media allows for identification both on the level of the homeland, particularly through people with a similar background, as well as the often culturally diverse environment of the destination city (Georgiou, 2010). The city, in particular, offers a space where media production can be used as a form of political and cultural representation (Georgiou, 2010). As Georgiou (2010) argues, “[p]erformative urban identities increasingly move away from the national imaginary and media and communications become experimental tools in this process” (p. 31). Here, the nation may become less dominant and central to the debate of identity, and can be replaced with an urban or transnational perspective (Georgiou, 2010, 2013). This can be related to adolescents' everyday social media engagement. Adolescents may have particular media idols, often social media influencers, who are from the same city, and perhaps the same cultural or socio-economic background. A YouTube vlogger from Rotterdam, or even the same neighborhood, might, therefore, function as a media idol. Adolescents may also engage in discussion about what it means to live in the city, or rate, praise, or criticize others' content

about it. Finally, adolescents may create and share their own content in which they construct and negotiate their urban identity. As the city can be considered part of their identity, this negotiation of identity could be found in their everyday uses of social media. Thus, we assume:

H3 Social media engagement has positive impact on self-categorization.

H4 Social media engagement has positive impact on group self-esteem.

Next to the social perspective, urban identity can also be viewed from a personal perspective. This perspective focuses more on the physical and symbolic aspects of this urban identity. It must be said that while this spatial dimension could potentially function as a cause for this identity, this causality is not assumed in our argumentation. It could be argued that if one feels connected to the social group, one might also feel more at home in the city (Lalli, 1992). Following this argumentation, we hypothesize:

H5 Migrant adolescents have higher urban identity than non-migrant adolescents.

H6 Social media engagement has positive impact on urban identity.

H7 Social identity has positive impact on urban identity.

Finally, belonging to a place or belonging to a group, and thus identifying with it, can be seen as a key factor in a person's self-esteem (Lalli, 1992). However, migrants might lack a stable national and/or cultural identity, which may impact their personal self-esteem. Compared to group self-esteem, personal self-esteem (from here on referred to as "self-esteem") does not belong to one's social identity but can be influenced by it. This raises the following question and hypotheses:

Q2 Does self-esteem differ between migrant and non-migrant adolescents?

H8 Social media engagement has positive impact on self-esteem.

H9 Social identity has positive impact on self-esteem.

H10 Urban identity has positive impact on self-esteem.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Sample and Procedure

Our survey sample was made up of 324 participants, including 160 boys and 159 girls. The ages of the 321 participants who filled this out ranged from 9 to 13 ($M = 10.65$; $SD = 0.88$). The father's country of origin (304 reported cases, 35 countries in total) was mostly the Netherlands (51.6%), Morocco (18.8%), or Turkey (9.9%). The mother's country of origin (312 reported cases, 38 countries in total) was quite similar: the Netherlands (51.9%), Morocco (17%), and Turkey (8.3%). Statistics Netherlands (2015) defines individuals as migrants when at least one of their parents was born abroad. This, therefore, includes first- and second-generation migrants. Based on this definition, 41.8% of the participants were migrants and 58.2% were non-migrants (20 cases could not be allocated to a group because they did not answer this question).

Rotterdam was chosen as our case study because of its super-diverse character in relation to, among others, socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural levels (Statistics Netherlands, 2018a; Vertovec, 2007), as well as its position as a minority-majority city (Jennissen et al., 2018), which both make for an environment that is characterized by various identities and accompanying differences on multiple levels. Moreover, it has a rich (urban) youth culture and articulated identity (Fortuin & Van der Graaf, 2006; JongRRKC, 2008; Kanne & Van Engeland, 2019), demonstrated not only by its many cultural products but also its reported pride among inhabitants (OBI, 2018). This shows the importance of urban culture and hints towards possible identification with the city. Finally, Rotterdam is located in the Netherlands, a country where almost all inhabitants have internet access (Statistics Netherlands, 2018b; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). This widespread access to the internet is crucial in our research, as it provides youth with a relatively equal opportunity to engage with social media.

Our collaboration with three schools from two different neighborhoods in Rotterdam helped us find adolescents from different backgrounds. These ranged from a strong to a weak socio-economical position and differed in the number of migrants (35.9% versus 78.5%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2018a). The data collection took place in November 2018. The survey was conducted

in classrooms at the participating schools, using paper and pencils, and took 15–20 minutes to complete. A researcher and a research assistant were present to introduce the survey and the research, inform the participants about the voluntary nature of the survey and answer any possible questions. The first part of the survey asked the participants a number of demographic questions and questions about access to digital devices. The second part focused on questions about social media use, social media engagement, SMIs, and locality of engagement. Finally, the survey included measures for self-esteem, urban identity, and social identity. Afterwards, participants were thanked for their participation.

3.3.2 Measures

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics (v25). Please see the results for more details on each analysis used.

3.3.2.1 Access to Digital Devices

In order to measure access to digital devices, we asked for ownership of certain digital devices and made a distinction between privately owned and shared devices to take into account the privacy of use of such a device. The device options were smartphone, tablet, and computer/laptop, as these provide the most options for social media use.

3.3.2.2 Social Media Use

Social media use was measured by presenting a list of social media platforms and a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always). We based the options for social media platforms on findings regarding the platforms most frequently used by adolescents in the Netherlands: WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Musical.ly (recently renamed TikTok) (Kennisset, 2017; Van der Veer et al., 2017). Additionally, to measure general social media usage, the items were merged into one scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$).

3.3.2.3. Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement was measured by four questions covering consumption, participation, production, and communication. We created a new measurement tool, asking for each platform if they consume content (viewing), partici-

pate (comment/like/rate content), produce content (make their own content and upload it), or communicate (use the platform to communicate with others). Following this, four new variables were calculated based on the sum of all platforms (0 = no platform used, 9 = all platform used).

3.3.2.4 Intensity of Following Local SMI

Regarding preference of media consumption, participants were asked to list two of their favorite content creators and the platform they follow them on. This same question was also asked for local content creators. In order to use this local SMI measurement in analysis with regards to intensity of following local SMIs, a new variable, named intensity of following local SMI, was calculated counting the number of platforms used for following the first local SMI mentioned, ranging from 0 to 9.

3.3.2.5 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured both on a personal and a social scale. Rosenberg et al.'s (1989) 6-item Self-Esteem scale was used to investigate personal self-esteem. This was done using a 4-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Strongly agree). Four of the questions were positive, whereas two were originally negative. To avoid confusion among the young participants, the latter two were rephrased to be positively phrased (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$).

3.3.2.6 Urban Identity

Identification with the city from a personal perspective was assessed using the 4-item sub-scale ("general attachment") from the Urban Identity scale (Lalli, 1992) because we considered this shorter scale more suitable for adolescents. This was done using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree; Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

3.3.2.7 Social Identity

To measure social identity in terms of self-categorization and group self-esteem, two subscales from Ellemers et al.'s (1999) social identity scale were used. To measure a sense of belonging to the city from a social point of view, we used the 3-item self-identification subscale (adapted from Ellemers et al.,

1999), which was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree). These questions focused on identification with others living in the city or “Rotterdamers” in this case (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$). To measure group self-esteem (in context of their city-related group) the 4-item group self-esteem subscale (Ellemers et al., 1999) was used, which was also measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$).

3.3.2.8 Demographics

Socio-demographics such as age, gender, nationality, and education level were also gathered. As a measure for nationality and cultural background, we asked for the participants’ parents’ country of birth, as a migrant is defined as having at least one parent born in a foreign country (Statistics Netherlands, 2015). In order to establish a better idea of their relationship to the city, we asked for the participants’ home neighborhood as well as the length of time that they have lived in the city.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Comparisons between Migrant and Non-Migrant Adolescents

Chi-Square tests were conducted to see if migrant and non-migrant adolescents have different access to technological devices. Migrant adolescents more frequently reported that they had their own smartphone than non-migrant adolescents, countering our first hypothesis that non-migrant adolescents have greater access to digital devices. The opposite was found for owning a laptop or a tablet, which was in line with our first hypothesis. Migrant adolescents were less likely to share smartphones, computers, or laptops but more likely to share tablets (See Table 3.1 for %).

Independent t-tests were conducted to analyze if migrant and non-migrant adolescents differ concerning their social media usage to answer our question of whether migrant and non-migrant adolescents differ in their social media engagement.

Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat were used more frequently by non-migrant adolescents than by migrant adolescents (See Table 3.2 for all *Ms*, *SDs*, and *t-values*).

No further comparisons among social media use frequency were significant.



| Access to digital device | Migrant | Non-migrant | χ^2 (1, N = 304) |
|--------------------------|---------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Own smartphone | 91.3% | 78.0% | 9.62** |
| Own computer/laptop | 29.1% | 45.8% | 8.61** |
| Own tablet | 30.7% | 47.5% | 8.61** |
| Shared smartphone | 5.5% | 10.7% | 2.58 |
| Shared computer/laptop | 67.7% | 71.8% | 0.57 |
| Shared tablet | 56.7% | 41.2% | 7.08** |

Table 3.1 Comparison of access to digital devices.

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.



| Activity | Migrants | | Non-migrant | | <i>t</i> -test | All | |
|------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| WhatsApp | 3.84 | 1.00 | 3.76 | 1.26 | ns | 3.79 | 1.16 |
| Facebook | 1.12 | 0.49 | 1.29 | 0.68 | 2.42* | 1.21 | 0.60 |
| Instagram | 2.74 | 1.46 | 2.53 | 1.52 | ns | 2.60 | 1.49 |
| YouTube | 4.10 | 0.81 | 4.41 | 0.87 | 3.10** | 4.29 | 0.84 |
| Twitter | 1.08 | 0.39 | 1.20 | 0.63 | ns | 1.14 | 0.53 |
| Snapchat | 2.17 | 1.23 | 2.62 | 1.41 | 2.86** | 2.41 | 1.35 |
| Musical.ly | 1.92 | 1.37 | 2.25 | 1.55 | ns | 2.09 | 1.49 |
| Pinterest | 1.23 | 0.66 | 1.40 | 1.00 | ns | 1.32 | 0.86 |
| Other | 2.63 | 1.74 | 2.46 | 1.73 | ns | 2.45 | 1.71 |

Table 3.2 *M*s and *SD*s for social media usage for all participants.

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01.

Independent t-tests were run for social media consumption, social media participation, social media production, social media communication, general social media usage, intensity of following local SMI, self-categorization, group self-esteem, urban identity, and self-esteem. Comparisons were made between migrants and non-migrant adolescents. Migrant and non-migrant adolescents only differed significantly for urban identity, in line with our fifth hypothesis, yet countering H2 and answering Q2. Migrant adolescents scored higher on the urban identity than non-migrant adolescents (See Table 3.3 for *M*s, *SD*s and *t*-values). This was in line our fifth hypothesis that urban identity is higher among migrant adolescents, yet countered the second hypothesis that migrants have a higher social identity. It also negatively answered our question on possible differences in self-esteem.

3.4.2 Influences on Social Identity

Multiple linear regression analyses with self-categorization and group self-esteem as criteria were run with migrant status, social media consumption, social media participation, social media production, social media communication, general social media usage, and intensity of following local SMI as predictors. The model for self-categorization did not reach significance, $R^2 = .050$, $F(9,266) = 1.56$, $p = .129$. This rejects our third hypothesis, as social media engagement did not have a positive impact on self-categorization. For group self-esteem we found a significant model, $R^2 = .07$, $F(9,266) = 2.07$, $p = .032$. Both confirming and rejecting our fourth hypothesis, intensity of following local SMI was found to be a significant positive predictor and social media participation was revealed to be a negative predictor (See Table 3.4 for all β s). Social media engagement had both a positive and negative impact on group self-esteem.

3.4.3 Influences on Urban Identity

To analyze influences on urban identity, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using social media consumption, social media participation, social media production, social media communication, general social media usage, intensity of following local SMI, self-categorization, and group self-esteem as predictors. The model was found to be significant, $R^2 = .55$, $F(11,263) = 29.48$,



| | Migrants | | Non-migrants | | <i>t</i> -test |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | |
| Social media consumption | 3.05 | 1.26 | 3.30 | 1.47 | ns |
| Social media participation | 2.07 | 1.23 | 2.37 | 1.49 | ns |
| Social media production | 1.81 | 1.35 | 1.99 | 1.59 | ns |
| Social media communication | 1.76 | 1.01 | 2.01 | 1.29 | ns |
| General social media usage | 2.36 | 0.64 | 2.47 | 0.68 | ns |
| Intensity of following local SMI | 0.49 | 0.81 | 0.57 | 0.84 | ns |
| Self-categorization | 4.82 | 1.39 | 4.55 | 1.67 | ns |
| Group self-esteem | 5.26 | 1.17 | 5.23 | 1.25 | ns |
| Urban identity | 4.20 | 0.76 | 3.91 | 0.91 | 2.86 ** |
| Self-esteem | 3.12 | 0.49 | 3.20 | 0.51 | ns |

Table 3.3 *M*s, *SD*s and *t*-values for social media usage and engagement, social identity, urban identity, and self-esteem.

Note: ** $p < .01$.



| | Self-categorization β | Group self-esteem β |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Migrant status | -.08 | -.01 |
| Social media consumption | .08 | .15 |
| Social media participation | -.06 | -.22* |
| Social media production | -.04 | .08 |
| Social media communication | -.14 | -.14 |
| General social media usage | .02 | -.04 |
| Intensity of following local SMI | .10 | .13* |

Table 3.4 Predictors for self-categorization and group self-esteem.

Note: * $p < .05$.

$p < .001$. Positive predictors were self-categorization, group self-esteem, migrant status, intensity of following local SMI, and general social media usage, confirming our sixth and seventh hypotheses on the positive impact of social media engagement and social identity on urban identity.

Given the significant differences found for the comparison between migrant adolescents and non-migrant adolescents on urban identity, two separate multiple regression analyses were conducted with general social media usage, intensity of following local SMI, self-categorization, and group self-esteem as predictors.

For migrant adolescents, we found a positive influence of self-categorization and group self-esteem, $R^2 = .46$, $F(4, 120) = 25.15$, $p < .001$. For non-migrant adolescents, self-categorization and group self-esteem were again found to have a positive impact on urban identity. In addition, intensity of following local SMI was also found to be a positive predictor, $R^2 = .53$, $F(4, 171) = 48.93$, $p < .001$ (See Table 3.5 for all β s).

3.4.4 Influences on Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was analyzed using a multiple linear regression analysis with social media consumption, social media participation, social media production, social media communication, general social media usage, intensity of following local SMI, self-categorization, group self-esteem, and urban identity as predictors. The model reached significance, $R^2 = .15$, $F(12, 260) = 3.81$, $p < .001$. The only positive predictor found was self-categorization, partly in line with our ninth hypothesis, but at the same time countering it, as well as our eighth hypothesis on the positive impact of social media engagement and the tenth hypothesis on the positive impact of urban identity (See Table 3.6 for all β s).

3.5 Discussion

This study investigated the social media engagement and identity development of adolescents in the super-diverse city of Rotterdam and analyzed the potential differences between migrant and non-migrant adolescents. We found that migrant adolescents more often had their own smartphone and shared a tablet



| Urban identity | All B | Migrant B | Non-migrant B |
|----------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Migrant status | -.13** | - | - |
| Social media consumption | -.06 | - | - |
| Social media participation | -.02 | - | - |
| Social media production | -.12 | - | - |
| Social media communication | -.06 | - | - |
| General social media usage | .13* | .10 | -.01 |
| Intensity of following local SMI | .13** | .06 | .12* |
| Self-categorization | .53*** | .51*** | .59*** |
| Group self-esteem | .16** | .22* | .16* |

Table 3.5 Predictors for urban identity.

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.



Self-esteem B

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Migrant status | .09 |
| Social media consumption | -.03 |
| Social media participation | .18 |
| Social media production | .04 |
| Social media communication | -.01 |
| General social media usage | .03 |
| Intensity of following local SMI | .01 |
| Self-categorization | .22* |
| Group self-esteem | .08 |
| Urban identity | .01 |

Table 3.6 Predictors for self-esteem.

Note: *p < .05.

than non-migrant adolescents (\neq H1), yet non-migrant adolescents had more access to their own computer/laptop and tablet ($=$ H1). The higher number of smartphones among migrant adolescents could, to a certain extent, be explained by the important role of the phone- and internet access in the experience of migration through, for instance, keeping in touch with family, as was found in previous research (Alencar, 2018; De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007). This difference could also be explained by socio-economic differences, as well as parental mediation (Livingstone et al., 2015; Van Dijk, 2012). Computers, laptops, and tablets are generally more expensive than smartphones. Smartphones can also be hand-me-downs from other family members, while some parents may consciously try to restrict their child's digital media use (Livingstone et al., 2015). Investigating social media engagement differences between migrant and non-migrant adolescents (Q1), analysis showed that non-migrant adolescents were more likely to use Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat than migrant adolescents.

In terms of (urban) identity construction, we differentiated between social identity, urban identity, and self-esteem. We found no differences for social identity between the two groups, both in terms of self-categorization and group self-esteem (\neq H2, H2a, H2b). Social media engagement did not have an influence on self-categorization (\neq H3). When investigating the influences of social media engagement on social identity, we found that following local SMIs positively predicted ($=$ H4) and social media participation negatively predicted (\neq H4) group self-esteem. Following local SMIs may help to construct a local identity, as adolescents might find the SMIs to be similar to them. When following these media idols from the same city, adolescents may feel a sense of pride or shared identity, focusing on the idea that they both live in the same city—something that binds them and creates a sense of “us” (Lalli, 1992). On the other hand, social media participation might be directed at a larger, perhaps more global audience and the evaluation of their content. While liking, commenting, and sharing, adolescents may find also themselves comparing, contrasting, and judging. Social media engagement might, therefore, inspire a more critical stance towards one's own local social group. Previous research has also found a reversed argument: those with a negative group self-esteem used

social media to engage with others outside the group (Barker, 2009). This could mean that those who are not fond of the city and its inhabitants might aim to actively engage with content that is not related to this group.

Urban identity was found to be significantly higher among migrant adolescents than non-migrant adolescents (= H5). This could be explained by the fact that migrant adolescents, having different national backgrounds than the one they currently live in, may have less coherent national identities in comparison to non-migrant adolescents. Therefore, our participants identified more strongly with Rotterdam, when asked, than they might when relating themselves to wider notions of identity, such as a Dutch national identity. This is in line with earlier research pointing out the significance of the city in the migration process, as well as the identification on different spatial levels (Georgiou, 2010; Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008). While identifying on one particular spatial level does not exclude identification on the other levels, and identification on one spatial level is not limited to one particular place (as proven by hybrid identities) (Georgiou, 2010; Lalli, 1992; Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008), the significance of the city in the everyday lives of the individual, particularly in the case of a migrant (Georgiou, 2010), may strengthen that sense of belonging. This may especially be the case in a super-diverse majority-minority city, where individuals are generally surrounded by others with similarly diverse identities.

The intensity of following local SMI and general social media usage were positive predictors of urban identity for both groups taken together (= H6). The influence of social media influencers on identity, particularly as role models and inspiration, is in line with research in other fields (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). When one's media idol, a person that is often admired, lives in the same city, this may foster a sense of similarity and recognition, and, as a result, a sense of belonging. Just as is the case with other inhabitants (Lalli, 1992), the influencer may become important to the individual's identity construction through the construction of "us" versus "them", differentiating themselves from other people outside the city (Lalli, 1992). This also connects to the idea that adolescents prefer media idols similar to themselves whom they can identify with (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

In terms of social identity, it was found that both self-categorization and

group self-esteem were positive predictors of urban identity (= H7). This suggests that if one feels like one belongs to the group of “Rotterdamers”, and when they feel good about this group, they also identify with the city personally. This is in line with the argument that well-being is connected to the urge to belong to a social group (Lalli, 1992). Moreover, it also supports the previous argument that the super-diverse group of inhabitants harbors a sense of similarity in its differences.

When testing separately for migrant and non-migrant adolescents, notable results were found. While for both group self-categorization and group self-esteem remained a positive impact on urban identity, differences were found in the impact social media engagement had on urban identity. The intensity of following local SMI was only a positive predictor for non-migrant adolescents. This might be explained by the finding that migrants already have a higher urban identity than non-migrants, possibly due to previously mentioned reasons, and therefore the intensity of following local SMI cannot increase urban identity much more. Non-migrant adolescents, on the other hand, might feel more connected to the city when they engage with local influencers who may strengthen their sense of belonging, as previously argued.

Finally, we found no difference for self-esteem between migrant and non-migrant adolescents (Q2). When analyzing possible influences on self-esteem, only self-categorization was found to be a positive predictor (= H9), whereas group self-esteem, social media engagement, and urban identity were not (\neq H9, \neq H8, \neq H10). Self-categorizing with the local social group could create a sense of belonging, which is connected to the promotion of self-esteem (Lalli, 1992). Resulting from our previous argumentation on urban identity, one could expect self-esteem to be higher for migrants as a result. However, our results go against the idea that high urban identity results in high individual self-esteem. This could be due to the complexity of self-esteem, especially in the life of migrants, where numerous other factors, such as ethnic background and socio-economic status, may also play important roles (Rumbaut, 1994).

3.6 Conclusion

This study investigated adolescents' urban identity from a personal and social perspective and related this to their social media use. Building on the notion of urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983), and positioning this in a framework of the super-diverse city (Vertovec, 2007), as a central space for the negotiation of identity of migrants and non-migrants (Georgiou, 2010; Lalli, 1992), we have found that this urban identity is particularly present among migrant adolescents. Here, social media engagement plays different roles, mostly positively associated with various forms of identity and self-esteem, yet, in one case, also negatively. Furthermore, differences were found between migrant and non-migrant adolescents in terms of access to digital devices and their preferences for social media platforms.

In this project, we have been able to gather data from migrant adolescents—a group generally hard to reach in survey research. The colorful survey, adapted to the interests of this particular age group, worked well in the school setting in which the surveys were conducted. The results may have important implications for studying the well-being of young migrants in super-diverse cities, where urban identity should be taken into account as an important factor in settling in and dealing with differences surrounding them. Taking into account urban identity might be particularly crucial to research involving migrant adolescents who have just arrived in the new city, as they may have to reestablish a sense of belonging in a new place. Having access to and using these social media might prove an essential tool for identity development and for creating a sense of belonging. Finally, future research should investigate in more detail how social media use and engagement plays a role in the construction of the urban identity.

This study has several limitations. The first one entails the distinction made between migrants and non-migrants. Migrants are not a homogeneous group and differ according to their reasons for migration, cultural background, socio-economic status, and the length of time that they have lived in the country (De Block & Buckingham, 2007; Jennissen et al., 2018). Future research should, therefore, take into account the length of residence when investigating the

strength of experienced urban identity. Second, due to the age of the target group, the length of the survey prohibited in-depth questions about engagement. More in-depth research on social media engagement on particular platforms could give a more complete image of the types of social media use among different groups in society. Thirdly, it should be noted that the model for self-categorization did not reach significance, and the variance was relatively limited. Assumptions on the relationship between urban identity, social identity, self-esteem and social media engagement were based on theory. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, causal assumptions are difficult to make. Finally, this research does not explain differences in urban identity between groups. A qualitative study could further investigate how adolescents actively identify with the city by engaging them in making media content about their own situation. All in all, this survey has contributed to the literature on online identity construction among adolescents in super-diverse cities. While some of the findings proved to be largely in line with existing research, our survey has demonstrated that theory can be enriched by incorporating urban identity as part of the identity development of young people in urban environments, particularly in the case of migrant adolescents. As our findings have shown that urban self-categorization is a positive predictor of personal self-esteem, urban identity might play an important role in adolescent empowerment, in which social media is used as a tool for this creation and negotiation of identity.

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4

Urban Influencers

An Analysis of Urban Identity in YouTube Content of Local Social Media Influencers in a Super-Diverse City



Abstract

Influencers belong to the daily media diet of many adolescents. As role models, they have the potential to play a crucial role in the identity construction of their viewers. In the age of social media, such role models may now be found more locally – in the same city – and perhaps with more diverse backgrounds. This may be particularly valuable to adolescents growing up in super-diverse cities, as they are surrounded by a multitude of groups and identities during a life phase in which they have to make sense of who they are and where they belong. Despite the heterogeneity of these identities, there is one thing all have in common: the city they live in. With the city as a common framework, local influencers may be important role models for these adolescents, particularly in negotiating their urban

identity. This paper aims toward mapping the ways in which social media can play a role in the negotiation of urban identity among youngsters by investigating how YouTube influencers from a super-diverse city are related to each other online, and how their content relates to the (super-diverse) city of Rotterdam. Findings show that in their videos and on their channel pages, influencers mainly affiliate themselves with the city through having the city as the background and context of the videos, through their involvement with cultural trends (e.g., soccer, hip-hop) that link to the city, and through their affiliation with other local influencers. We argue that influencers may therefore provide their viewers with content that may potentially help their local viewers strengthen their urban identity.

4.1 Introduction

Social media influencers are highly popular among Dutch youth and can safely be assumed to play a crucial role in the everyday life and media diet of adolescents. These influencers are users of social media who have accumulated a large following online, often to such an extent that it has become (part of) their career (Abidin, 2017). Research shows that they are perceived as (micro-)celebrities and play an important role as media idols (Gleason et al., 2017; Martínez & Olsson, 2019). As social media platforms focused on user-generated content (e.g., YouTube and Instagram) have become increasingly popular, so have their content creators. Some of these individuals, in turn, are strongly admired by adolescents, and some have found a tremendous amount of fame with their large number of followers (Ofcom, 2017). Due to the user-generated content focused character of these platforms, content creation and publication has become available to many regardless of their geographical location or absence of professional materials (Ito et al., 2010; Turner, 2014). As videos can be made and published from the comfort of one's own bedroom or neighborhood, a variety of influencers have become available from various locations, increasingly reflecting society's diversity.

The diversity among these influencers may be of importance to adolescents' development, as influencers function as idols that adolescents can identify with, especially when similar to them (Gleason et al., 2017; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Hoffner, 1996). The local character of the influencer and their videos may also play an important role in this. In *super-diverse cities* (Vertovec, 2007), characterized by great ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity, adolescents find themselves surrounded by different groups and identities, trying to make sense of their place among them. Yet, despite all of their differences, one thing all have in common is the city they live in. Previous research on place identity introduced a city-oriented perspective: urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). This entails a sense of belonging to and identification with the city through the everyday experience of this physical and social setting in the life of the individual (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). This may, for instance, help to differentiate oneself from inhabitants of other cities (Lalli, 1992). Urban identity

can be particularly important to adolescents with a different cultural or national background, for whom it might be easier to identify with the city, than to identify with the country they live in. Our recent survey study among the same target audience has indicated that migrant adolescents indeed experience a higher sense of urban identity compared to non-migrant adolescents (Van Eldik et al., 2019a).

Earlier studies have found that social media play a crucial role in identity development (Baym, 2015; boyd, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). The engagement with the content created by influencers and participation in the comment section are ways in which adolescents can negotiate their identity online. Identifying with and feeling good about one's fellow inhabitants has previously been found to be positively related with urban identity, and indications have been found that identifying with one's fellow inhabitants is, in turn, positively related to personal self-esteem (Lalli, 1992; Van Eldik et al., 2019a). However, representations of an urban identity online may also raise questions about who belongs to the city and who gets to represent it. In light of different identities, a polarization of different urban voices might exist, potentially alienating certain groups. It is therefore important to investigate the way in which the city and its inhabitants are represented, and by whom they are represented.

Moreover, the intensity of following a local influencer has been associated with urban identity and the related social group self-esteem among urban youth, meaning that they felt connected to the city and they felt good about their fellow inhabitants (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). Local influencers may therefore be assumed to play an important role in identifying with the super-diverse city and its inhabitants. A next step is to seek out who these local influencers popular among adolescents are and what content they produce and distribute. To do so we analyzed local YouTube influencers who were found to be most popular in an earlier survey study among 324 Rotterdam adolescents (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). First of all, the online ecology in which the influencers find themselves may play an important role. Channel pages present information about affiliations with other influencers (featured channels and subscriptions), and channel recommendations shown next to the videos are based on similar audiences and themes. Taking into account YouTube's ecology may thus offer insight into to

what extent local influencers present themselves in the context of local networks, as well as the thematic nature of the channels and networks. Therefore our first two research questions are:

RQ1 To what extent are the local influencers of Rotterdam connected to each other through their YouTube affiliations network?

RQ2 How are these local influencers categorized in YouTube's recommender system, and how are these communities connected to how the city is portrayed?

Secondly, the content of the influencers' YouTube channels should also be taken into account. In their textual, visual, and audible elements, the videos may present the city or its inhabitants in a variety of direct or symbolic ways. Influencers may choose to present themselves, their surroundings, and other people in ways that reflect the way they relate to a city. Hence, our third and fourth research questions were:

RQ3 How does the content of these local influencers reflect the super-diverse city of Rotterdam and its inhabitants?

RQ4 What elements are present in the video that connect these local influencers to the super-diverse city of Rotterdam and its inhabitants?

To answer these questions, a network analysis and a thematic analysis were conducted. Combined, these analyses aim to demonstrate in what ways the influencers present and represent the city and its inhabitants, and help understand what adolescents could potentially draw from their online idols in terms of urban identity.

4.2 Theoretical Framework

4.2.1 Adolescents, Media, and Identity

Young people are keen users of social media, and the Dutch youth is no different (Kloosterman & Van Beuningen, 2015). In recent years, visually oriented platforms in particular, such as YouTube and Instagram, have gained increasing

popularity among young users in the Netherlands, and have surpassed the more 'traditional' social networking sites such as Facebook (Kennisset, 2017; Van der Veer et al., 2017).

Social media have previously been found to play an important role in adolescents' identity construction (boyd, 2014; Cover, 2012; Gleason et al., 2017; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011), which is a crucial and central development in this life phase (Delfos, 2013; Erikson, 1968; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Social media offer adolescents the opportunity to get in touch with others from a wide variety of backgrounds (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This diversity of voices, in turn, may help these adolescents construct and negotiate their identities, and serve as a form of validation (Cover, 2012; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). This may be done by comparing and contrasting themselves with existing identities, as well as through countering existing narratives (Leurs et al., 2018). Identity construction through social media may also hold difficulties, as it is more difficult to separate various audiences (boyd, 2014), and may cause a decrease in self-concept unity (e.g., Davis, 2013; Matsuba, 2006). With influencers being central players on many social media platforms, their role in the identity construction of adolescents needs further investigation. It is therefore important to know who these influencers are, and what content they produce that adolescents can borrow from.

4.2.2 Influencers as Micro-Celebrities

The participatory character of today's social media affords users to both view existing material of others and upload their own content – what previously were consumers, are now the producers of content as well (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Some of these users who produce and share user-generated content have gathered a remarkably large following, essentially turning into celebrities. This can be understood as what Senft (2008) has coined *micro-celebrity*, which entails “a new style of online performance that involves people ‘amping up’ their popularity over the web using technologies like video, blogs, and social networking sites” (p. 25). When the activities of these micro-celebrities exceed that of (sometimes partially paid) hobbies, they become social media influencers, which can be understood as its own career trajectory embedded in the professionalized social media ecology (Abidin, 2017). By creating a personal brand on (and sometimes

off of) social media and generating a large following and amount of fame, an influencer becomes attractive to businesses for spreading their advertisements among specific target audiences (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). The success of an influencer is strongly connected to their image or self-branding and their connection to the audience. Authenticity, as a key element, is achieved through blurring the boundaries between the influencers public and private life, and maintaining the status of a perceived amateur (Abidin, 2017; Ferchaud et al., 2018; Jerslev, 2016). Next to that, parasociality and engagement with the audience plays a key role in micro-celebrity, where the influencer creates such a relationship with their audience to maintain engagement by means of intimacy, accessibility, and community (Ferchaud et al., 2018; Jerslev, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Usher, 2018). Collaboration with other influencers is also utilized as a form of cross-promotion, that may further help increase their visibility and further their careers, either by means of existing friendships between influencers or the intervention of a multichannel network (MCN) (Ashton & Patel, 2017; Grünewald et al., 2014; Lobato, 2016). Having cross-promotion among influencers appear in a natural and authentic looking fashion may be important to the credibility of the influencer. Such collaborations and affiliations may, in the case of YouTube, not only be visible in videos, but also on channel pages through influencers' featured channels or subscriptions. Collaboration may thus help viewers to associate one influencer with the other. All in all, networks among influencers are, in different ways, of great importance to the success of their channels.

4.2.3 Influencers and Identity Construction

As media idols, influencers can function as role models for adolescents, given that the consumption of media content by influencers may provide not only entertainment, but also examples of identities (Gleason et al., 2017; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Lovelock, 2017; Turner, 2014). Adolescents may engage with the influencer content by means of consuming the content, participating in comment sections, liking or sharing content, and even producing their own content, for instance in response to or based on the content by these influencers (Jansz et al., 2015; Shao, 2009). As in dialog, influencers often address their audience in a direct way in their videos and engage with them in the comment sections,

creating the parasocial interaction [i.e., the one-sided feeling among the audience that they have an intimate personal relationship with the media figure or celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956)] that is so crucial to their success (Burgess & Green, 2018; Frobenius, 2014). Parasocial relationships, in turn, have been linked to processes of adolescent identity formation (Gleason et al., 2017).

Early adolescents prefer media idols they can identify with –someone with whom they find they have similarities (Delfos, 2013; Cohen, 1999; Hoffner, 1996; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Additionally, previous studies have shown that one’s similarity to a role model, for example with respect to gender and ethnicity, is an important predictor of the influence that the role model has on the individual (e.g., Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Lockwood, 2006). With the increasing diversity of role models available due to the affordances of social media to easily upload content, adolescents may find influencers that have these similarities. They can find role models with, for instance, a same cultural or socio-economic background, or someone from the same city or neighborhood. Consequently, the content made by these role models may have an important influence on these adolescents’ identity construction.

However, not everyone has access to the materials, technologies and support that make professional production possible (Usher, 2018). With the appearance of amateurism often pursued to maintain an image of authenticity in spite of professionalization (Abidin, 2017), micro-celebrity, or being an influencer, is often misunderstood and oversimplified as something that is available and practiced by many ordinary people: the availability and accessibility of social media to many may give the impression of a ‘bottom up’ character to micro-celebrity (Usher, 2018). Research showed it is a small group of people with a privileged background in particular that tend to dominate online content creation (Brake, 2014). Becoming an influencer might therefore not be possible for everyone, resulting in a select group of individuals that are more likely to dominate most of the content on social media on an influencer level. With this selectivity in an environment where authenticity is key, it is important to question the extent to which the influencers and their content reflect the diversity that can be found in today’s society, particularly in highly diverse environments. This question is particularly interesting in light of the very thing that adolescents and their favorite local influencers may have in common, which is place.

4.2.4 Urban Identity

Place plays an important role in the establishment of sense of belonging and the construction of identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1977). Place identity has been researched from a variety of theoretical traditions and can be understood on various levels of scale (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1977). A form of place identity that is specific to the environment of a city, is urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Urban identity is part of one's self-identity, and results from the everyday experiences of an individual in the context of the city (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Providing the backdrop of everyday experiences, the city becomes a symbol for these experiences, as well as an independent entity that provides "a sense of stability and continuity" (p. 294) to the life of the individual (Lalli, 1992). The city, in this sense, "provides an identity-enhancing context for one's biography, and thus a continuity which is relatively independent from definite (e.g., social) changes" (Lalli, 1992, p. 294). In essence, urban identity deals with the role that the city and its inhabitants, in physical as well as symbolic form, play in the everyday life of the individual and how this is part of their understanding of who they are.

Urban identity manifests itself in a variety of ways. Identifying with the city and/or its inhabitants consciously is one of the most direct ways in which urban identity can be recognized (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Belanche et al. (2017) emphasize the cognitive character of this dimension of urban identity, stressing the awareness of one's membership to a social group and identifying with it. This social group may of course also include one's personal social network. Urban identity is also achieved by differentiating the city and/or its inhabitants from other cities or inhabitants (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). As the differentiation between the self and others is central to the creation and negotiation of one's identity in general, inhabitants can make sense of and negotiate their urban identity by means of comparing to other cities, or perhaps non-urban environments, as well as the characteristics and behaviors typically associated with it (Lalli, 1992). This comparing and contrasting may also contribute to an evaluative level of urban identity, where positive and negative connotations may play an important role (Belanche et al., 2017). This can, in turn, play a role in self-esteem and self-

efficacy (Belanche et al., 2017; Van Eldik et al., 2019). Urban identity may also be viewed from a more environmental and symbolic perspective (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). The spatial characteristics signify the everyday living experience of those living in the city (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Certain landmarks or other symbols may also be recognized as typical to that city (Belanche et al., 2017). In line with this argument, famous individuals commonly associated with the city may have a similar symbolic function.

To investigate urban identity in the context of Rotterdam, it is crucial to take into account the specific characteristics of the city. Rotterdam is the second largest city of the Netherlands, being only smaller than the capital Amsterdam, with 644,527 inhabitants (Statistics Netherlands, 2019) and it is a super-diverse city (Scholten et al., 2019b), which means it is characterized by great diversity on various complexly intertwined levels (Vertovec, 2007). Rotterdam holds a complexity of diversities, not only related to ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic levels, but also migration history, social and living situations, and more. Among the four largest cities in the Netherlands with more than 300,000 inhabitants, Rotterdam has the highest number of youth with a non-western migrant background (Statistics Netherlands, 2017). It is a majority-minority city, meaning that the majority of inhabitants has a migration background (Jennissen et al., 2018). It holds more than 200 different nationalities and a large variety of ethnic backgrounds (Jennissen et al., 2018), with 80,742 (12.6%) western migrants and 224,109 (38.2%) non-western migrants in 2018 (Statistics Netherlands, 2018a). Socio-economic diversity is also strongly present in Rotterdam, with 20 to 22% of minors living in poverty in 2016 (Hoff, 2017). Moreover, neighborhoods and schools show segregation in terms of socio-economic status and migration background (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2019; Herweijer, 2008; OBI, 2019). This multi-faceted diversity of the city may therefore be crucial in the everyday experience of the city, and the cultural products and understandings that rise from it (Alim & Pennycook, 2007; Bennett, 1999; Georgiou, 2010).

4.2.5 Urban Identity and Social Media

Previous research has investigated different ways in which place can play a role in the use of social media and relating identity construction, for instance

through investigation of sharing locations on Four Square (Saker, 2017), and other location-based technologies (Schwartz & Haleboua, 2015). As Schwartz and Haleboua (2015) argue, the mentioning of location on social media can be seen as “parts of larger narratives and performances of embodiment and experience of place” (p. 1656). Previous research has also found indications that a high intensity of following influencers from one’s city is associated with a higher level of urban identity (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). Adolescents who followed local influencers on multiple channels had a higher urban identity than those who did not. Influencers therefore can be said to play an important role in the construction of urban identity. Influencers may differentiate themselves from people from other cities, emphasize the positive characteristics of the city, or adolescents might recognize themselves in small details with regards to one’s language or habits. The narrative of a local influencer with regards to their background and identity in the context of the city may also invite adolescent audiences to recognize their similarity with (the lives of) the influencer. For instance, a local influencer might move through the city center while recording their vlog, providing the viewer with an environment that is highly recognizable, or might even openly announce that they identify as a “Rotterdammer”. Moreover, the diversity of inhabitants in the super-diversity may play a crucial and interesting role. Previous research has argued that media idols and influencers can play an important role for minorities (Briggs et al., 2012; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Lovelock, 2017). With fewer role models in traditional media, social media may provide a place where adolescents may find positive role models. Role models have previously been found to stimulate a positive self-image in the context of sex-roles (Ochman, 1996) or may serve as sources of pride, inspiration and comfort for sexual minorities (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011), yet media may also hold stereotypes that may negatively affect self-esteem, as was found in the context of African American youths (Ward, 2004). It is therefore interesting to investigate how diverse these role models, who have the city and therefore presumably also urban identity in common, and their representations of the city are. With their expressions of urban identity, influencers may also stimulate that identity in the adolescent audience member. Connection through place may not only be prevalent from the content of their videos, but also from their collaborations

and affiliations with, or thematic connection to, other influencers from that same city visible on their channels. As urban identity may be tied to and interconnected with many elements of an individual's life and experiences, content produced by influencers with explicit or implicit references to the city and its (youth)culture, as well as the connections between these local influencers, may therefore play a crucial role in the negotiation of their viewers' urban identity.

4.3 Methods

Two methods were used in this study. First, a small-scale network analysis was conducted based on a previous survey that asked for local influencers (Van Eldik et al., 2019a), to help us understand patterns of interest and collaboration between and around these influencers on YouTube (i.e., affiliation network), and to understand their position in thematic communities resulting from YouTube's recommender systems (i.e., related channel network). Second, a thematic content analysis was conducted on the content of six influencers that were selected on the basis of the survey, focusing on the ways in which the city is present and urban identity is communicated to the audience, both implicitly and explicitly.

4.3.1 Sample

A survey among 324 Rotterdam adolescents aged 9 to 13 ($n = 321$; $M = 10.65$; $SD = 0.88$), including 160 boys and 159 girls, was conducted in 2018 (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). The survey was conducted on three different schools in two different neighborhoods of Rotterdam, representing a multitude of socio-economic, migration, and cultural backgrounds. The survey asked participants for their two favorite influencers from Rotterdam and on which social media platforms they followed them. Non-local influencers or local non-influencers were omitted from the resulting list, and the frequency of mentions of each local influencer was noted. A local influencer was defined as an individual with a social media account from the region of Rotterdam who had a significant following ($>15,000$ subscribers). This resulted in a list of local influencers with YouTube and Instagram as the main platforms. From here we focused on YouTube, not only for its

popularity, but also because, unlike Instagram, the platform allows for retrieval of their channels' networked context. Currently YouTube is visited by around 2 billion logged-in users each month (Solsman, 2019; YouTube, n.d.). YouTube provides a space where all users can upload videos, which can be viewed by others, with room for 'liking,' commenting and sharing the content. The resulting list of 18 influencers, with subscriber counts ranging between 15.000 and 1.500.000 ($M = 339,016$; $SD = 379,325$), was the foundation for the following analyses. This research was carried out with the approval of ESHCC's Ethics Review Board.

4.3.2 Network Analysis - Influencer Network

A network analysis was conducted to identify patterns of interest and (local) collaboration (RQ1), and identify larger thematic communities in which the influencers' YouTube channels are algorithmically categorized (RQ2). First, in order to uncover patterns of interest and collaboration, we used Rieder's (2015) YouTube Data Tools to retrieve the featured channels and channel subscriptions of the 18 influencers identified by the respondents of the survey, including the 6 influencers that were selected for the thematic analysis. Featured channels are other YouTube channels that users display on their channels with the goal of showing other users' channels that they recommend, typically signifying affiliation or collaboration. Subscriptions can be found on the same channel profile page but refer to other YouTube channels that the user follows, highlighting interest and/or identification. Besides the first-degree connections, we also retrieved second and third degree connections of the 18 influencers, each time connecting the channels returned by previous iterations with new sets of channels. *Gephi*, a network analysis and visualization software package, was used to visualize the 'affiliation network' (Bastian et al., 2009).

Second, in order to understand the influencers' channel's position in YouTube's recommender systems – YouTube typically clusters channels that cover similar themes together (Rieder et al., 2018) – we used Rieder's (2015) YouTube Data Tools to retrieve the related channels for our 18 influencers. Here, too, we retrieved second and third degree connections. This resulted in our 'related channels network' that we also visualized using *Gephi*. We used *Gephi's* implementation of the Louvain algorithm with a resolution of 0.8 to detect commu-

nities in the 'related channel network' (Blondel et al., 2008). In contrast to the 'affiliation network' that showed patterns of interest and affiliation between channels, this network reflects types of channels associated with each other based on YouTube's algorithm, likely based on previous user engagement, indicating a similar target audience, and the communities in this network often signify thematic clusters. Further details on both steps can be found in Section "Results."

4.3.3 Qualitative Content Analysis - Video Content

In our qualitative content analysis we investigated the representation of the city and the inhabitants (RQ3), and how the influencer positioned themselves in it (RQ4). We focused on local influencers who made video material in the form of vlogs. Here, we defined vlogs as all user-generated videos that include the maker of the video talking to the camera in a casual fashion. This may entail the influencer taking the viewer with them in their everyday lives, but may also include more structured formats, such as interviewing or challenges.

Six of the local influencers from the survey were selected for further in-depth investigation. In this sample, five out of six influencers were men, and two out of six influencers could be categorized as white Dutch with no apparent migration background, whereas the other four seemed to be of various other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During the selection of these six influencers, the most frequently mentioned influencers were chosen, influencers who did not produce vlogs were omitted, and in case a local influencer had more than one YouTube channel, only one of these channels was chosen (often their main or individual channel). We selected the 40 most recent vlogs from each influencer for a pre-selection. This resulted in 240 videos that went through a pre-selection process, investigating the extent to which these videos presented the city, its inhabitants, or urban identity. Moreover, videos that were not considered vlogs were omitted. Videos that were made in high affiliation with a third party (except for other influencers) were also omitted. In total, 134 (56%) videos were deemed relevant enough, and the 10 most recent relevant videos of each channel were selected for further in-depth analysis, leaving a total of 60 videos. We aimed to answer to what extent and how the content published by local

YouTube influencers, popular among local adolescents, relates to the super-diverse city (RQ3 and RQ4). Following the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2006), we first familiarized ourselves with the data, after which the initial open codes were established. During the next step of looking for themes, 7 themes with 1–9 subthemes each emerged, which were reviewed on the level of the codes and the dataset. This was further limited and merged to a total of 5 themes, with 2–6 subthemes each, which, in turn, were further defined and specified. Two coders were involved in the measurement of the intercoder agreement and the establishment of the codebook. The intercoder agreement based on a subsample of the videos had a Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.81$ (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

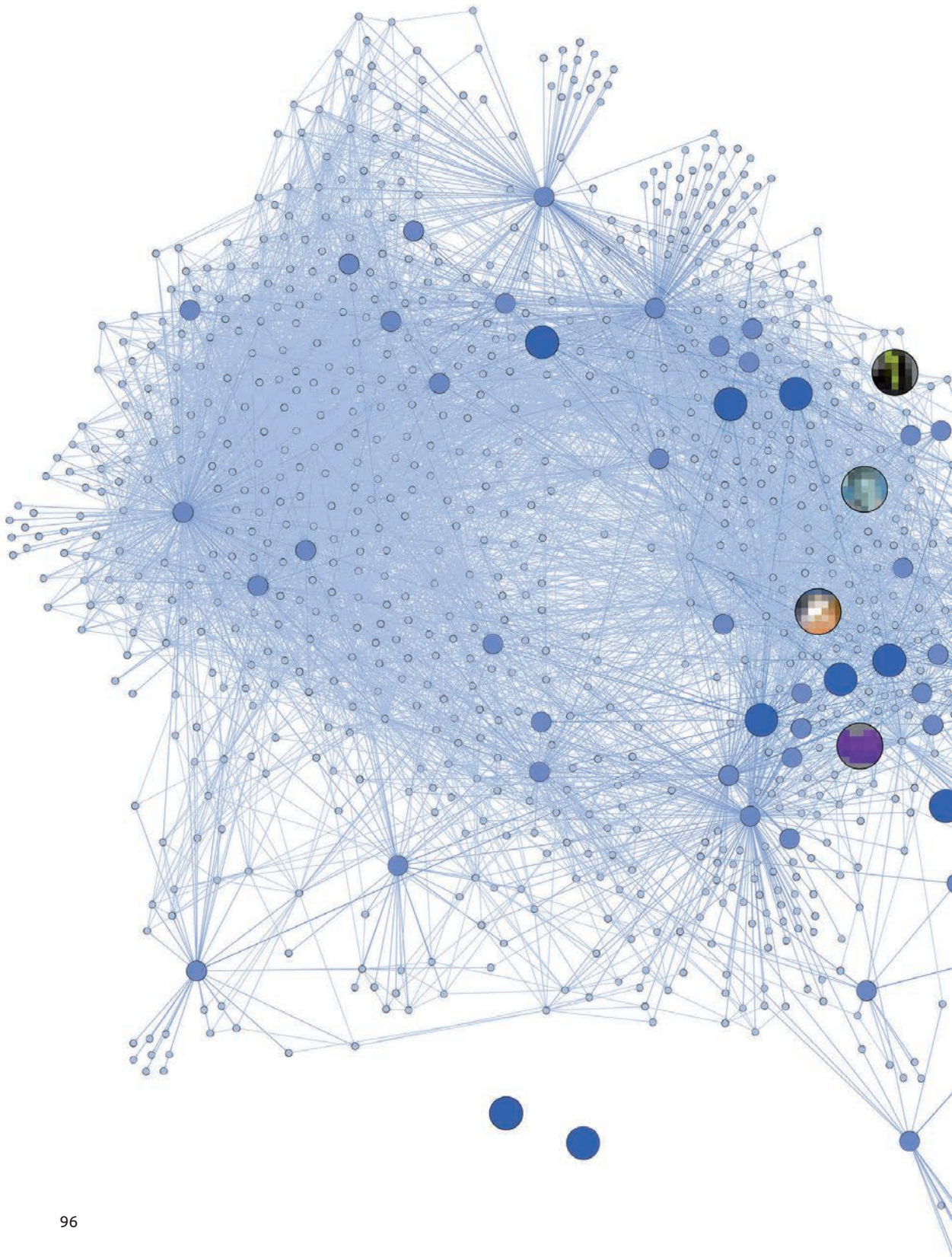
4.4 Results

4.4.1 Network Analysis of YouTube Channels

In our network analyses we aimed to position the influencers in relation to each other in an affiliation network, as well as in relation to thematic communities in a related channel network.

4.4.1.1 How Are the Influencers Connected to Each Other?

To analyze the patterns of affiliation and interest between the influencers, three steps were taken. First, we analyzed the direct links between the featured channels and subscriptions of the 18 influencers identified in the survey – to what extent they referred to each other on their channel pages. By analyzing the affiliation network, we found that 9 of the 18 influencers were directly linked to each other's YouTube channels (network density = 0.039), typically demonstrating affiliation and/or interest. This network consists of two components, meaning that there are two clusters of influencers linking to each other with no connection between these groups. The other nine were not connected to any of the original channels at this point. Second, we investigated the featured channels and subscriptions of the channels that the original 18 influencers linked to, to see if there were possible affiliations between the 18 influencers



through other channels. We found that these 69 channels had 128 connections between them (network density = 0.027), which were separated into four components, each holding 2 to 50 channels. Three of our original influencers still remained without any links, or affiliations, with other channels. As a final step, we investigated the featured channels and subscriptions that the previous 69 channels linked to. We found 937 channels with 7558 connections between them (network density = 0.009). The previously separate components now connected to each other, becoming one component, and only two of the original 18 channels remained without affiliations. Almost all 18 influencers

are thus indirectly affiliated with each other within three degrees of separation, contributing to the appearance of a local group of influencers that are familiar with each other (see Figure 4.1 for a visualization of the previous three steps and their connections). Such a locally connected group may, in turn, strengthen a sense of the city as a shared identity.

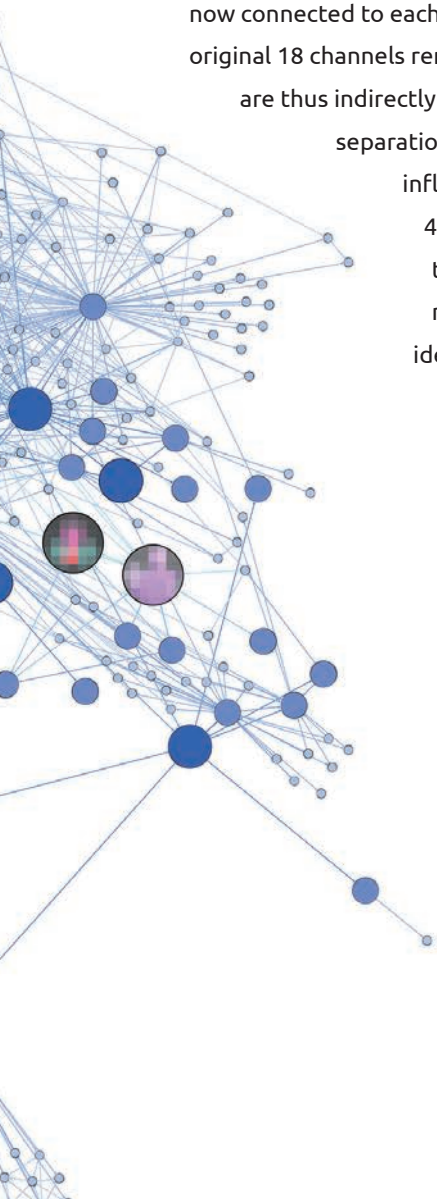


Figure 4.1 The figure shows the affiliations between channels based on their featured channels and subscriptions. The dark blue dots indicate the original 18 influencers, the medium blue dots indicate the channels directly connected to one of the 18 influencers (1st degree connections), and the light blue dots indicate second degree connections. The six influencers that are analyzed in the thematic analysis are displayed with blurred pictures. Lines between the dots demonstrate a connection between two influencers through their featured channels or subscriptions.

4.4.1.2 In What Communities Do the Influencers Position themselves?

To investigate the position of the 18 influencers in YouTube's recommender systems, we analyzed the related channel network. The related channels algorithm connects YouTube channels that are engaged with by the same users. On a network level, this leads to communities of channels that are likely to have something in common, such as a similar topical focus. The related channels were gathered in April, 2019. Unfortunately, the related channel feature is no longer available on YouTube since May 2019 (YouTube, 2019). Retrieving first, second, and third degree connections caused the network to grow exponentially with each iteration. This resulted in a network of 905 channels and 4809 connections between them. Community detection resulted in 15 communities, with a modularity score of 0.72. We have reflected on the contents of the channels in each community to label them accordingly. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the communities in which our influencers found themselves.

One of the 18 influencers was not attached to any part of the component and had no connections of its own. While we found no clear indications why, it might be caused by the scale of our data collection. More iterations would perhaps connect the channel to the component. Other communities found, but not containing any of our influencers were: *Dutch Traditional Media Community*, *General Music Community*, *US DIY Community*, *US Vlogger Community*, *Car Community*, *Specific Brazilian Soccer Team Community*, *International Soccer Community*, *General Brand/Consumer Community*, and *US News, Politics & Entertainment Community* (see Figure 4.2 for a visual representation of the different communities, their links, and the positions of our original 18 and 6 influencers in it). Most of these communities were international or predominantly US-based, whereas the communities that included the influencers were all predominantly Dutch.

The communities in which the influencers were found are therefore diverse, but reflect well the interests of the adolescents. Interestingly, almost half of the influencers were located in the Dutch *Urban Music Community*. This is particularly relevant due to the urban and diverse character of this music scene, which fits the super-diverse character of the city. With this and the affiliations between local influencers in mind, it invites further investigation of the content of the videos to establish the ways in which the city, its inhabitants, and urban identity are present and how they are portrayed.



| Number of original 18 (and 6) influencers | Description |
|--|--|
| 8 (2) | <p><i>Dutch Urban Music Community</i></p> <p>Mostly Dutch male YouTubers, as well as music channels, with a strong tendency toward urban music (hip hop, R&B, and rap) and with great ethnic and cultural diversity. Target toward those interested in urban music.</p> |
| 3 (0) | <p><i>Dutch Family (Friendly) Vlogger Community</i></p> <p>Most Dutch family-friendly lifestyle vloggers, such as teens and families with children. Contains content about everyday life, toys, but also beauty and fashion. Likely oriented at a predominantly younger (female) audience.</p> |
| 2 (1) | <p><i>Dutch Soccer Community</i></p> <p>Predominantly Dutch soccer vloggers, teams, channels, and sponsors. Aimed at soccer enthusiasts.</p> |
| 2 (1) | <p><i>Dutch Entertainment and Games Vlogger Community</i></p> <p>Mostly Dutch white male vloggers who focus on vlogs, challenges, pranks, humor, extreme sports and games. Likely oriented at (early) adolescent boys.</p> |
| 2 (2) | <p><i>Dutch Lifestyle Vlogger Community</i></p> <p>Dutch YouTubers, vloggers, predominantly white young adult females, addressing lifestyle, beauty and fashion, among other things. Likely oriented at, but not limited to, adolescent, or young adult females.</p> |

Table 4.1 An overview of the communities in which the original 18 influencers were present.

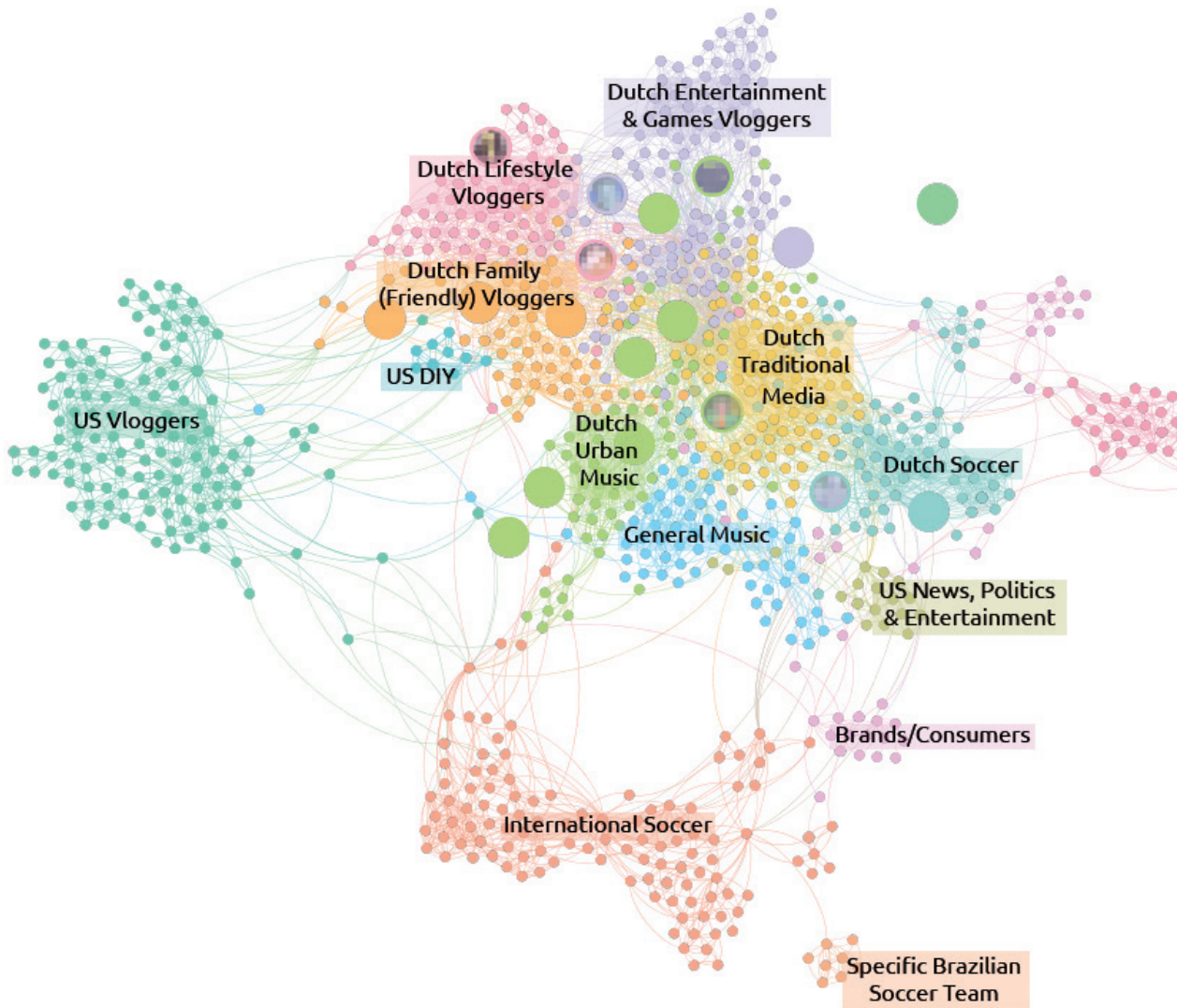


Figure 4.2 The related channel network including the 15 communities found through community detection. The original 18 influencers are enlarged, and the six influencers part of our thematic analysis contain blurred pictures. The direction of connection is indicated by a clockwise bended line between the dots.

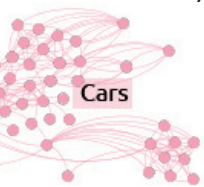
4.4.2 Content Analysis of YouTube Videos

In the following section we present our findings of the thematic analysis. Five themes were found, most of them divided into a number of subthemes. The main themes are: *Being and Living in the City*, *Culture and Diversity*, *People and Relationships*, *Urban Symbols*, and *Other Identities*.

4.4.2.1 Being and Living in the City

As a first theme, being and living in the city emerged. We found that there were commonly direct references to living in, being in, or being from Rotterdam.

This was generally focused on mentioning one's whereabouts, showing the environment, and stating one's roots. This theme can be separated into three subthemes: *Being in Rotterdam*, *Living in Rotterdam*, and *Being from Rotterdam*.



Being in Rotterdam

As influencers were followed through their everyday lives, they often pointed out that they were in Rotterdam at various moments of their day being occupied in various activities. This was mostly done by means of saying this to the audience: "I am here, somewhere in a neighborhood in Rotterdam" or "I get my nails done here in Rotterdam." Another influencer indicated his location in Rotterdam on a map that was later edited into the video. Such statements focus the attention on the city, and make it known to the audience that they are recording their videos and living their everyday lives in this city.

Living in Rotterdam

A more personal approach to this focus on being in Rotterdam is influencers pointing out that their home is in Rotterdam. This was not only hinted toward, but also mentioned or shown: "Anyway, I am happy to be almost in Rotterdam, or in other words, that means I'm almost home." Homes can also become symbols for being home in Rotterdam when videos of influencers are frequently recorded inside. Walking in and out of their residences, showing the view from their windows or doors, and discussing the location of one's home all contributed to this. Such statements and footage attract the attention to the city, and show that the influencer lives in this city, and thus belongs to this group of Rotterdam inhabitants.

Being from Rotterdam

Some influencers implicitly or explicitly identified or were identified as being a Rotterdammer in their videos. This can be seen, for instance, when someone addresses a Rotterdam influencer: "Did you know we just came from your hometown? Rotterdam?" In another video, an influencer argues, while wearing a soccer scarf from an opposing soccer team: "By the way, I am from Rotterdam, in case you didn't know." In another situation, a Rotterdam celebrity exclaims with a clear Rotterdam accent when talking to about another local influencer: "I think he is a Rotterdammer." Here, the accent in combination with the exclamation that was an unnecessary remark in the context of the conversation, can be interpreted as not only a strong identification with the city itself by the celebrity, but also the identification of other Rotterdammers as such, and a feeling of connection with other inhabitants.

4.4.2.2 Culture and Diversity

A second theme that emerged from the data was that of culture and diversity. This theme holds a variety of cultural elements, can be connected to the minority-majority and super-diverse character of Rotterdam, and stresses its urban cultural characteristics that are largely intertwined with this.

Inhabitants and diversity

Inhabitants and their diversity were commonly presented in the videos. Not only did the influencers themselves reflect a selection of the diverse group of cultures, ethnicities and nationalities that live in Rotterdam, but some also showed ordinary inhabitants in their videos or interacted with them. This particular focus on ordinary Rotterdammers can be best exemplified by one of the influencers who conducted interviews in the streets of Rotterdam. They addressed their interviewees with a question, often with a silly topic, and had the interviewees' answer, allowing them to speak and talk about themselves. In another example, an influencer interacts for quite some time with an ordinary Rotterdammer when they give away some of their furniture. By allowing the ordinary Rotterdammers to respond and speak for themselves in the video, they are offered a voice in the videos of these influencers, be it under the control

of the influencer by means of the questions asked and the editing process. Including ordinary Rotterdammers in videos can be interpreted as a way for the influencers to engage with ordinary Rotterdammers as fellow inhabitants. The influencers interact with ordinary inhabitants just like their viewers, and do this in public spaces where their viewers could find themselves in their everyday lives. Even when influencers did not interact with the locals, they provided an image of Rotterdam and its inhabitants by placing themselves in public spaces recognizable to the Rotterdam viewer from their everyday lives. This shows the viewer that the influencers are present in their environment and that they surround themselves with other ordinary Rotterdammers.

Many of the videos reflected the multitude of diversities, and its complex relationships that characterize the super-diverse city. Both the diversity among the influencers, as well as that among other Rotterdammers in the videos, contributed to this reflection of the super-diverse city. Diversity was mostly present in the videos in the form of nationality, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, and, to a lesser extent, a focus on migration. For the sake of this analysis, these elements have been isolated from their complex relationships to each other. Diversity on a national level was often present in forms of mentioning, questions toward, or expressing of one's national background, such as: "You are a real Surinamese," "My mother is half Italian," or, jokingly, "Are you a Turkish Moroccan?" Connecting to this, a diverse set of ethnicities were present in the videos. While this diversity was visually present, ethnicity was seldom discussed. Emphasis on cultural backgrounds was another way in which diversity became apparent, which was mostly expressed by means of cultural elements such as, for instance, playing or performing world music, religious expressions, lifestyle choices, and the various languages spoken. The videos also contained socio-economic diversity. The presence of expensive possessions, ranging from cars and houses, to a relatively luxury lifestyle gave the impression of a high socio-economic status among some of the influencers, which is possibly the result of their work as (successful) influencers. However, not all grew up with such a socio-economic status, which was particularly demonstrated by one of the influencers who receives an all-in holiday as a reward for their hard work on their channel and, overwhelmed with emotions, reveals that they have never

been on holiday. Later they say, in disbelief and gratefulness: "I am proud of myself. I'm not allowed to say this, but with all due respect: what [young person from my neighborhood] can say that they have reached [so many] followers? No one." This demonstrates the socio-economic differences that exist within the city, particularly on a neighborhood level. Finally, migration was implicitly and explicitly mentioned in a few instances. When talking to a girl with a migrant background, one influencer asks: "How long have you been living in the Netherlands?" stressing her migration background. Additionally, when visiting a small town, one of the influencers jokingly asks if they have ever met a beautiful black man, emphasizing the absence of diversity in the rural areas as opposed to the rich diversity in the city. Together, various forms of diversity, which were present in different combinations, represented the complexity of the super-diverse city and its inhabitants.

Language and dialect

Language was a recurring element in many of the videos on various levels. First of all, many different languages were spoken in videos. While the main language of all videos was Dutch, the national language of the Netherlands, words or sentences were spoken in other languages. Sometimes ordinary Rotterdammers in videos were asked to speak their mother tongue: "How would you say I love you and I never want to lose you in Antillean?" Or, in another instance: "How would you say that in Turkish?" Other times, influencers spoke other languages, or emphasized that Dutch was not their first language: "But Creole is my language." Some of the influencers were also able to understand some of the other languages spoken, indicated by responding in the same language or in Dutch.

Aside from, and perhaps in contrast to, other languages was the Rotterdam dialect and accent. This dialect and accent was mostly spoken by white Dutch Rotterdammers, including some of the influencers and their families. While sometimes it was exaggerated for reasons of humor and mockery, it can be perceived as a clear marker for many that signifies being born and raised in Rotterdam. It was also used to explicitly mark one's Rotterdam identity. Interestingly, well-known dialect sentences that address the origins from the speaker were playfully used in some instances by non-white influencers to point out

their affiliation with the city and culture of Rotterdam. For example, when an influencer accompanied by another Rotterdam celebrity exclaims in dialect: “Are we from Rotterdam? Can’t you hear it?” Despite it not being their dialect in their daily speech, they used this to emphasize their Rotterdam identity.

Urban culture

Various typical urban cultural elements were present in the videos. Urban culture may include many (cultural) elements that are important to people’s everyday lives in the city (not to be confused with, or limited to, the music and lifestyle scene also termed urban). The most frequent and important examples in the videos related to soccer, as well as hip hop, rap, and other associated cultural elements. These themes are to some extent related to the genre or community of some of the influencers, as demonstrated in the network analysis.

Music was a common element in the videos with hip hop and rap as the most frequent genres. This is in line with our network analysis in which many of the popular local influencers appeared in the Dutch Urban Music Community, which was characterized by urban music and cultural diversity. Music, predominantly hip hop and rap, was played and listened to, but was also performed (professionally and non-professionally) and recorded. Moreover, the videos also included (references to) cultural elements that are often associated with hip hop, rap and the associated lifestyle, such as slang, a particular clothing style, or references to life on the streets. This theme was sometimes accompanied and characterized by a dichotomy that touches the theme of diversity on many levels, such as socio-economic position (rich versus poor), ethnic (generally white versus non-white), and of course cultural (dominant versus non-dominant). When two influencers are discussing hip hop, one tells the other: “Did you know I still listen to a lot of Tupac and Biggie? [...] I might look like a frat boy, but listen, I’m ‘gangster’.” Here, the influencer seems to hint toward a certain lifestyle that diverges from the way he looks, and expresses a preference for that lifestyle that counters his identity on the basis of his appearance. Such expressions of urban culture might therefore be seen as reflections of the multicultural city, urban inequalities, and, on the other hand, the cultural richness that characterizes the city.

Soccer was a central element to the videos of a number of influencers, as was

found in the network analysis, but it was certainly not limited to those within the soccer community. Soccer was a carrier of many other themes, but in doing so also fulfilled its own urban cultural function. Not only was it associated with the local soccer teams, and rivalry with other cities, it can also be seen as a sport available to everyone, despite one's background. Some of the influencers showed and talked to famous professional soccer players from Rotterdam in their videos. The soccer players often had diverse ethnic, national, or cultural backgrounds, reflecting the super-diverse character of the city. A professional soccer player tells to one of the influencers "At a certain point on a Saturday morning I thought to myself: I just want to play soccer with my buddies," and continues to tell that he joined his friends at the local soccer team and never stopped playing since. Addressing such locals that became national, if not global, celebrities can be considered a way to reflect how, for some, soccer can play a role in making it in life, or even potentially improve one's socio-economic status, especially as celebrities are often seen as role models to adolescents. Soccer, which is shown as an accessible sports that can both be played on the field and on the streets, can thus be seen as an urban cultural element that connects many elements of the city, including, but not limited to, urban diversity and the social identity of an urban soccer team.

4.4.2.3 People and Relationships

The social environment of the influencers in relation to their portrayal of the city was the third theme that emerged from the videos. This can be distinguished into two subthemes: celebrities and influencers, and their personal Rotterdam network and family in relation to the city.

Celebrities and influencers

In their videos, the influencers were often not the only famous people that could be found. Often times, these influencers had a network of other influencers and celebrities around them that could be considered friends, acquaintances or colleagues. This ranged from working together, to hanging out together in an everyday setting, as well as making videos together. One influencer introduces another: "I am here with an old friend, [...] I knew her before YouTube."

Other videos included official collaborations, but also included being on the set of making another media product with other influencers or celebrities, such as television programs, YouTube videos or recording music. Many videos included other Rotterdam celebrities and influencers either by them being present or mentioning them. Interestingly, five out of six influencers appeared in each other's videos, some more frequently than others. This reflects a Rotterdam network, which is in line with the local network found in the network analysis. Moreover, others of the 18 identified local influencers, as well as influencers that they featured or subscribed to on their channel page, were also present in the videos, again reinforcing the Rotterdam network established in the network analysis. Rotterdam professional soccer players, music artists, and television personalities also frequently appeared in the videos.

Rotterdam influencers in some cases identified or were identified as urban influencers, meaning that they were famous in the city and known by an urban audience. One influencer, when shooting their video far away from Rotterdam, asks people if they know who the influencer is. While the answers are mixed, the explicit question, phrased in a somewhat mocking way, not only seems to stress the urban versus the non-urban, but also seems to indicate that the influencer did not expect those outside of the city to know them. This would in turn indicate that they expect their audience to be primarily urban, as opposed to, for instance, rural. This image was often reinforced by being recognized in a city context. A clear understanding of one's audience as being urban may then indicate a form of identification with the city as the place where their audience resides, where they are famous, and with which and whom the influencer can identify.

Personal Rotterdam network and family in relation to the city

Influencers' videos also frequently featured, either by means of mentioning or showing, their friends and family living in the same city. Particularly interesting here was the mentioning of friends or family in relation to the city. This ranged from growing up together, to supporting the same soccer team, to them living in the same city. When explaining about their relationships with other influencers and differentiating these work-friends from what they call 'real' friends,

one influencer explained: "My friends I met mostly here in Rotterdam. I know them since they were kids, and we've experienced so much together. That's where my roots are." The influencer thus stresses how their local friends with whom they grew up are still very important to their life, stressing their history in Rotterdam. Another influencer shows how their Rotterdam identity is something they want to pass on to their children: "I always wanted to take [my daughter to a Feyenoord game], but she was too young." Feyenoord is important here, as it is one of the professional soccer teams of Rotterdam. The influencer then goes on to dedicate a whole video to this activity. This focus on one's personal network of friends and family in Rotterdam symbolizes the entanglement of one's life with other non-famous Rotterdammers, and sometimes even accentuated their personal history in the city.

4.4.2.4 Urban Symbols

A fourth theme that was found dealt with urban symbols and can be divided into a variety of subthemes: areas, landmarks, teams, events, businesses, and explaining urban symbols.

Areas

Areas referred to any mentioning or showing of Rotterdam or its specific neighborhoods, including towns and small cities in the Greater Rotterdam Area. Frequently, the influencers were driving or walking through various parts of Rotterdam. Showing such areas may invite the viewer to recognize the surroundings, and may be perceived as environments that they live their everyday lives in.

Landmarks

Landmarks, on the other hand, often included, but were not limited to, the well-known Erasmus bridge, the De Rotterdam building, but also various soccer stadiums, as well as the river, local public transport, and lesser known landmarks. One influencer shows a cruise ship and, behind it, the Erasmus bridge and stresses its size: "A bizarrely big cruise ship. Bigger than the other, higher as well. [...] You can barely see the Erasmus Bridge!" Similar to the areas, these

landmarks are (the décor of) the sceneries in which the videos take place, offering the possibility for the viewer to recognize this as the environment that they themselves live their everyday lives in.

Teams

Teams in most cases referred to soccer teams, including Feyenoord, Sparta, and Excelsior, with the first being dominant. This connects to the network analysis findings where the *Dutch Soccer Community* was among the most important and hosted Dutch soccer teams, including Rotterdam teams. Soccer teams, and especially the fandom surrounding it, can be considered important markers of urban identity – belonging to the city and supporting their team. Influencers visited games, wore logos on clothing, talked and played with (professional) players, and soon. This theme connected to other urban symbols such as events, landmarks, logos, but also celebrities and influencers, as well as rivalry with other (urban) identities.

Events

The events in Rotterdam that were shown or mentioned ranged from sports events, such as soccer games and the Rotterdam Marathon, to other local events, such as the International Film Festival Rotterdam and Trek Festival. One influencer explains as they drive away from their home and, on the way, show footage of the marathon event: “Today, the marathon of Rotterdam takes place, or, in other words, it’s very crowded in the city.” These events are happening in the lives of influencers and their Rotterdam audience at the same time. Moreover, in many instances, these events can be linked back to the previous three urban symbols of areas, landmarks and teams.

Businesses

Some influencers also mentioned or visited local Rotterdam businesses of different sizes – ranging from restaurants, to hairdressers, to the Feyenoord shop. For example, influencers went to eat at a local restaurant, named the restaurant, and showed the food. Sometimes the employees or owners were shown as well. Moreover, they helped their fellow Rotterdammers by promoting

these businesses. Such collaborations can be considered crucial and common in terms of expanding each other's reach, as well as influencer marketing related activities. Not only are such businesses owned by fellow Rotterdammers, these businesses may also be recognizable to the viewers and might be places they visit or pass by now and then.

Explaining urban symbols

Urban symbols were in some occasions also explicitly named or explained by influencers. By pointing out the urban symbols or giving an explanation about the urban symbol, sometimes in relation to living in Rotterdam, they seemed to aim to educate the viewer on the city of Rotterdam, and position themselves as locals or at least very familiar with the city. An example of this is when an influencer shoots a video while traveling from one side of the city to the other, and on the way they describe all the famous landmarks and their location in the city: "I am acting as a tour guide," they proclaim. Later they emphasize their local knowledge and, seemingly, their everyday living experience: "I just arrived at Leuvehaven [station], that stop is of course famous for Rotterdammers and [the announcement voices] always say: Leuvehaven station, Eyehospital." Such explanations of urban symbols thus function as an extra emphasis, and can be perceived to connect the environment to the (knowledge of) the influencer.

4.4.2.5 Comparisons With and Reflections on Other Identities

As a final theme we found that the images of Rotterdam, its inhabitants, and urban identity were also established next to images of their opposites. The most important contrasts found were Amsterdam, other cities, and the comparison of urban versus rural.

Amsterdam

The rivalry and comparison between Amsterdam and Rotterdam is nothing new in the Netherlands, and it was therefore not surprising that this was present in the videos. As the two biggest cities in the Netherlands, they have a long history of competition and rivalry on many fields. It was therefore surprising

that Amsterdam was frequently returning in a neutral or positive light in the videos of the Rotterdam influencers. One of the influencers even expressed wanting to move to Amsterdam: "I was just driving, and I thought to myself: I like Amsterdam so much. So I think I will be moving here before summer." Many of the influencers frequently visited Amsterdam for (influencer)work-related reasons. Despite the well-known rivalry between the cities, Amsterdam therefore seemed key to the lives of the majority of these influencers. The rivalry between these cities was, however, not entirely absent from the videos, but in a few instances presented itself in innocent, sometimes slightly teasing ways. It was mostly found in the context of soccer, and the rivaling teams Feyenoord (Rotterdam) and Ajax (Amsterdam). One influencer sees Ajax bedsheets and playfully and mockingly proclaims: "What do I see over there? I see a gnome! Uh, I mean the Ajax logo." Another example is when a Rotterdam influencer explains that he needs to go to Amsterdam, and a Rotterdam celebrity quasi-offendedly yells: "What?! Amsterdam!?" These instances show the presence of rivalry, but were all embedded in a context that limited the negative implications of such statements. The innocent rivalry, and its particular presence in soccer, was even explained by one influencer who argued: "I fanatically support Feyenoord, but that does not mean I hate people from Amsterdam or people who support Ajax." Such a statement can be interpreted as rather remarkable, since the rivalry between these two soccer teams has been characterized by hatred and intolerance among some of their supporters. While a rivalry with Amsterdam is still present and Rotterdam influencers seemed to slightly differentiate themselves from this city, it was not a strong contradiction that defined Rotterdammers as non-Amsterdammers, which makes this a surprising finding. However, this innocent approach to the rivalry may have various explanations. On the one hand, it seemed as if the job of an influencer to a certain extent entailed being part in the Amsterdam media environment and network, with many of the studios, companies, agencies and MCNs located in the area. On the other hand, it might also be a matter of commercial self-interest, where choosing sides or excluding or alienating part of one's audience can only do harm to the number of views and followers.

Other cities

Other cities were also presented in the videos, but in these cases less rivalry was present. This was not limited to cities in the Netherlands. These cities ranged from very large international cities, to smaller Dutch cities. Mostly the cities were only named, however, a few were also shown, including and ranging from Amsterdam and The Hague, to Katwijk and Liverpool. Particularly the mentioning and showing of non-Rotterdam soccer teams offered a place for other (urban) identities to be present. One of the influencers frequently shows other soccer teams, players and training fields in their videos, and sometimes even plays against players from a variety of other predominantly Dutch soccer teams. However, despite the game element, very little rivalry is present on an identity level. Sometimes a distant admiration was even present, as when approaching the stadium of Liverpool, one influencer exclaimed: "We are here! Look at that: the beating heart of Liverpool!" At the same time, Rotterdam was also, in select cases, distinguished from other cities. One influencer proclaims as they are showing a number of Rotterdam landmarks: "Sometimes I forget how beautiful Rotterdam is and how much it differs from other cities."

Urban versus rural

A final, relatively infrequent but quite powerful dichotomy found in the videos was the comparison between the urban versus the rural. People from the rural provinces of the Netherlands were generally seen as inherently different. Differences between the urban and the rural were often made clear by means of explicit mentioning of these differences, such as a lack of a multicultural environment, urban culture and the conveniences of city life. One of the influencers asked someone from a rural area if they had a public transport card, and, after a negative answer, the influencer emphasized the absence of public transport in rural areas. Moreover, these differentiations included a lot of stereotypical remarks about the countryside, such as the idea that all rural inhabitants were farmers, the mocking of the rural dialects, and rural towns as places where no one wants to live. One of the influencers mockingly proclaims: "We in Rotterdam West, South, North, East – we have it all. But in this [small town], they have a bakery, too!" Another combines many rural stereotypes to describe being in a

rural area: “We would be sitting in between cows and pregnant donkeys, and fun and all, and we could inseminate and everything that comes with it.” All in all, this clearly articulated distinction between the urban and the rural put an emphasis on what it means to live inside a city – particularly that of Rotterdam.

4.5 Discussion

This research investigated how the local influencers most popular among local adolescents of Rotterdam are affiliated with each other, how their channels relate to the wider media ecology, and continued by identifying to what extent and how the content published by these local influencers relates to the super-diverse city and its inhabitants.

The results of the network analysis and the thematic analysis showed the connection between the YouTube ecology and the video content in the presentation of the city. The affiliations between local influencers found in the network analysis were also reflected in the thematic analysis, with five out of six influencers appearing in each other’s videos, next to other (local)influencers from the network. This twofold local affiliation emphasizes the importance of the local network. Furthermore, the communities found on the basis of YouTube’s recommender system showed that many of the influencers were recommended according to themes that reflected cultural aspects of the city that also emerged from the thematic analysis: urban music lifestyle and soccer. Combined, the findings demonstrate a number of overall findings.

4.5.1 The City as a Recognizable Framework for Strengthening Urban Identity

The network analysis and thematic analysis showed that the city can be understood as a recognizable framework for negotiating and strengthening adolescents’ urban identity. The city and its inhabitants were mostly present in the background of the videos or mentioned in passing. Many of the videos took place in the city (see *Being and Living in the City*), showing the local scenery (see *Urban Symbols*), engaging with local influencers, celebrities or ordinary Rotter-

dammers with diverse backgrounds (see *People and Relationships and Culture and Diversity*), and presenting (sub-)cultural elements that can be considered strongly connected to the city (see *Culture and Diversity*), and, additionally, a local network of affiliations could be found in terms of the YouTube ecology in which these influencers find themselves.

Through the position of the influencers within the context of Rotterdam, Rotterdam adolescents may find themselves recognizing many aspects related to the city and its inhabitants, touching on the spatial experience of the city (Proshansky et al., 1983; Lalli, 1992) as well as symbolic elements that are affiliated with the city (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Spaaij, 2008). In line with findings by Schwartz and Halegoua (2015), Belanche et al. (2017), and Saker (2017), the city was often represented through symbols that represent the Rotterdam environment and by marking locations that are symbolic to the city, both of which may be easy to recognize for local adolescents. Next to spatially symbolic elements, cultural elements may also play an important role. For instance, Rotterdam soccer teams, as found both in the videos as well as the related channel communities, may provide a collective identity through shared fandom (Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Spaaij, 2008), as soccer teams are often connected to a city, functioning as a vehicle for a local identity, and rivalry between particular teams helps to strengthen collective identity through the feeling of us versus them (Shobe, 2008; Spaaij, 2007, 2008). Moreover, the presence of the Rotterdam accent and dialect adds an extra possibility for recognition, as dialect can be seen as a form of expressing one's place identity (Johnstone, 2011), and the Rotterdam accent is generally recognized in the Netherlands. Together, these representations of the city provide the décor for the videos and meaningful symbolical elements, which may increase the perceived affiliation between the influencer and the city. Next to that, it can be understood as a mostly positive representation and evaluation of the city (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992), may help strengthen a collective identity (Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Spaaij, 2008), and, in turn, may increase the likelihood of young Rotterdammers being able to identify with these influencers.

This affiliation with the city was further reinforced when influencers mentioned their locations, sometimes almost as if checking in, which previous research

has argued can be understood as a form of identity construction based on place (Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015). Many of the influencers showed their Rotterdam homes and some even straightforwardly identified themselves as Rotterdammers, signifying that they identify with the city they live in and feel a sense of belonging to the city and its inhabitants, which can be perceived as a direct link to urban identity (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992). Moreover, by including ordinary Rotterdammers in their videos, the influencers reinforced the creation of authenticity, approachableness, and parasociality, particularly for a Rotterdam audience, which is key to the success of the influencer and may therefore strengthen their function as role models (Abidin, 2017; Burgess & Green, 2018). Together, this can be perceived as a way in which they establish their affiliation with the city, which may help adolescents recognize the influencers as 'Rotterdammers' and likeable role models, and provides them with recognizable elements that signify a sense of belonging to the city that they might use in their own negotiation of their urban identity.

A final way in which the influencers supported an urban identity strengthening framework was through the negotiation of what Rotterdam was not – a comparing and contrasting between Rotterdam and other cities or areas. Influencers included elements that clearly differentiate Rotterdam from other cities or areas, by means of the cities themselves, teams, or other themes such as contrasting the urban against the rural, aiding the negotiation of Rotterdam identities (see *Urban Symbols and Other Identities*) (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Interestingly, rivalry between cities seemed generally absent or was only playfully indicated, which was surprising due to the well-known rivalry between Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in particular their soccer teams (Spaaij, 2008). No strong position was taken, which can be possibly explained by the large audience that these influencers address that exceeds the boundaries of the city. This connects to our finding that their overarching related channel communities were clearly Dutch (versus international communities), but not limited to Rotterdam communities. The videos may thus contain symbols, contexts and situations highly recognizable to a Rotterdam audience, possibly reinforcing an existing urban identity, but non-alienating to those outside of this context, which in turn may support the influencers' authenticity and accessibility aiding the parasocial relationship with all of their viewers.

4.5.2 A Reflection of Rotterdam as a Super-Diverse City

Rotterdam's super-diverse character also plays an important role in the presentation of the city. First of all, the influencers themselves seemed to have different ethnicities, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, representing their Rotterdam audience quite well. This goes against the idea that media production is limited to those with a privileged background (Brake, 2014; Usher, 2018). However, it could be argued that the glamorous lifestyle differed from that of many ordinary inhabitants, as is the case with many celebrities. This glamorization of urban life might present a too optimistic view of everyday life in the city. The representation of the city as super-diverse was also reflected in what and who these influencers showed (see *Culture and Diversity*). From the overwhelming diversity of ethnicities, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, as well as languages and (sub-)cultures, we can see that the presentation of Rotterdam exceeds a white-dominated Dutch culture, and is a clear indication of the Rotterdam super-diversity, especially due to their complicated relationship with other elements such as socio-economic status, and the various waves of migration from various countries throughout the history of Rotterdam (Jennissen et al., 2018; Scholten et al., 2019b; Statistics Netherlands, 2018a; Vertovec, 2007). While the extent to which this (super-)diversity was present differed between influencers and their videos, the presence of a great diversity on various aspects may at the very least be said to start to reflect the intertwined complexity of diversities that characterizes the super-diverse city (Vertovec, 2007). The diverse backgrounds of the influencers and celebrities, reinforced by the diversity among ordinary Rotterdammers that appear in their videos, may provide a diverse pool of potential role models with whom these adolescents with different backgrounds may identify themselves through their similarities (Gleason et al., 2017; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

Moreover, super-diversity was also reflected in the centrality of Dutch hip hop and soccer in the related channel communities and the videos of the influencers (see *Culture and Diversity*). These themes speak to the young target audience and hold important cultural symbolism that is key to understanding urban identity in Rotterdam (Alim & Pennycook, 2007; Bennett, 1999; De Groot, 2019; Spaaij, 2008). Hip hop and rap music are known to often deal with (local) urban issues

that are central to multicultural and super-diverse cities (Alim and Pennycook, 2007; Bennett, 1999; De Groot, 2019). The urban relevance of soccer could be found both in its approachable element, being available to everyone despite socio-economic status, and at the same time in its symbolism in terms of the local teams. Together these many elements tie together and begin to reflect the various levels and complexities of diversity that exist within the city of Rotterdam.

4.5.3 The Importance of the Local Influencer Network

Both the network analysis and the thematic analysis showed the importance of the social environment in identification with and creating a sense of belonging to the city. The videos as well as the network reflected the role of personal and professional networks that are central to the success of influencers. While the content of the influencers' videos varied greatly, as did the related channel communities in which they were found, the influencers, particularly those who were connected by one or two steps in our network analysis, could regularly be found in each other's videos (see *People and Relationships*). While some influencers were clearly collaborating frequently in terms of video making, others appeared in more informal settings. This was true for those within the same community, but also those outside of it. This network and mutual support among influencers from the same city can be understood not only in terms of informal connections, but may also be the result of the MCNs that these influencers are affiliated with (Johnston, 2017; Lobato, 2016). Nevertheless, the affiliation between local influencers strengthens a sense of a network of Rotterdam influencers that engage with each other. Adolescents find themselves living in the same city as a group of their media idols, which may potentially strengthen their collective identity, as well as provide them with a pool of role models from which adolescents may borrow in their (urban) identity construction. This centrality of urban identity is further emphasized by the presence of the influencers' friends and families and their personal history in the city, which can be understood in terms of the importance of the idea of a place related social community and one's perceived history in the city (Belanche et al., 2017; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Kim and Kaplan, 2004; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Van Eldik et al., 2019a).

4.5.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This project has combined methods of quantitative network analysis with qualitative thematic analysis, based on earlier results from a survey study. The results of these analyses supported each other, and the multi-method approach of this research helped to understand and combine the findings on the content of the videos in light of the current online media ecology. By basing the choice of influencers on the previous survey results, the findings of this research reflect content of influencers that were truly popular among and were recognized as Rotterdammers by the young participants, instead of picking influencers on the mere basis of views or subscriber counts. The results of this research help further investigating the role of influencers in identity construction, particularly in light of adolescents' lives in the super-diverse city, and demonstrate the different forms and messages that the content can hold. In light of earlier findings that showed that social media engagement and local influencers play a role in the construction of urban identity, a sense of belonging and even, through this, self-esteem (Van Eldik et al., 2019a), the current findings fill the gap with respect to what the content of such local influencers' videos actually entail.

This study also has a number of limitations. Firstly, in May 2019, YouTube deleted its related channel network from the YouTube interface, as it was deemed not frequently enough used (YouTube, 2019). These suggestions are therefore no longer visible on the influencers' channel pages. Secondly, the qualitative thematic analysis was based on a selection of six influencers, and while effort was made to include different genders and cultural backgrounds whilst sticking to the popularity as indicated by the empirical findings of the survey, it was outside the scope of the research to make distinctions on the basis of these demographic characteristics. Future research might benefit from taking gender, cultural background, but also online community or genre into account for an even more nuanced image, or specific results for a specific group of viewers. Finally, as role models influencers may also present unrealistic identities that could be harmful to adolescent identity development alongside and intertwined with urban identity, such as gender, racial, and socio-economic stereotypes. Future experimental studies are needed to investigate the effects

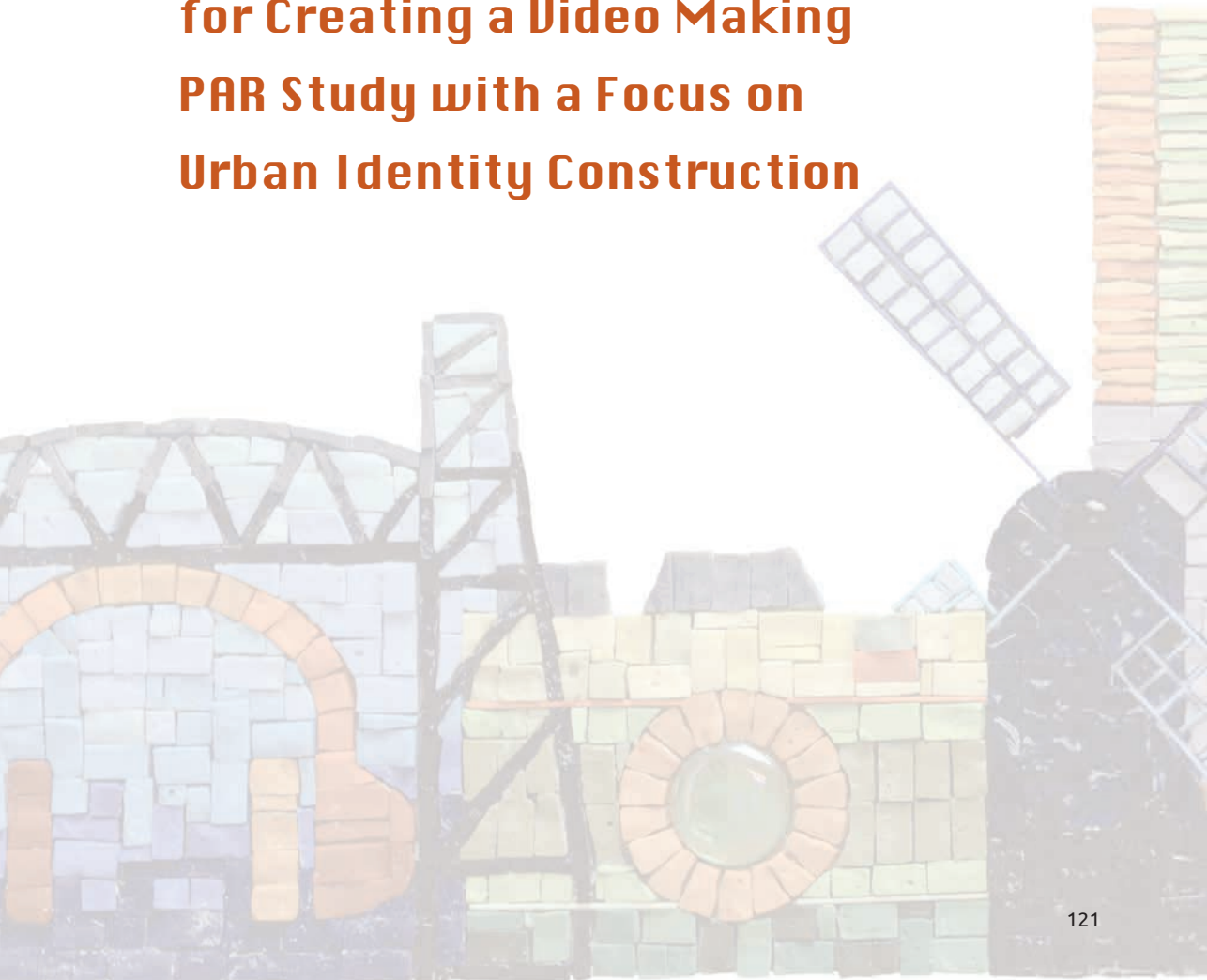
of these local influencers as role models on adolescents, focusing on what is obtained from watching the videos.

All in all, this research has contributed to the literature on urban identity presented in the online environment, both in terms of the network as well as the content of influencers preferred by adolescents. Our results therefore indicate that influencers, in their role as role models, may play an important part in adolescents' urban identity construction and, in turn, play a role in empowering them through the representation of the super-diverse city in which they find themselves and of which they are part.



5

Designing a Study, Constructing a Course, Exploring Urban Identity An Approach to and Considerations for Creating a Video Making PAR Study with a Focus on Urban Identity Construction



Abstract

With the increasing ease with which social media content can be produced and shared, the online environment has become a space for many to construct their identities. For adolescents growing up in the complex social environment of super-diverse cities, producing social media content may be a particularly interesting way of identifying and relating themselves to their city-level social and physical environment – their urban identity. But how does one go about investigating such a creative, complex phenomenon? This chapter explores the theoretical background and sets out the steps by which we created a participatory action research study in the form of a weekly recurring video production course in which we

explored the social media production process of and videos created by 10 Rotterdam adolescents in terms of urban identity construction. Additionally, attention is also paid to the incorporation and stimulation of media literacy and empowerment as additional goals of the course, and how they were planned to be observed by the researchers through the collected data. The chapter describes how thematic, interpretative, and phenomenological approaches were combined in the analysis of the data. Finally, the chapter explores important considerations and lessons learned within the construction of the course. Results are reported in Chapter 6.

5.1 Introduction

In recent years, it has become increasingly easy to produce and share one's own content on social media. Social media platforms afford ample opportunity for numerous forms of content sharing, of various levels of investment, and for diversely selected audiences (boyd, 2014; Choi et al., 2020; Granic et al, 2020; Picone et al., 2019; Triêu & Baym, 2020). As eager and perceptive users of social media, adolescents not only consume social media content, but some also create and share their own media products (Jansz et al., 2015; Van Driel et al., 2019). Social media, a place generally absent of parents and guardians, afford the construction and negotiation of their identities with peers through various activities, ranging from adjusting one's profile page to creating one's own content (boyd, 2014; Jansz et al., 2015; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

The previous chapters have explored theory to provide a *trans-spatial urban identity model* for the online environment (Chapter 2), explored the general urban media engagement of adolescent Rotterdammers (Chapter 3), and looked at the content and networks of the influencers they consume (Chapter 4). The shared common experience based on spatial environment and social category, that is captured by the concept of urban identity (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983), has been found to be present among young inhabitants of this super-diverse city and particularly so of its adolescents with a migrant background (Van Eldik et al., 2019a). Moreover, we have seen that the content consumed by these adolescents holds elements of this urban identity, including the city's recognizable physical characteristics, its rich cultural environment, and its diverse set of inhabitants (Van Eldik et al., 2019b). To some extent, differentiating oneself from inhabitants of other cities was visible (Van Eldik et al., 2019b). Urban media engagement may therefore positively influence a shared sense of belonging (Lalli, 1992) or it could create tensions between different voices and narratives surrounding this identity, and everything in between. Urban identity, too, may be expressed and shared online by urban adolescents themselves, for instance, by identifying and affiliating with the physical and social environment of the city in various ways.

Following up on our own and others scholars' earlier results, and taking into

account the unique super-diverse characteristics of the city, a weekly recurring video course was created as a PAR study in collaboration with a local philanthropic initiative to explore how Rotterdam adolescents themselves construct and negotiate an image of the city and how they express what it means to be a “Rotterdammer” using social media. In this course the topic of urban identity was addressed indirectly through the assignment of creating a vlog or video related to the city and a general self-introduction video. Urban identity construction and negotiation was investigated both by focusing on (and the discussions in) the process of production and the end products.

As an additional, reflective goal, this study also explores how such a PAR study can potentially inspire empowerment and media literacy skills. These two topics not only stem from the nature of the course (teaching media skills), and the philosophy of the local philanthropic initiative (empowering young people), but also relate to the construction of urban identity through effective and strategic (urban-related) self-presentation in an online environment. The data collected is therefore also used to reflect on in what ways the researchers could support and observe signs building media literacy, the empowerment of the participants, and their intersections with urban identity.

In this methodological chapter I will extensively describe the design of and approach to the unique study at hand, aiming to simultaneously provide an illustrative approach to how to create a participatory action research (PAR) study focusing on identity construction through video making. It starts by exploring the theoretical background of the study on urban identity, and also provides a framework for our understanding of media literacy and empowerment by means of conceptualizing its subcomponents as building blocks that are easily applicable in PAR research. It then continues by outlining the sample, procedure, and analysis conducted. Next, it explores how the PAR study and course was created on the basis of these elements. Finally, we reflect on the crucial considerations and lessons learned regarding the construction of the course. Results of the study are reported in Chapter 6.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

5.2.1 Recapping: Adolescents, Urban Identity, and the Context of the City

In previous chapters, we have discussed the recognition of the online environment, and in particular social media, as an important, complex space for identity constructions, particularly for adolescents (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). We have also discussed how finding out who one is and where one belongs involves the ideas and conceptions about the role of one's living environment and a sense of belonging to this environment and those living in it (urban identity) (Belanche et al., 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983), and how such conceptions are particularly important for youth in what Vertovec (2007) termed super-diverse cities, especially those with a migrant background for whom this local identification seems to be notably strong (Day & Badou, 2019; Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008; Van Bochove et al., 2009).

While urban identity stems from theory that is centered around the phenomenology of physical space, Chapter 2 argued that in this world where we fluently move between online and offline, urban identity needs to be studied online as well. In recent years, scholars have started to discuss place related concepts and practices in relation to the online environment (e.g., Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014; Yılmaz & Kocabalkanlı, 2021). What most previous studies have in common is their focus on how these identity practices help build (social) space and/or they focus on location-based services, leaving the question how broader engagement with the city on social media helps further construct urban identity itself yet to be explored. As explored in the *trans-spatial urban identity model* in Chapter 2, in this dissertation, urban identity is understood to hold both personal and social aspects (e.g., Belanche, 2017; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983; Valera & Guàrdia, 2002). Urban identity therefore includes ideas, conceptions, and experiences about the built and the social environment, and how this is related to oneself (Lalli, 1992; Belanche, 2017). Expressions of urban identity, be it created explicitly or implicitly, with or without the intention of self-presentation, could be used to demonstrate connection to or affiliation with one's environment and fellow inhabitants (Van Eldik et

al., 2019b), to communicate to fellow inhabitants or non-inhabitants what is meaningful to the user, and to construct an image of the city and its inhabitants in a way that reflects their experience of it. As discussed in Chapter 2, people prefer to present groups they belong to in a positive light (or choose to identify differently), which contributes to their self-perception in terms of positive self-esteem (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, Tajfel, 1981). Presentations of fellow inhabitants may match or diverge from how users present themselves and can potentially be deployed to negotiate this group's identity. This may indirectly impact the user's presented identity through their affiliation with this group and vice versa.

Important to note is that experiences of the city and fellow inhabitants may not always be shared, which means that the online urban identity expressions of one user may sometimes also counter that of another. Other users play an important role in the online shaping of identities, as this is a social process (boyd, 2014; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Although users may aim to present themselves in relation to the city and fellow inhabitants in a certain way, self-presentations may be affected by other users' content or responses (boyd, 2014). Adolescents may also decide to respond to content and/or produce counternarratives to existing representations that better fit their own experiences and ideas (Granic et al., 2020; Leurs et al., 2018). Therefore, the diversity of individuals that characterizes the city may be reflected in their urban identity expressions online.

5.2.2 Moving towards Production: The Role of Video Content

The current media landscape allows users to engage in varying degrees (Picone, 2019). It was found that consumption of (social) media content is widespread among adolescents and that many also use it to communicate (Jansz et al., 2015). More intensive kinds of participation, such as the creation of user-generated content, are less common (Jansz et al., 2015; Kushner, 2016). However, more recently, with the advent of TikTok, as well as Snapchat and "stories" on Instagram, the thresholds of production have lowered. This allows users opportunities to participate in small, yet meaningful ways, and with more targeted audiences. These platforms allow short videos or other content made with low

investment and can be easily captured with a smartphone. This, consequently, has also had an impact on the social practices of sharing. For instance, Choi et al. (2020) found that posts with a short visibility, such as 24-hour story features on social media, give users the opportunity to present themselves in a nonstrategic way and lower the impression management threshold. This in turn amplifies users' effort towards identity construction and negotiation, including the internalization of these identities. Related to this, Triêu and Baym (2020) found that the absence of visible feedback in such stories is part of what helps to lower the threshold for self-presentation and frequent sharing. But next to that, young people also create somewhat larger, higher investment types of media productions, such as YouTube videos (Caron, 2017), and are sometimes inspired by their favorite influencers in their creations (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2019, p. 345). In fact, video-based social media platforms have been found to be the most popular platforms among Dutch early adolescents, with YouTube being number one and TikTok as a second (Netwerk Mediawijsheid, 2021a).

A genre of videos that is particularly popular is that of vlogs (Burgess & Green, 2018). In vlogs (a video version of the blog) the creators are often physically and/or audibly present in the videos (Caron, 2017; Frobenius, 2014). Creators may, for instance, sit down to discuss a topic with their viewers or record footage of their everyday life (whilst taking their viewers along). Vlogging can be understood as a way for the creator to express their identity (e.g., Farrukh et al., 2021; Jones, 2019). Various previous studies have utilized video making and video diaries to explore young people's (online) identity constructions (e.g., Chan, 2006; Gauntlett, 2007; Leurs et al., 2018). Gauntlett (2007), for instance, has addressed the role of creativity in understanding and investigating complex concepts such as identity. He argues that "creativity and artistic production [...] will almost inevitably tell us something about their creator. In particular, artistic works are a thinking through and reflection of social and psychological experience" (p. 30). As a result, using creative, visual techniques allows one to self-reflect and to utilize elements other than language to express oneself and communicate emotions (Gauntlett, 2007). Such creative, visual approaches are particularly interesting for young participants, who might not yet have a very expressive or nuanced vocabulary (Prosser & Burke, 2008). Using the process

of video production, more specifically vlogs, as an object of research therefore provides information about how identity is constructed through social media practices.

As previous research has begun to show the value of (making) city-related media as a way of studying urban identity online (e.g., Saker, 2017; Schwartz and Halegoua, 2014; Yılmaz & Kocabalkanlı, 2021; Van Eldik, 2019b), we designed a study that allows us to investigate the production of urban related media as well as what the production process involved, instead of only being able to look at the final materials. With this, we aim to explore how young adolescents in the super-diverse city of Rotterdam construct and negotiate their urban identity using social media. To do so, the study will focus on the presentation of the city and its inhabitants in the process of making videos and in the final video product.

5.2.3 Empowerment, Media Literacy, and their Relation to PAR and (Online) Urban Identity

Previously, video production courses, whether inspired by PAR or different research strands, have been utilized and recognized in previous research as vehicles to provide something positive to young participants in various ways (e.g., Friesem, 2016; Hobbs et al., 2013; Leurs et al., 2018). While simply providing a media production course does not automatically empower young people (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; De Block & Buckingham, 2007), making media has been argued to help young people become more media literate, stimulate them to participate, to express and to have a voice (e.g., Gauntlett, 2007; De Block & Buckingham, 2007; Leurs et al, 2018; Friesem, 2016), and stimulate social, emotional, and cognitive development (Friesem, 2016). On top of that, engaging creatively can be seen as a way to connect with others in various ways (Gauntlett, 2018). In order to plan for the stimulation and observation of media literacy, empowerment, and their relation to urban identity, we now provide a brief exploration and operationalization of the concepts.

The concept of empowerment has various definitions and applications depending on the focus of research, and its sensitization is highly dependent on the specific circumstances of the phenomenon under investigation (Rocha,

1997; Zimmerman, 1995). It can be applied to the politics and power of a group, the building of personal skills and confidence of an individual (see Rocha (1997) for overview; Hennink et al., 2012; Page & Czuba; 1999; Peterson et al., 2002), it can be defined as a goal, focusing on status gained, or seen as a process, focusing on the journey of increasing one's (sense of) control towards one's goals (Tengland, 2008; Zimmerman, 1995). A way to define empowerment on a personal level, as is relevant in the study at hand, is as Zimmerman (1995) argues; empowerment "includes beliefs that goals can be achieved, awareness about resources and factors that hinder or enhance one's efforts to achieve those goals, and efforts to fulfill the goals" (p. 852).

Not surprisingly, previous research has drawn connections between empowerment and self-determination theory (SDT) (e.g., Davis & Bowles, 2018; Di Maggio et al., 2019; Ju et al., 2019). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012) focuses on the intrinsic motivation to take deliberate action and is based on three elements: autonomy, competency, and relatedness. This (sense of) ability to achieve something by having the independence, skills, and contextual and social circumstances that make it possible, can be related to conceptualizations of empowerment in that they are the building blocks towards a sense of reaching one's wants and goals (Davis & Bowles, 2018; DiMaggio et al., 2019; Ju et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 1995). Shier (2015, 2019), for instance, investigated empowerment in relation to children as social change makers and applied three related elements: attitude, capability, and conditions and opportunities. Attitude included elements such as recognizing one's ability, having self-esteem, and feeling capable of influencing the outcome by taking action. Capability focused on one's ability to do things, one's knowledge, and one's autonomy. Conditions and opportunities focused on the context including the social environment and the support that one gets. Similarly, in their investigation of a definition of empowerment for international development organizations, Hennink et al. (2012, p. 206) understand individual empowerment to exist out of agency (including self-identity, the ability to make decisions, and to have impact), knowledge (having access to information, sources, and education, that helps in problem solving, self-confidence, and finding the right help), and an enabling environment (including both institutional structures and social norms). SDT, when adjusted to

the phenomenon at hand, can therefore function as a helpful tool in operationalizing empowerment.

In this project, we chose to ascribe to the process-oriented perspective of empowerment. To sensitize this in a way that would fit the context of the course, elements from Shier's (2015, 2019) application of empowerment, Hennink et al. (2012)'s conceptualization of individual empowerment, and Deci and Ryan's (2012) conceptualization of SDT were borrowed and synthesized into four elements: 1) confidence, 2) autonomy, 3) capability, and 4) supportive network. See Table 5.1 for an overview and description of these elements. As the previous conceptualizations and their overlap show, these elements are likely strongly interrelated.

Media literacy, too, has been approached and defined in a wide variety of ways by various authors. In 2004, Livingstone defined media literacy as "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts" (p. 3). Other terms such as digital literacy (e.g., Buckingham, 2015), internet skills (e.g., Van Deursen et al., 2015) and digital skills (e.g., Van Dijk & Van Deursen, 2014) have helped to further expand this field of knowledge in various directions. A definition for social media literacy was provided by Livingstone (2014) to capture "the tasks of decoding, evaluating and creating communication in relation to media qua representation (text, image, platform, device, etc.) and qua social interaction (relationships, networks, privacy, anonymity, etc.), since these are integrated in the very nature and use of SNSs" (p. 3). Broadly speaking, media literacy therefore not only encompasses knowledge and awareness of media related opportunities and complexities, but also active production skills – now more than ever. Previously, scholars have argued that making media themselves helps young people become more media literate, as well as stimulates them to participate and give them a voice (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019; Kellner & Share, 2007; Leurs et al., 2018). Media literacy through making media has even been linked to stimulating social, emotional and cognitive development (Hobbs & Moore, 2013; Friesem, 2016).

Media literacy has several connections to online identity construction. As discussed in section 5.2.1, the online environment is an interesting space for (adolescent) identity construction (e.g., boyd, 2014; Granic, 2020). Developing these



| Element | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| Supportive Network | The building and presence of a supportive network of people, including a general sense of connectedness and belonging, but also a network that provides help and makes matters possible. |
| Capability | The experience of being able to do something effectively and get something done that one intends to do. |
| Autonomy | Having the choice and willingness to do something, as well as being able to work by oneself and overcome obstacles on one's own. |
| Confidence | Having or building the confidence in one's potential to do or learn something in order to achieve one's goal. |

Table 5.1 Four elements that make up this study's understanding and application of empowerment.

(social) media skills should help an individual to present oneself in a way that is safe, strategic, creative, and enjoyable. Furthermore, as we have discussed in Chapter 5, creating videos provides a space to use creativity and multimedia in communicating a message, and visuals can aid in presenting oneself and talking about identity (Gauntlett, 2007, 2018).

Media literacy has also been related to empowerment. Through both small and large practices, strengthening media literacy and other forms of active media engagement might contribute to empowerment (Friesem, 2014; Leurs et al.,

2018; O’Byrne, 2019; Rozendaal & Figner, 2020), for instance through reaching goals, learning new skills, or having impact (Zimmerman, 1995). Moreover, research by Van Laar et al. (2017) highlights the connections between 21st-century skills and digital skills as professional and personal skills, demonstrating the broader necessity of media literacy skills in individuals’ future opportunities. This could also be considered a necessary step in future empowerment.

To sensitize media literacy in relation to the course, empowerment, and (online) urban identity (construction), an initial conceptualization was created, building on existing media and digital literacy scales by Livingstone (2004), Hobbs (2010), Van Deursen and Helsper (2020), and Netwerk Mediawijsheid (2012, 2021b). For the purpose of our research, the following elements were composed: general (critical) skills, hard skills, creative engagement, and strategic use of media. See Table 5.2 for an overview and descriptions of this initial categorization and sensitization of these concepts.

In this context, media literacy and empowerment can, in turn, be related to urban identity in a number of ways. It can be related to empowerment through its connection to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging (see Belanche et al. 2017; Van Eldik et al., 2019a; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Moreover, with the online environment as a space for (urban identity-related) self-presentation, it could be perceived as an aiding factor (through confidence and supportive network), as well as an outcome (feeling more connected to those around them and strengthening a sense of identity). The interconnection with media literacy and empowerment also allows for new angles, such as asking about perceived impact, difficulties experienced in the making process, and awareness of existing urban related media.

5.3 Participants and Procedure

To explore the proposed questions, a video making course was created in collaboration with a local philanthropic initiative offering a range of free afterschool creative courses for adolescents, located in a culturally diverse neighborhood of Rotterdam. Creating our own course allowed us to determine the course



| Element | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| General (critical) skills | A basic understanding of and information on (responsible) media use and (online) safety and rights. General knowledge of media and the field of media (both practical and ideological). Focus on theoretical knowledge. |
| Strategic use of media | Awareness and skills to use media (content use and content creation) for a certain benefit or to strategically communicate a message. This can be about oneself, but also about something else that one finds important. Also includes self-reflexivity towards media use. |
| Creative engagement | Creating and presenting a message/content through media. Finding and presenting the right information, sharing it with people effectively. Exploring creativity with media. Using media creatively and effectively to present a message. |
| Hard skills | Knowledge and ability on how to use media from a practical perspective – how to use the hardware and software. Focus on practical knowledge. |

Table 5.2 Four elements that make up this study's understanding and application of media literacy.

content and gather various types of data in a responsible manner. This course, an originally 18-week course focused on making one's own videos, was created as part of the local initiative's range of courses, with a focus on empowering adolescents through hard- and soft skill development. The course was originally planned in the spring of 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had to be postponed until October 2021 and new participants had to be recruited. The data gathering for this paper took place in the first 8 weeks. Ten adolescents (age 10-11 at the start of the course, 6 girls and 4 boys, with diverse cultural backgrounds reflecting the diversity of the neighborhood) participated in the course (of which one remained absent after the first 2 weeks). The project was approved by the ESHCC's Ethical Review Board. Adolescents voluntarily signed up for the course, about which they were made aware it was part of research. In addition, active consent was required from parents/guardians for adolescents to participate. The researcher worked together with a teacher from the local philanthropic initiative to create and teach the course. A student assistant was present to record observations. All names used in the paper are pseudonyms.

The course was structured in a way that made participants build their skills and reach new "levels" every few weeks with related topics. The first two weeks were focused on determining everyone's level. In this part participants made a video in which they introduced themselves. In weeks 3 to 7, participants worked towards becoming a "Vlogger" by making their own vlog about their life in the city. Weeks 8 to 11 focused on different types of special effects. In the remaining weeks, we planned to work on the level of "Journalist" and "Filmmaker", followed by a presentation for their families, however, due to COVID-19 related measures, the course was canceled after week 11. In Chapter 6, we will dive deeper into the construction and specific set-up of this course. Several types of data were gathered to answer the posed research questions. This included videos, storyboards, brainstorm materials, weekly (informal) group discussions, short (informal) interviews, observations by a research assistant, and notes by the researcher. Important to note is that storyboards (as well as the other materials) do not always contain the same information as videos for either deliberate or accidental reasons.

| Data | Description |
|---|---|
| Videos | |
| Introduction videos | Participants were asked to make a video in which they introduce themselves. Videos were made with tablets and free editing software. |
| Rotterdam-related videos | Participants were asked to create a vlog about (life in) Rotterdam, aimed to trigger expressions of urban identity. While the topic of the video (Rotterdam) was set, participants were given the freedom to create their own unique videos. Videos were made with tablets and free editing software. |
| Brainstorm materials and storyboards | |
| Introduction storyboards | Participants were asked to create a storyboard first to aid their brainstorming, facilitate storytelling, and structure their filming process. |
| Brainstorm materials | To generate ideas for the video and activate thinking about city-related topics, participants engaged in several brainstorm activities, including making a mind map and making a Rotterdam-related alphabet. |
| Rotterdam-related storyboard | To prepare their video, participants created both a basic and an extensive storyboard in which they planned what they were going to film, what they aimed to convey, and who/what they needed in order to do so. |

Table 5.3 An overview of the data used for analysis.

| Data | Description |
|---|---|
| Informal discussions and interviews | |
| Informal group discussions <i>at the start</i> of the city-related and introduction weeks | Held in the beginning of class each week covering a different topic (and captured on video). Questions were discussed such as what participants liked and did not like about Rotterdam, what it means to be a Rotterdammer, if they knew Rotterdam social media influencers, how you could post something about Rotterdam, and if they had ever done it themselves. |
| Interviews <i>during</i> the city-related weeks | Asking participants to explain what they were making and walking through their storyboards and/or videos. Conducted short and informally throughout class as to not disrupt the general process of creation and captured only on audio due to the variety of locations. Intended to explore the making process and contextualizes our findings. |
| Interviews <i>at the end</i> of the city-related weeks | Conducted as part of the presentation of the final videos to the group. Asking participants to introduce their video, and afterwards asking them questions about what they wanted the audience to remember, and how they felt about the city after filming. |

Table 5.3 (Continued)

| Data | Description |
|---|--|
| Informal discussions and interviews (continued) | |
| Interviews <i>after</i> the city-related weeks | Included questions such as what participants thought of the assignment, how they would have done it differently if they had no limitations. This was done concisely in pairs and throughout the class as to not disrupt the process. Conducted informally throughout class and captured only on audio. |
| Observations | |
| Observations during all sessions | Expressions of urban identity (as well as empowerment, media literacy, and other related occurrences) that were not caught in recorded conversations or on camera, but were written down by a trained research assistant, and were further discussed with the researcher. |
| General notes | Notes written by the researcher after each session to help reflect on the findings and the course. |

Table 5.3 (Continued)

By including the discussions and production process in the study, we could identify the choices made by the participants without having to retrospectively ask about the process and were sometimes also able to see what is thought or believed but left out of the videos. By asking participants to create a vlog about life in the city, we initiated our examination of the central question at hand (namely urban identity), yet by giving participants space choose their own creative direction and by offering a variety of example videos with less personal topics, they had the freedom to also steer away from this approach and take a more general approach to capturing the city.

This research should be understood as a form of PAR, which can be understood “as an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action” (Hall, 1981, p. 7 cited in Burgess, 2006), in which both researchers and stakeholders/participants are involved in shaping the research, with the aim towards having a positive impact (Nelson et al., 1998). In this case, the course design was created in collaboration with the teachers of the local initiative based on their previous experience with adolescents, and further shaped by the feedback of the participants throughout the weeks. While privacy concerns, age limitations, and other pragmatic reasons did not allow sharing the created materials online, the course did aim to bring about media literacy skills, awareness of urban identity, and through this, ideally, empowerment of the participants. The exact goal of the study (its relation to the city) was not specifically emphasized as not to influence the created videos, but rather participants were aware that we were gathering data for research on how they made these videos and how we made the course, and did therefore have space to argue what they considered important. As Day Langhout and Thomas (2010) argue:

Research that affects children can be further reinvigorated by reconceptualizing the research process as an intervention in and of itself, where children learn skills through guided participation and active engagement. In other words, research and intervention are not separate steps, but rather are the components of praxis, or an embodied theory, with an agenda of creating conditions that facilitate individual and group empowerment, as well as social change. Using the theoretical framework of participatory action research with children has the potential to strengthen research findings, interventions, and social action. (p. 61)

5.4 Analysis

The multifaceted dataset was analyzed in two phases, and with two combined levels of analysis. The first phase analyzed urban identity construction during the process of and end results of the created videos. First, as the systematic basis of our investigation, we started with a thematic analysis to see patterns and understand the connections that were made to Rotterdam. Following Fereday and Mui-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid approach to thematic analysis, we started by developing a code manual based on previous research (e.g., Van Eldik et al., 2019b) and our theoretical framework, informed by our research questions. To test the reliability of this code manual, a trained student assistant coded 10% of the materials together with the researcher. We extensively discussed the code manual beforehand so that it was clear for all parties, then we coded three different types of materials together, and went on to code the rest of the selection independently. After this we met up to discuss any inconsistencies and adjust the codebook accordingly. The rest of the data was coded by the primary researcher. In this process, the code manual was used, but was supplemented by additional new inductive codes. This was particularly necessary due to the broad range of topics covered in the data. The final codes were once more discussed with the research team and assistant to test their clarity and rigidity. The codes were connected to form themes and sub-themes, after which they were further clustered and inspected to make sure they accurately covered the data.

The complexity of the topic of identity, the multiplicity of different types of data, and the longitudinal nature of the course required the addition of an extra layer of interpretation at a meta-level. Therefore, the analysis is also grounded in Drew and Guillemin's (2014) framework of interpretative engagement, who emphasize the importance of the participant, the researcher, the produced media, the context of the production, and the audiences. Drew and Guillemin (2014) recognize three steps in visual meaning-making and interpretative engagement with images. The first step is the creation of individual images by the participant, their reflections on the content, and any further guidance on how the materials should be interpreted. This was done through

the process of creation of media and reflections that were captured during the course. The second step focuses on the researcher's interpretation and reflections on this data and additional contextual information. This was done through the interpretation of the created media products, but also through the interviews that contextualized what was seen in the data. Further context was captured by observational notes and the researcher's and research team's reflections on the course. The third step involves meaning making through active involvement with the existing theoretical framework and additional theoretical and conceptual directions stemming from the data. This was done through further active relation of the findings to the theory. The resulting analysis therefore included a more interpretative layer. This included comparing among and between the different types of materials, among and between participants, and investigating the different discourses that arose around the city, its inhabitants, and what it means to be an inhabitant of Rotterdam.

We used both analyses and a relevant selection of the data for the two parts of our research question: the process and the created videos. To investigate the *process* of making a video, we focused on the focus groups, the interviews, the observational data, and the brainstorm materials. Here, the thematic analysis was used to identify bigger themes that were discussed in the process of making the video. To dive deeper into the interconnections within our findings, and to process the diversity of data and longitudinal nature of the project, we used an interpretivist approach with an emphasis on creating further understanding through combining the different data, participants and discourses.

To study the topic in the *created videos*, we used the video data (with a main focus on the Rotterdam-related videos), supplemented by the brainstorm materials and interview data which helped explain the meaning of the content. Thematic analysis here too aided in the identification of the different ways in which adolescents present the city and their inhabitants, as well as how they relate this to their own identities in their videos.

In the second phase of analysis, focusing on the additional goal of observing and exploring empowerment and media literacy, a similar approach was taken. In this analysis, weeks 9 and 10 of the course were also included through reflections, notes, and some short in-class discussions. As these topics were address-

sed as an additional layer of data, they consist of observations and second-hand interpretations of the available research material conducted by the researchers. Due to the various types of data and the reflective nature of the research query, two levels of analyses were combined. For this part of the analysis, a second round of hybrid thematic analysis was conducted, now focusing on empowerment and media literacy, relating it to the earlier findings on urban identity. The initial codebook was built upon the earlier discussed existing theory, and applied as an observation guide, as well as later during the analysis, and finetuned together with the research assistant in the process. In order to support the reflective, explorative nature of this work, a second level of analysis was added in the form of an interpretative analysis with a phenomenological approach (Eberle, 2013). To do so, notes, observations, and reflections were used to further interpret, combine, and embed the findings and provide further exploration. The results therefore go beyond the thematic analysis and are combined into a reflective discussion.

5.5 Preparations and Considerations: Designing the Course

5.5.1 Collaborating with a Local Initiative

What is perhaps most important to the effectiveness of a collaboration, and what is crucial to the success of a PAR-inspired study, is the shared aim or philosophy with the collaborating party. As Darby (2017) argues, despite the tendency within academic research to aim for value-neutral research, it can be beneficial to embrace the value of impact driven research, and it is not unlikely that research will be impacted by the values of the collaborating party. Previous PAR-inspired studies have exemplified this under various conditions (e.g., Bruinenberg et al., 2019; Clements et al., 2012). Our project course was facilitated by, and partly constructed in collaboration with, a philanthropic local initiative that provides free afterschool creative courses for neighborhood adolescents. With the values of the initiative focused on providing young local adolescents with various soft and hard skills, and empowering them in the process, the video

making course was designed to develop both types of skills, stimulate empowerment, and simultaneously allow for the exploration our research question. The combination of our initial understanding of urban identity as a positive concept with the potential for positive impact, and the collaboration with the local philanthropic initiative with a similarly inspired philosophy was therefore crucial in shaping the research and course design, and providing a collaborative atmosphere.

A PAR-inspired research collaboration can be considered a mutually beneficial practice impacting the work of both sides. While researchers or experts are often framed as those bringing value to the collaborating party and the participants through the process and the knowledge that comes out of it, collaboration holds many benefits for the researcher, too, (Darby, 2017). In the case of our study, the existing structure of the local initiative helped greatly to shape its form and provide various possibilities, opportunities, and resources. On a practical level, the collaboration offered access to potential participants, a safe embedded environment, as well as various resources such as personnel, space and materials. On a content level, the researcher benefited from working with the local initiative by means of observing and participating in classes beforehand, getting to know the age group, and talking to and learning from various (hired and volunteer) staff members, each with their own fields of expertise. The creation and execution of the course was carried out together with a staff member who contributed greatly with her pedagogical and didactical expertise. This created a unique circumstance that other types of non-collaborative research do not provide, and helped gain insight into what processes and outcomes are desirable for context-relevant research (Darby, 2017). In turn, the collaborating party gained several benefits from the collaboration practice. Not only were we able to provide time, labor, and academic expertise (Darby, 2017), the study also resulted in a new, relevant, and timely course that was offered to their target audience and could be (re)used after the study was finished.

Simultaneously, we experienced the importance of anticipating and acknowledging potential obstacles that occur in collaboration. First, a collaboration can mean a certain extent of dependency, and resulting in some loss of control (Darby, 2017) for the researcher. For instance, our planning was largely depen-

dent on the local initiative's availability, as courses had a set starting date and a pre-determined duration. While such practical problems could be avoided by clear agreements on the time limits, negotiating adjusted courses, or independent recruitment of participants, the feasibility of this relies strongly on the flexibility of the collaborating party and the time and resources available from the researcher. Other potential pitfalls can stem from the existing rules and requirements of the collaborating party. For instance, our collaboration with an initiative that provided voluntary afterschool activities meant that attendance was strongly encouraged rather than mandatory. While this meant that absence sometimes resulted in the loss of potential data, the voluntary nature of attendance meant that there were enthusiastic participants who were interested in the subject and would be more likely to partake in a similar activity in everyday life. Another example of such obstacles are the set of rules, limits, and expectations within the course itself that impact participants in the context of the collaboration. This requires careful consideration regarding what is possible and what is not. Initial immersion in the local initiative's environment had helped shape the course accordingly. However, small inconveniences still occurred, for instance in the form of the initiatives' automatic restriction on explicit online content which in some cases also accidentally blocked non-explicit content. Such situations sometimes required creative, yet time consuming, workarounds.

5.5.2 Designing for Positive Impact

Incorporating the various side goals of the research required careful planning. This section aims to explain how this was done and what was learned.

The study was carried out in the form of a course, which had its' footprint on the research possibilities and the potential impact, and vice versa. The choice for a video making course was theoretically and pragmatically established from the obvious central question about online urban identity construction, the request for building and strengthening various soft and hard skills of the collaborative party (empowerment and media skills), and the interests of the target group (making vlogs). The format of a video making course aided the original research at hand: previous research has shown that using video making or other visual and creative activities are effective ways of exploring abstract topics such

as identity (e.g., Gauntlett, 2007, Literat, 2013). Both the process and products of video production would therefore help participants and the researcher reflect on the participants' urban identity expressions by means of more concrete activities. Moreover, video making courses are also relevant to the study's additional goals; video making courses have been used to build and strengthen various soft- and hard skills (Drotner, 2020; Friesem, 2016, 2017) teach media literacy (Hobbs et al., 2013; Leurs et al., 2018; Friesem, 2017, 2019), and, through this, aid in empowering its participants (Charmaraman, 2013; Hobbs et al., 2013; Leurs et al., 2018; Friesem, 2017). The weeks central to our data collection (namely the weeks that led up to and included the city-related content) were planned for the first six to eight weeks of the course. This brought together the various concepts and goals, and helped create a course that was interesting for all parties involved.

To create a flexible, yet structural base for the course, a scaffolding structure was used with repeating general structures (see Table 5.5 for an overview of the original planning, and Table 5.6 for the adjusted planning due to the national COVID-19 measures). Overall, the course was designed with a focus on teaching media production skills. On a micro-level, for each video created, the course went through the steps of content creation: planning, filming, editing, and reflecting (inspired by Friesem's (2017) approach). On a macro-level, five general levels or goals were built in the course, each consisting of two to four week blocks, in which participants were asked to make one larger video or several shorter videos (See Figure 5.1 and Table 5.5 for an overview). Working with these blocks allowed us to concentrate the research goal within a specific, condensed part of the course. However, due to the extended length of the course in the schedule of the local initiative, the media production activities and the skill level aimed for was increased to exceed the initial goal level of making vlogs.

In addition to the production skills, the course also included brief in-class discussions of more theoretical media literacy topics that fit the content of the week to embed the media production information in a framework of responsible media use and provide additional (theoretical) background knowledge (see Table 5.4 for an overview).

Next, dissecting and implementing steppingstones for empowerment in



Figure 5.1 A screenshot of how the stages of the course were presented to the participants.

relation to the media-literacy oriented course helped to structure the course and adjust the style of teaching towards the empowerment-oriented goal. It was structurally planned how we could incorporate this in each part of a class, as outlined in Table 5.4. In terms of teaching style, several overall techniques were used, which can be found in the table as well. To strengthen the orientation towards empowerment for a diverse set of students further, we were inspired by Friesem's (2017) media production hive, that caters to different ways of learning within a media production course. This includes a variety of techniques to engage participants in different ways during seven stages of media production: explore, empathize, plan, produce, organize, share, and act. While our cycles of media production were smaller than this model aims for, each of the seven steps was present in one or more parts of a (3 to 4 week) cycle of media production. For an overview of the ways in which the creation of an empowering environment was planned, see Table 5.4. Combined, we experienced that this preparation helped us greatly in applying these techniques, by giving us a toolkit to implement strategies that could be carefully thought about before class and reflected upon after. It also aided in integrating them in activities in a way that they could support each other, as is visible from Table 5.4.



Step during class

Details

Introduction

Address topic of the week in a playful manner.
Recap the content of the previous week.

Discussion (media literacy)

Participants are asked several questions to explore theoretical topics that are related to that week's production skills.
During the Urban Identity assignment, this part is used to explore urban identity (-related media use).

Explaining assignment and tools

Explaining the assignment for that week and introducing the tools.
Assignments, such as the city-vlog, were created to stimulate identity construction and empowerment. Participants could choose their own way of making a video and were given freedom in what they wanted to say in their video. However, we tried stimulating this by asking them, at different points of the cycle, to imagine their audience, think about what they wanted to say about the city, and to what extent they felt connected to the city.

Brainstorming / planning (weeks 1 and 2 of the cycle)

Brainstorming ideas for content and building a storyboard.
Storyboards were chosen to help structure participants' ideas and included not only space for images and text, but also included questions about what messages they want to convey, what they needed to film a particular shot, and who they needed to help them (for instance, someone to hold the camera or be in the shot with them).
The focus was not on instructing the participants on how to do things, but to have them come up with ideas and problem-solve issues.

Connection to Friesem's (2017) Media Production Hive

Exploration of the subject in terms of production skills (*explore*).

Involved active thinking and brainstorming about the audience and the implications of media messages (*empathize*).

Exploration of tools (*explore*).

Involved access to various forms of instructions, such as written instructions on paper, verbal instructions by the teachers, or online instructional videos (*explore*).

When examples had to be included, we provided a variety of representations and genres (*explore*).

Exploring the materials (*explore*), brainstorming and thinking about the audience (*empathize*), making a plan and working together (*plan*), and creating storyboards (*produce*).

Connection to Empowerment

Setting the tone for a welcome learning environment (*supportive environment*).

Through discussing these topics together, this part aimed to contribute to a *supportive environment*, and improve the *capabilities* of the participants.

Aimed to contribute to *capability* through exploring the tools, and the *supportive environment* through the presence of help and the encouragement of creative freedom.

Aimed to stimulate the *supportive environment* through working together, including each other in their planning, and through the creative freedom, *capability* through exploring ideas using brainstorming tools, as well as *confidence* and *autonomy* through building these skills autonomously.

Table 5.4 Typical steps of a class in a cycle of an assignment.

| Step during class | Details |
|--|--|
| Filming (weeks 2 and 3 of the cycle) | Filming the materials – sometimes individually, sometimes in teams – to convey their message. |
| Editing (+ possible re-filming) (weeks 3 and sometimes 4 of the cycle) | Editing the videos (and sometimes re-filming small parts). Due to the nature of editing software and its accompanying process, this was mostly done individually. However, here too, participants could help each other build their skills or explore new techniques themselves. In cases of collaboration participants would have to make decisions together. |
| Sharing (week 3 or 4 of the cycle) | Participants are asked to share their created materials. Time is planned for demonstration of and reflection on the created materials each week, inviting participants to provide feedback and compliments on others' work and reflect on their own. For the city-related assignment, an award show is planned where each candidate is applauded for one of their hard skills (e.g., creative editing skills) and one of their soft skills (e.g., excellent collaboration). We also ask participants to reflect on their impact, emphasizing what they can accomplish through making a video and empower them to engage. |

Table 5.4 (Continued)

Connection to Friesem's (2017) Media Production Hive

Recording the videos and creating a message (*produce*).

Assembling the video recordings and creating or finding other materials necessary for editing (*produce*), editing and organizing the raw materials, monitoring each other's work (in the case of a group), and organizing the message (*organize*).

Reflecting on the video and the process, giving and receiving feedback, and sharing the work (*share*), reflecting on the impact of the videos (*act*).

Connection to Empowerment

Included the building and presence of a *supportive environment* through collaboration, *capability* through the building of new skills, but also *confidence* and *autonomy* through autonomously building skills.

Included the building and presence of a *supportive environment* through collaboration, *capability* through the building of new skills, but also *confidence* and *autonomy* through autonomously building skills.

Connected to the *supportive environment* through the focus on feedback and acknowledgement of each other's skills, as well as *confidence* through the emphasis on awareness of growth and impact.

| Step during class | Details |
|----------------------------|---|
| Overall applied strategies | <p>Have participants work together; Encourage knowledge sharing and helping between peers; Actively considering help needed from peers in their own plans; Actively mix-up pairs after a few weeks to broaden the supportive environment; Collaborations among participants as well as individuals outside of the course in later weeks; Stimulating awareness of value as a group and the unique voices within by diversifying groups (Charmaraman, 2013).</p> |
| | <p>Low threshold start continued by scaffolding to prevent discouragement because of overly daunting skill- or knowledge gaps.</p> |
| | <p>Encouraging participants to resolve issues encountered by themselves or with the help of a peer first before resorting to a teacher, hoping to stimulate trust in oneself to be able to solve issues with awareness of supportive network; Value judgements focused on participant rather than opinion of teacher, focusing on own instead of external goals.</p> |
| | <p>Emphasize own goals and opinions as leading for success; Celebrating moments of success and learning; Emphasis on peers reflecting on and providing positive and/or constructive feedback on each other's work when presented, to which have been found to promote social, emotional, and cognitive skills in the context of a media production course (Friesem & Greene, 2020).</p> |

**Connection to Friesem's
(2017) Media Production Hive**

Connection to Empowerment

Supportive environment

Capability

Autonomy

Confidence

5.5.3 The Importance of (Planning for) Flexibility and Unforeseen Circumstances

As the previous and coming sections suggest, we actively experienced the importance of planning for flexibility and unforeseen circumstances. As Darby (2017) argues, it is crucial to allow for non-linearity in projects that involve co-production and allow for reflection and adjustment of plans. As a longitudinal data collection with young participants that needed to actively participate, this study required a flexible approach. Flexibility was necessary in the research set-up, as the course was initially planned for as a seven-week basic skills-oriented course, yet a change in schedule required lengthening the course to 18 weeks. We decided that the focus on the city-related video, and therefore the data gathering, would still take place in the first part of the course to make sure that the videos created by the young participants still mostly resembled the types of videos that they would have made at home. Additional steps were taken to enable flexibility, such as planning in blocks with gap weeks in between to allow for potential delays, and having extra activities ready in case not enough participants were present, the researcher would unexpectedly be unable to attend, or we needed to fill up a week in between.

Despite these precautions, additional reason for continued vigilance and flexibility was encountered. The speed of learning and the possibility for content production by participants, whilst enjoying the process, required the adjustment of the planning. Careful, critical, yet pragmatic reflection on the learning and creating process helps the researcher anticipate whether to, for instance, accelerate or slow down the pace or whether to spend more or less time on a certain topic (Friesem, 2017). Moreover, the researcher and co-teacher reevaluated the course weekly to see if any changes were needed in terms of time, necessity or the wishes of the adolescent participants. The wishes of the participants were monitored through active inquiry and observation of their level of attention. This gave the participants more power and agency (Literat et al., 2018) and was particularly important to make sure that they stayed interested and continued their participation in the coming weeks. It was crucial, however, that the research weeks were conducted in a systematic fashion, which allowed for less flexibility.

Some circumstances are so unexpected and of such scale, they cannot be planned for: namely, the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to social distancing regulations and lockdowns which forced the local initiative to close, it greatly impacted the structure, length, and even to some extent the content of the course. It postponed the start of the data collection from Spring 2020 to Fall 2020, and the course was cut short again after only 10 out of 18 sessions, as a new lockdown was declared. During the weeks that the course took place, we ran the risk every week of extra COVID-19 related measures to take place or the local initiative having to close due to quarantine or lockdown, or the researcher, co-teacher, or participants not being allowed to attend sessions because of COVID-19 related symptoms. Moreover, physical distancing rules also impacted the amount of people allowed in a space and the possibilities to move around in or outside the space where the course took place. While the way the course was set up allowed for a relatively smooth adjustment to the current situation (e.g., back-up sessions, keeping the data collection at the start, bringing videos or photos from home, cleaning rigorously after each session, keeping distance), major situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic are circumstances of a level that can never be entirely planned for and undeniably impact the conducting of research tremendously. See Table 5.6 for an overview of the sessions that were carried out. All in all, having a clear plan for potential unforeseen circumstances prevented us being caught off guard and provided a buffer to deal with a certain extent of situations.

5.5.4 Being Teacher & Researcher: A Valuable Balancing Act

Taking on the teacher role as a researcher is both uniquely valuable and simultaneously holds a lot of tension. On the one hand, the social constructivist and critical theory argument often underlying a PAR-inspired approach emphasize the importance of the relationship between the researcher and participants (Day Langhout & Thomas 2010, p. 62). With this combined role and the recurring nature of the course, we aimed to provide participants with a comfortable space to express themselves and be honest about their experiences, build trust and positive relationships with them, which helped the researcher to get to know the participants and contextualize their creations and expressions. Moreover,



| Week | Level / goal | Activities |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1-2 | Level 1: The basics | Introduction video |
| 3-6 | Level 2: Vlogger | Video about their city |
| 7-10 | Level 3: Content maker | Stop-motion Special effects Working with a greenscreen Editing on a computer |
| 11-14 | Level 4: Journalist | Creating a newscast |
| 15-17 | Level 5: Filmmaker | Creating instruction videos at the local initiative and/or together make a documentary. |
| 18 | Presenting work to parents | Presenting created videos to parents or guardians. |

Tale 5.5 Original planning of course.



Specific goals

See what their level is; introduce themselves; get comfortable in the group; learn the production steps.

Engage with urban identity; express urban identity; learn new ways to express yourself; improve planning, filming, and editing.

More focus on (different forms of) editing, by means of special effects; practicing more complex video editing; improving planning and creative thinking.

Learning how to present information in various ways; working together through new techniques such as interviewing, storytelling and learning about framing.

Learning about the production process; learning how to work together; applying various previously learned techniques; working with people outside of the course.

Presenting and reflecting.

Media literacy topics to be discussed

Privacy and online safety, copyrights.

Responsible identity expression.

How film works, how special effects are made, what deepfakes are.

Fake news, framing, importance of checking sources.

Production process

n/a



| Week | Level / goal | Activities |
|-------------|------------------------|--|
| 1-2 | Level 1: The basics | Introduction video |
| 3-7 | Level 2: Vlogger | Video about their city |
| 7-10 | Level 3: Content maker | Stop-motion: Free assignment Special effects: Making a commercial Working with a greenscreen: Superhero story. |

Table 5.6 Adjusted schedule due to pandemic.

interpersonal relationships between an adult teacher and adolescent participant can even help enhance social and emotional development, cognitive functioning, and positive identity development (Rhodes et al., 2006). From a practical perspective, the teacher role also provided the researcher with the necessary control over the trajectory of each session and helped to integrate data gathering in a casual and natural manner. We aimed to allow participants to play an important role in co-constructing the knowledge and shaping the research as much as possible within the context of the project, despite the inescapable power difference (Clark, 2010).

On the other hand, there are challenges created by combining roles: namely the limited time and attention available for both roles and managing their con-



Specific goals

See what their level is; introduce themselves; get comfortable in the group; learn the production steps.

Engage with urban identity; express urban identity; learn new ways to express yourself; improve planning, filming, and editing.

More focus on (different forms of) editing, by means of special effects; practicing more complex video editing; improving planning and creative thinking.

Media literacy topics to be discussed

Privacy and online safety, copyrights.

Responsible identity expression

How film works, how special effects are made, what deepfakes are.

flicting natures. While having a research assistant to record observations and a co-teacher to help in the classroom were important and effective measures to combat these struggles, the dual role still takes a toll on the extent to which one is available to carry out both teacher and researcher roles. We worked to provide participants with enough guidance, yet also had to ensure that the data was not influenced by this. The researcher and co-teacher therefore predominantly aimed to take on the facilitating role of “guides”, as described by Blum-Ross (2015), with a strong focus on providing a nourishing environment for self-development and identity construction whilst providing the necessary skills. However, difficult challenges remain, such as balancing interest and attention span of the young participants. At moments, the researcher felt that the

intensive, practice-focused nature of the course did not allow her enough time and space to go in-depth in some of the group discussions and brief interviews. Much effort was put into keeping participants interested in coming back each week, while also trying to answer the research questions and maintain the structure of the research.

5.6 Conclusion

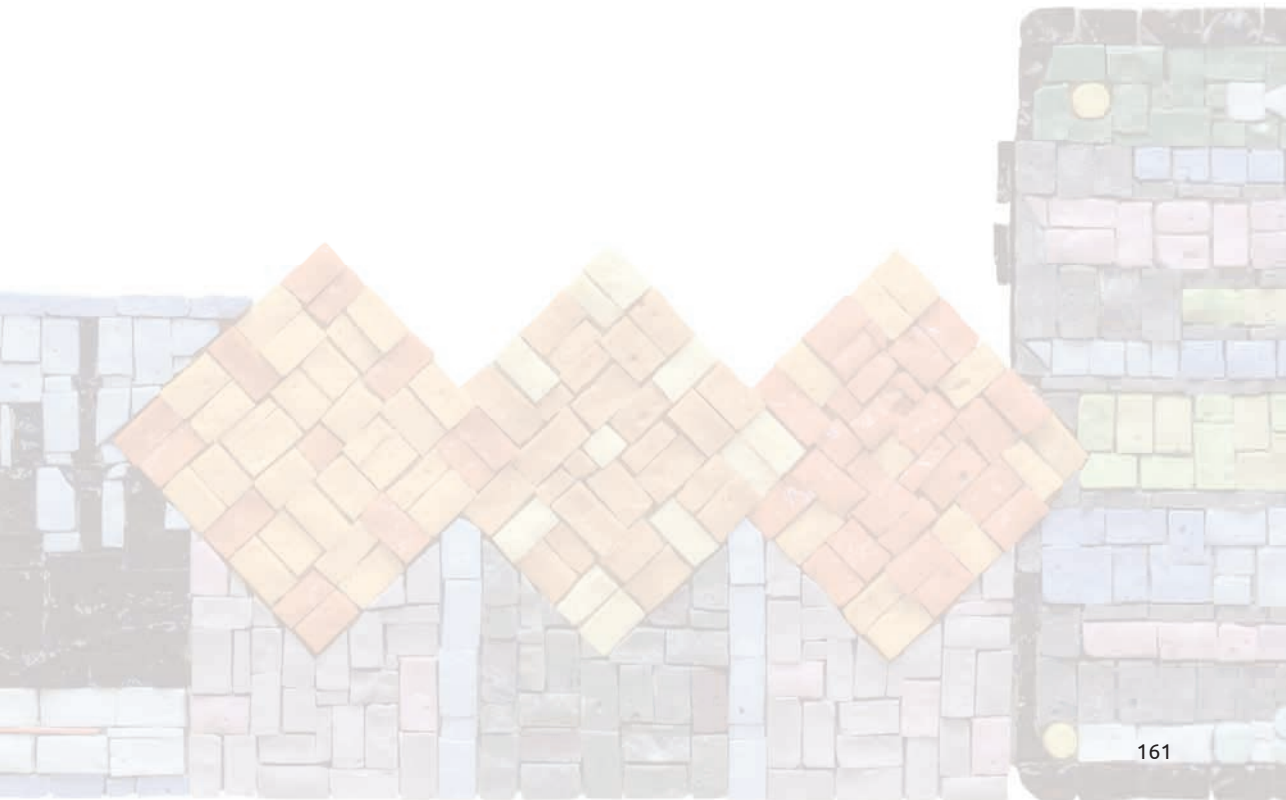
In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical, procedural and pragmatic steps that formed our approach to creating a video production PAR study focused on exploring online urban identity through social media (video) production. Many design choices had to be made in a flexible way in order to suit the participants specific needs, while simultaneously balancing different roles in the process. By carefully outlining and reflecting on this process, this chapter therefore not only served as an introduction to the results in Chapter 6, but also provided a detailed and pragmatic account of an approach to researching topics related to online identity construction through video making. Specifically, it has provided a detailed report of the design for an investigation on adolescents' online construction of urban identity through video production whilst also incorporating teaching media literacy skills and focusing on empowerment. It has discussed the underlying theoretical framework of this study, elaborated on the design choices and considerations made, highlighted the obstacles one encounters in setting up and carrying out such a study, and argued for the relevance for a hybrid form of analysis in the context of a PAR approach with multiple types of data. In the next chapter, we will report on the findings of this study in detail, and the ways in which the researchers were able to observe the concepts in this intensive, complex process.



6

This is my City, This is Me

**Investigating Early-Adolescents’
Urban Identity Expressions in
(the Process of) their Social Media
Video Production.**



Abstract

Social media has been recognized as an important place for identity construction through various forms of engagement, including original content production. Adolescents growing up in urban environments might make use of social media to explore and construct the part of their identity rooted in a sense of place and belonging – urban identity. This paper takes the first steps in exploring Rotterdam adolescents' urban identity construction through video production by means of a weekly recurring video production course with ten participants. The focus on user-generated content as an opportunity for adolescents to explore and experiment with their identities offers a valuable opportunity to investigate (the process of) urban identity expressions. This chapter reports on the results of the study outlined in Chapter 5. A combined thematic and interpretative approach was taken for the analysis of the data, resulting in a thematic exploration of the phenomenon. Results describe how participants in the study presented and related to the city, and touches upon how results related to their city-related media use outside the study. The chapter also discusses the observations in terms of how the study inspired media literacy, empowerment, and their relationship to (online) urban identity.

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the theoretical framework, design, analysis and considerations of the PAR study were outlined and extensively discussed. In this study it was aimed to explore how adolescents in the city of Rotterdam use social media production, in particular video making, to express and negotiate their urban identity online. This was done as a final step in this dissertation's exploration of online urban identity among Rotterdam adolescents. The course created was analyzed as an explorative case study to answer the ways in which adolescents themselves construct and negotiate an image of the city and how they express what it means to be a "Rotterdammer" using social media video content. This was done by analyzing the media products that resulted from the course (a general self-introduction video and a video related to the city), and by looking both the process of and discussion about creating the videos. On top of that, it was also used to explore how such a PAR study might inspire empowerment and media literacy in relation to urban identity among adolescents and how this can be observed. This chapter reports on the results of this study. The themes and subthemes resulting from the analysis will be presented under three clusters: *Presentations of the City*, *Relating to the City*, and *Media Use & Outside the Classroom*. A fourth cluster, *Observing signs of Impact*, focuses on the ways in which the researchers were able to observe and explore media literacy, empowerment, and their interaction with urban identity in the data that was generated in the study.

6.2 Presentations of the City

In this section, we address the way in which the participants reflected on and presented the city and its inhabitants in both the process of making a video and the video itself.

6.2.1 Tone and Focus of the Materials

The first theme that stood out, supporting several upcoming themes, was the tone and/or focus with which participants created their storyboards and their

videos. While some chose to make content with a *general tone and/or focus*, predominantly addressing the topic of the city with some distance from their personal lives, others decided to use a rather *personal tone and/or focus*, which points to the engagement with the city from more personal perspective often including examples from their own lives. Two of the created videos (one of which was created as a collaboration between three participants) had an overall predominantly general tone. These videos focused for a majority on general elements by summarizing a selection of famous sites of Rotterdam and talking about diversity and the local dialect. Five others made videos with a predominantly personal tone, including videos in which they talked about their own life, friends and family, local activities, and living environment. The tone of the video was mostly reflective of the tone in their mind maps and storyboards, yet the city-related alphabets (a brainstorm assignment in which participants were asked to relate something about the city to each letter of the alphabet) all had a mostly general tone. This shows that most participants were aware and actively made use of both the general elements recognizable to an outside audience, as well as being able to connect and present the city in relation to their everyday lives. While the assignment was roughly framed as a vlog about life in the city, participants were free to create their video in different, less personal approaches. In this light, the finding that many made their videos particularly personal, and the specific ways in which they chose to do so, remains particularly interesting.

6.2.2 The Spatial Environment: Personal and General

One of the ways in which the general or personal tone was achieved in the videos and during the brainstorm process, was through mentioning and showing the physical city: the *general* and *personal spatial environment*.

In terms of the *general spatial environment*, participants referred to commonly recognized, non-personal examples, such as specific areas (e.g., city center, specific neighborhoods, the well-known area code "010"), well-known buildings, architecture and landmarks (e.g., the Cube Houses, the Erasmus Bridge, and the Euromast), as well as other specific physical objects (e.g., museums, public transport, the harbor, and natural environments including the river). These general elements were mostly mentioned during the brainstorm process. While many

of the videos included some slight reference to generally recognizable spatial features, the two videos with a more general tone did include these elements most frequently. For instance, Robin (female, 10) showed some well-known buildings by pointing and having an image appear: "Today I'm going to talk about Rotterdam, of course with some famous buildings. There are the Cube Houses, the Markthal, the Euromast, the Erasmus Bridge, the Kunsthal, and Hotel New York!" However, in both cases, no further explanation was given about the examples, nor were they explicitly connected to the participants' personal lives.

The *personal spatial environment*, referring to personal spatial topics and examples, was present in all the participants' videos (and most of the mind maps) in some form, for instance, by participants mentioning their house, street or local square, neighborhood, school, mentioning or explicitly showing the local philanthropic initiative, or discussing local restaurants and shops in their direct vicinity. The mentioning of one's house or street demonstrates the importance of the home as the prime locus of their experience and relevance of the city. The presentation of their school and other parts of their living environment reflects the importance of these locations in their everyday lives. The focus on the neighborhood as a meaningful unit to be mentioned and identified with could be considered a subcategorization of urban identity. This demonstrates the importance of the immediate, meaningful action space in which the everyday life takes place in their identification with the city. The frequent inclusion of the local philanthropic initiative may have resulted partly out of convenience for participants who were eager to film and edit their own materials. However, as participants had various opportunities to include other topics and chose to do so in other cases, these examples were likely included to demonstrate a location in the city where they spend part of their free time. Finally, it's worth noting that mentions to the local initiative, one's house, street, and neighborhood were also made earlier in the introduction storyboards and videos created in the first two weeks, emphasizing the relevance of the personal spatial environment in online self-presentation.

Overall, these spatial references seem to have their unique purposes in online representations of the city. The broad range of references to general spatial environment shows the use of the elements of the city that are potentially

recognizable to the audience and may also have been used by the participants to demonstrate what they know about the city and its versatility. The frequent inclusion of personal spatial locations, however, seems to suggest that participants wanted to create videos that reflected environments are meaningful to their everyday living experience, and showed how their local environment is part of who they are and what they experience on an everyday basis. The lack of further in-depth discussions, however, could point towards either shallow knowledge about the general examples or, perhaps more likely, the limited timeframe of (the production of) the video. In the latter case, the participant could have chosen to mention as much as possible in their videos, opting for breadth rather than zooming in on a particular detail. This approach demonstrates the wide variety of associations made with the city in the case of the general examples, and a broad self-presentation in the personal examples.

6.2.3 The Symbolic Environment

Besides the spatial environment, references to the symbolic environment could be distinguished, pointing towards more intangible elements connected to the city. This included *diversity, cultural aspects, and inner-city issues*.

With Rotterdam's super-diverse character, it was not surprising that one of the subthemes that emerged was (mostly cultural) *diversity*. During a group discussion, for instance, Nala (female, 11) mentioned, "I think about the different cultures [when I think of Rotterdam], because you have many of them here." Others also mentioned one's own and other's cultural backgrounds, the diversity of languages, and the international environment. This shows the observation of diversity as a distinct characteristic of Rotterdam's socio-cultural environment. Three of the videos included such references. For example, the group of three girls sang in their video "Rotterdam, everything is possible for people and culture," and at the end of their video explained, "we thought it was important to make a video that stressed that everyone can be who they are in Rotterdam," (Feline, female, 10) "including the cultures, and so on, that's why we mentioned culture" (Amani, female, 11). This also indicates their awareness of issues of inclusivity and tolerance in the city. Diversity was addressed by the participants in terms of socio-economic differences only briefly through mentioning the

presence of homeless people in the city. While addressed from a variety of perspectives, socio-cultural diversity seemed to generally be expressed by participants as either something positive and enriching or neutral. However, despite diversity being a central topic in public debate on Rotterdam, and, perhaps even more importantly, participants' everyday experiences, it did not appear as the central topic of their videos, except to some extent by the group of girls.

Next to diversity, the theme of *cultural aspects* encompassed a broader set of culture-related topics that participants associated with the city. Firstly, this included the Rotterdam dialect and/or accent, which several participants later included in their brainstorm materials and two participants made explicit reference to it in their videos, of which one even dedicated a little tutorial to it. Secondly, various associations with food and leisure were made. During the focus groups, various associations with food sometimes linked back to other themes (e.g., linking the river to (edible) fish, and city walks to buying ice cream). Participants also connected various leisure activities, including sports and other enjoyable activities, to their everyday lives in the city, which in turn emphasizes the function of the city for these personal activities. Thirdly, participants actively mentioned traditional or typically Dutch cultural elements, such as windmills, clogs, and other traditional elements in the discussions and brainstorm materials. Combined with the previous discussion of (cultural) diversity this seemingly emphasizes the presence of a dichotomy between Dutch traditional culture and other cultures. This was illustrated by a participant's mind map, stating "culture → black / white," which seemed to point to ethnic and cultural differences, yet without further value judgement. Later, this participant and her peers rather emphasized the diversity and its openness to various cultures in their video. However, the topic of traditional Dutch cultural elements did not seem explicitly present in the other videos.

Participants also explored the topic of *inner-city issues*. The presence of criminality and violence in the city seemed to have left a significant impact on them. In the group discussions, they mentioned issues such as a sense of safety, graffiti, and heavy traffic, but also theft, drugs, the presence of weapons, and even cases of murder. This topic appeared during one of the group discussions, where participants expressed that some of these issues frightened them and discussed

their related experiences. This sense of unsafety has previously been connected to neighborhoods with a higher diversity in place of origin and cultural diversity (Jennissen et al., 2018), and to some extent reflects current criminality rates in Rotterdam (Akkermans et al., 2022). Some also expressed that they were aware that people outside of the city perceived the city as dangerous. By contrast, only one participant explicitly touched upon it in their video, briefly mentioning the presence of criminality being a downside of the city. Another participant had planned to put it in her video but explained she forgot. Generally, while inner-city issues therefore seemed an important, mostly negatively connotated city-related topic to discuss among the participants, this importance was hardly reflected in the content of the videos.

6.2.4 The Social environment

6.2.4.1 Personal Social Environment

Next to the spatial and symbolic environment, participants also discussed and presented the social environment. As Lalli (1992, p. 293) argues, the city can be a symbol for the social contacts one has in it. References to participants' local *personal network* came to the fore frequently. This included family, friends, classmates, pets, neighbors, teachers, and teammates. For instance, Samir's (male, 10) video showed the teachers at the local initiative and his pets, Nala included her friend in her video, and Randell (male, 11) talked about his local friends, family, neighbors and local gaming teammates in his. Most of these examples were merely a mentioning of these people without going further into depth about them. Being presented as part of the city and their life in the city, they seemed to be positioned as meaningful fellow inhabitants, while the focus remained on the self-presentation of the presenters. This emphasizes the city as an important everyday social space for the adolescents. However, in the focus groups, the topic of personal relationships was rather limited, which may be related to the overall general tone of the group discussions, versus the more personal tone of most of the videos.

6.2.4.2 Famous Rotterdammers

Aside from personal networks, some participants also mentioned *famous*

Rotterdamers. This included local social media influencers, sports players, and even the mayor of Rotterdam. These famous fellow inhabitants serve a symbolic function and were predominantly mentioned during interviews and group discussions. Only one participant incorporated several influencers in his storyboard, and in his video included Rotterdam Mayor Aboutaleb, as well as his aunt who he claimed to be a known YouTuber. While discussions surrounding this topic seemed to take a more general perspective (for instance, which famous Rotterdamers or Rotterdam influencers they could mention), some expressed that they were fans of, went to the same school as, or lived in the same neighborhood as, the famous inhabitants. Therefore, some personal connection was present as well, through a sense of similarity and para-social interaction that characterizes relationships with media figures (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). The discrepancy between what was mentioned in the group discussions and in the videos demonstrates awareness of famous inhabitants, but a hesitance to actively and “publicly” (that is, towards peers, parents and teachers) identify with them on a personal level. More time was spent focusing on fellow inhabitants close to them. This suggests that just because someone is famous and from the same city does not make them immediately relevant – rather it seems that this relevance comes from having a connection or a sense of admiration, which could be interpreted as instances of as para-social interaction and wishful identification (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019).

6.2.5 Value Judgements and Comparisons

Both in the videos and in the discussions, statements were made about the city and how the participants evaluated it. Generally, these could be divided between positive and negative opinions, statements, and comparisons. We noticed that there was a general *positive* (or otherwise neutral) association in the created materials and discussions about Rotterdam. Participants argued, among others, that Rotterdam is a nice place to live and has a lot to offer, and included examples such as it having a nice shopping center and a richness in cultures. Interestingly, participants often focused on the atmosphere of the city – the general feeling that they had about it. Flora described that what she likes about the city is: “that it is crowded in a cozy way. It always seems that when

you look at Rotterdam, at where people are walking, you'll see different cultures, and in the shops you'll see people wandering around and looking at stuff. And often they say 'hello'. That's what I like so much about Rotterdam." This positive stance translated directly into the context of most of the videos: their enthusiasm about living in the city was explicitly mentioned in six out of seven videos. For instance, Fadime talked about how she likes the atmosphere of her neighborhood with its shops and local market, and Randell called the city "fun" and promoted it as a good place to move to.

During the group discussions participants also mentioned some *negative* opinions about the city. This centered mostly around the idea that Rotterdam is perceived as dangerous, relating to the aforementioned theme of inner-city issues. Even during the group discussion where this was discussed elaborately, participants still chose to mention elements they liked about the city in between. One of the participants called the city "difficult," arguing that he liked the city when it is "calm", but he found it unpleasant when it became "complicated," which he later related to in terms of fights or arguments. We interpreted this as the presence of unpleasant relations in his direct environment or possibly discrimination. Only once did a negative opinion clearly appear in a video – the earlier mentioned example about criminality. Another participant mentioned the crowdedness of her neighborhood market neutrally in her video, yet, conveyed in an interview that she found this somewhat annoying.

Interesting to note is that differentiations and comparisons, which is a key element in shaping social (urban) identity (see Chapter 2, section 2 and 4), were largely absent from the discussions and the videos. In the few cases that a comparison was made, a specific opposite was, for the most part, absent. For instance, Nala mentioned Rotterdam to be "one of the best cities to live in", implying that it's better than other cities. Only when Randall presented Rotterdam as a "difficult" city, referring to the behavior of some people in Rotterdam, did he mention other cities like Amsterdam and The Hague as a comparison.

6.3 Relating to the City

In this section we address the ways in which the participants related the city and its inhabitants to themselves and their identities in the process of making a video as well as the end-product.

6.3.1 Identification with the City & the City as Living Environment

Throughout the discussions, written materials and videos, participants expressed different intensities of *identification with the city*. During the group discussion before starting the Rotterdam-related video, participants were asked whether they considered themselves a Rotterdammer. Each of the 9 participants present that day raised their hand in agreement. After making and presenting the Rotterdam-related videos, we assessed this connection to and evaluation of the city by asking each participant whether they felt more, equally, or less proud to be a Rotterdammer than before making the video. Three participants' positive identification remained unchanged, of which one argued that this was because "I think I've always been very proud, so I can't be prouder" (Robin). Five of the participants argued they were prouder for reasons that included enjoying making of the video and the topic making them happy. Flora argued that she was prouder of being a Rotterdammer, "because we now expressed what (we in) Rotterdam have to offer, and if you can complete the whole alphabet with that, then you have a lot to celebrate." Only one participant said her pride regarding the city had decreased, yet this was due to embarrassment about her performance in the video and did not seem to be related to the city-related message itself.

One of the most central means through which participants related themselves to the city was quite straightforward: through referring to themselves living in it, being born there, and sometimes by making explicit that they were there at the moment of filming, they positioned themselves spatially, showed that they were an inhabitant in the city, and in a way demonstrated that they belonged there. This was often done through references to their personal spatial environment, as well as the personal tone or focus of videos. In the written materials, this happened predominantly by various ways of emphasizing the personal spatial environment. In his storyboard, Samir, for instance, drew his house and included

in text that he wanted to show where he lives in the video. This way, he emphasized his connection to the city through being an inhabitant of it, physically positioning himself there and signifying his belonging. The videos reflected similar expressions, both explicitly through mentioning the city as their living environment, and implicitly through mentioning schools, leisure activities, or their personal network within the context of their created Rotterdam videos. For instance, in a personal-toned video Fadime introduced herself and mentioned the city and the street she lives in, demonstrating a very explicit presentation of Rotterdam as her living environment. In videos with a more general tone, such connections were present, too. Amani, Flora, and Feline, who called themselves “The Girls 010” signifying their belonging to the city, discussed their presence in Rotterdam explicitly at the beginning of their song by singing “we are at [the local initiative] which is in Rotterdam,” and explain later in the video that “we also used this text because [Amani] goes to the [school mentioned in the song].” The presence of these explicit and implicit references to the city as their living environment demonstrates the personal importance of the city and its relation to their everyday lives.

Interestingly, emphasizing the city as one’s living environment already occurred in the introduction videos. Five participants mentioned living in or being born in Rotterdam in their storyboards through various references to their personal spatial environment, including 010, references to their direct living environment, and mentioning their recurring presence at the local initiative. The videos reflected this: five participants mentioned living in or being born in Rotterdam, and two expressed being in Rotterdam by actively talking about the local initiative, stating its courses as their hobby, and/or promoting it. As the storyboards used for the first video only included six squares in which they could fill out information, intentionally dedicating one of those boxes to one’s city demonstrates that urban identity is an important part of some of these participants’ self-presentation.

6.3.2 What Does It Mean to Be a Rotterdammer?

During the focus groups, the question of *what it means to be a Rotterdammer* was both directly and indirectly discussed following questions about the subject

as well as through remarks and topics throughout other conversations. This yielded several ideas regarding who qualified as a Rotterdammer, as well as what constituted the characteristics of a (stereo)typical Rotterdammer.

Qualifying as a Rotterdammer was perhaps most often seen in terms of attributes relating to their physical presence in the city: living in the city, being born there, or the city being part of one's everyday living environment. When asked about the characteristics associated with fellow inhabitants, however, participants went beyond spatial oriented perceptions and included more social and symbolic elements. Three participants emphasized the friendliness of and friendships between the inhabitants: "I like that there's a lot of friendship in Rotterdam" (Samir). Moreover, Robin used spatial and symbolic elements to characterize fellow inhabitants: "I think that when you're a Rotterdammer, you live on a little part of history of the World War II," pointing towards the importance of the historical context of the city. Generally, perceptions of fellow inhabitants seemed to have a mostly positive angle. Interestingly, two participants emphasized accent or dialect and specific demographics to characterize fellow inhabitants: "I don't know, but especially [think of] older men with a bit of a Cowboy-like style and a Rotterdam accent" (Nala). The elements in this example seemed to point towards their perception of a somewhat culturally and ethnically homogeneous, traditional Dutch demographic and culture. One participant expressed negative associations with Rotterdammers, ascribing a certain type of (undefined, yet seemingly negative) behavior and difficulty understanding them.

The earlier discussed themes further inform us about participants' perspectives on this topic. The discussions of the city as a place of criminality and participants' perceptions of the city as unsafe seems relevant considering perceptions of fellow inhabitants. However, despite the general discussion on the topic of criminality, the absence of this topic in the discussion of being a Rotterdammer suggests that this is not central to their perception of what it means to be an inhabitant of the city. Rather, their responses often had a more positive, socially oriented tone. Earlier themes also contributed to conflicting ideas about who belongs and who does not. On the one hand, Rotterdam was perceived as a diverse city, supported by participants self-categorizing and categorizing friends

and family as Rotterdammers. However, simultaneously, participants also made quite a few references to traditional Dutch culture. This emphasizes and complicates the dichotomy between qualifying as a Rotterdam inhabitant and the identification of its characteristics.

While the central idea of a Rotterdammer being someone who lives in Rotterdam may sound straightforward, it exposes a complexity within the participants' underlying reasoning. By addressing living in Rotterdam as a precondition for being a Rotterdammer, calling themselves and their friends and family Rotterdammers, and emphasizing the (cultural) diversity in the city, participants seemed to suggest that everyone can be a Rotterdammer. However, the emphasis on traditional Dutch culture and the Rotterdam dialect as the characteristics of the typical inhabitant indicates a discrepancy or possibly different levels of belonging.

6.3.3 Interconnection with Other Identities

Throughout the discussions, written materials and videos, participants expressed a couple of interconnections between their urban identity and *other identities*. Aside from (elements of) social and personal identities, such as being a family member, a classmate, a student of a teacher, as well as associating themselves with various hobbies, two interconnections stood out: cultural identity and online identity. Three participants referred to their cultural identity in their videos. For instance, Flora connected being a Rotterdammer to being Dutch in her introduction video, after which she mentioned her multiple cultural roots, and Kevin mentioned his cultural roots and showed the Cape Verdean flag and the country's written name in his Rotterdam-related video.

The other element was related to specifically to an "online" identity construction. By discussing social media channels and asking about numbers of followers, the visibility of one's identity seemed to play an important role. This connects to findings by Guerrero-Pico et al. (2019) and Pires et al. (2021) on the aspirational production practices of adolescents, the goal of reaching a large audience, and emulating and/or becoming a professional influencer. Randell connected this to his urban identity: "I have West in my [social media account] name because it refers to my neighborhood. And because I was inspired by my brother, who put it

in his name as well.”. This shows an overlap of this online and audience-oriented perspective combined with more individual urban identity practices.

6.4 Media Use In- and Outside the Classroom

To relate the created content in the course to more everyday practices, we also explored themes related to their media consumption and production in relation to the city outside of the course.

6.4.1 Inside the Classroom: Ideas and Actual Media Use for Videos

To investigate what options they had in mind in the creation of social media content, before creating the videos about the city, participants were asked for different *ideas how media could be used to present the city and its inhabitants*. During the group discussions participants suggested an initial number of creative ideas in which their urban identity could be expressed through video, including taking pictures in the city and of the city, making videos about the city or showing where they are in the city, talking about the city, combining a series of pictures to make a video, or use stop motion techniques. In creating the videos, however, most of the participants presented the city mostly by talking about it in their videos, directly addressing their audience. In some cases, participants used pictures that they had found online or inserted text to support what they were saying. Due to the pandemic and other practical reasons participants were not able to film outside. Instead, they had to option to bring videos made at home, which we would help them to insert. Only two participants brought one or two pictures and none brought their own videos. A few participants chose to show their audience around in the local initiative, creatively dealing with the circumstances while presenting a part of their lives in the city. While some participants inserted music and sounds, none used existing Rotterdam related music or audio fragments (e.g., Rotterdam artists or songs about Rotterdam). An exception of this was the group of three girls who made a song about the city and sang it themselves. Generally, the city was therefore mostly represented by what participants were saying and showing in their videos.

6.4.2 Outside the Classroom: City-Related Media Consumption and Production

During the sessions, it became clear that participants been *exposed to Rotterdam-related social media content* before, mostly discussed as part of their active media diet. Various participants pointed to Rotterdam-based social media influencers. When explicitly asked about this, participants were fast to mention five local influencers, three of whom lived in their neighborhood. This connected to their direct personal and social living environment, and demonstrated their spatial and social proximity to their local media role models. Other examples were mentioned throughout the weeks as well. One of the participants included influencers, one of which was a relative, as part of his storyboard and referred to this influencer in his video. City-related media consumption experiences were thus in some cases directly related to their personal spatial and social living environment.

When the participants were asked whether they would likely make *Rotterdam related videos after this course* again, three participants agreed, three largely disagreed, and two participants were not sure. Of the latter, one participant, however, added an important nuance: “I think that I never thought to make a video about Rotterdam. I think I’d rather make a vlog where I *went* somewhere *in* Rotterdam, than making one in which I tell something *about* Rotterdam” (Robin). This indicates that while dedicating a whole video to the city might be a heavy form of engagement, it might play an important role as the background of their videos – the environment in which their lives and all their experiences take place. Some of the examples of previously made content, which will be discussed next, suggests how this might be happening.

That last argumentation seems to be reflected strongly in the *Rotterdam-related videos they had made on their own time* before the course. Five participants gave examples about how they had previously filmed at a Rotterdam location. For example, Flora mentioned: “Once I was making a TikTok video on my way to my aunt’s party, and we were filming. And then I decided to film on our way there. And then you saw my house, the street, and the Erasmus Bridge.” Similar to the other examples, the city was in the background of a video, without it being the subject of it. Only one of the participants did indeed make a

video *about* the city, and even mentioned the inclusion of an influencer: “I made a video about Rotterdam. I went from the south [of Rotterdam], to the north, and to the west, where I live. But then, by coincidence, I saw [local influencer] when I was filming my video. [...] He even wanted to be in my video.” (Samir). The city was thus mostly found as the background to their videos, only rarely was it the subject. Furthermore, four participants had uploaded their previously made video on social media, including Instagram and TikTok (of which one could be publicly viewed while the other two had unknown privacy settings), and one had shared it on a messaging app (sharing it with friends only). Participants did not go further into how big their audience was (or they perceived to be) or why they opted for this audience.

During the interviews, participants were also asked what they would have done differently if they had not been limited by the course and situation. Many mentioned filming other locations, such as landmarks, shops, daily life locations, and other enjoyable parts of Rotterdam. Flora also wanted to capture Rotterdam’s atmosphere: “Maybe you could show, as you were heading somewhere, how crowded it is or how many people they are. That you blur things, but that you can sort of show how much color it really has. [...] You see the trams driving, you see many shops, such as the local butchery or hairdresser, and you’ll see a lot of color.” Some participants indicated they wanted to further explore the local initiative and show what they would do there in different workshop spaces, demonstrating a specific activity from their everyday lives in the city. All these examples show the various ways to present the city by means of a video, while focusing on positive experiences and self-presentation.

6.5 Observing Signs of Impact: Urban Identity, Media Literacy, and Empowerment

As an additional aim, in line with the underlying elements in the planning and execution of the course, was to explore ways in which the presence and development of empowerment and media literacy in the course could be observed and how they seemed connected to each other and urban identity (see Chapter

5 for an initial breakdown of these concepts into observable building blocks). The following results describe the ways in which the researchers were able to observe indications of such phenomena from the data in an interpretative and inductive manner. This section provides a description of what we could observe during the current study and aims to provide empirical examples of how these concepts and their interconnections can be observed for future research.

6.5.1 Media Literacy

To get a general sense of the initial level of media literacy amongst the participants for educational purposes, in-class discussions about important media literacy topics were conducted by the researchers. Throughout the course, the researchers monitored the development of participants media literacy through observations of participants' activities and the created materials. Recaps of previous weeks and improvements in created materials over time, gave some indication of the extent to which media literacy increased, yet only allowed for general observations due to their inductive and interpretative character. Table 6.1 provides an overview of examples of these observations and how they were integrated in the course. The researchers noticed differences in the initial levels of media literacy between participants and between the elements in the first weeks. However, from what the researchers were able to observe, it seemed that the participants' development in terms of elements, or building blocks, of media literacy did not always happen equally or at the same time. For instance, Kevin's strong creative engagement did not match his low level of awareness of online privacy and safety (creative engagement vs. strategic use of media/general (critical) awareness). It is important to note that the focus of investigation was not on the degree or frequency of improvement.

6.5.2 Empowerment in the Context of Media Literacy

As previously mentioned, this case study's additional goal was concerned with exploring how the presence of empowerment could be observed in the process of making media, guided by the initial building blocks in Chapter 5. Table 6.2 provides an overview of examples on how these building blocks were observed

during the weeks. This section briefly addresses each building block (confidence, capability, autonomy, and supportive environment) and highlights examples of their interconnections.

The building block *confidence* in relation to media literacy included expressions or other behavioral examples indicating that participants believed they could do or learn something. Looking at the storyboards, videos and brief interviews, there seemed to be differences noticeable in confidence in terms of the complexity and creativity of what they strived for. For instance, some participants in their videos would point at spaces where they would later add in images or included such plans of this in their storyboards. This demonstrates their confidence in their ability to make this happen, even if they didn't already possess the skills. Behaviors such as a decrease in shyness and increasingly proudly showing their work and accomplishments to the teachers or peers demonstrated potential increases of such confidence. This could point to repeated experiences of success or overcoming obstacles. Negative examples of confidence should also be noted. For example, Randell briefly considered deleting his video out of insecurity, and Robin created a video of high quality, yet was very self-critical at the end result. Both examples connected to their perception of the quality of their work and, arguably, existing self-esteem. All in all, these examples illustrate the potential of connections between participants' perception of their hard skills and creative engagement and their confidence, which can simultaneously be translated to their autonomy and capability. This could be explained by the idea that dissatisfaction with or inability to complete a task could create insecurity about oneself and one's capabilities and/or autonomy, yet accomplishment shows proof of capability and/or autonomy.

Occurrences of *capability* were found in relation to participants' abilities and were also visible through behaviors such as working effectively without having to ask many questions, which relates it to media literacy skills and autonomy as well. Various literacy practices in digital culture are dynamic and are interconnected with other general skills (Cannon et al., 2018), which explains the strong hybridity between media literacy skills and the understanding of capability in this case. Participants started the course with different levels of skills and



| Element | Initial observations |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| General (critical) knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Knowledge of e.g., privacy rules, copyrights, knowledge on how certain media techniques work- Lack of knowledge of e.g., online permanence, privacy options, and safety |
| Hard skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Difference in self-reported experience+ Observed ease of filming and editing- Observed difficulty editing |
| Creative engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Coherent initial presentation- Incoherency in content- Presence of non-strategic bloopers and one-takes |
| Strategic use of media | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Self-promotion techniques- Inclusion of personal details that present a privacy risk |

Table 6.1 Examples of observations of media literacy and how they were integrated in the course.



| Observed examples of changes | Observed and/or stimulated during |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ability to repeat previously discussed topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short in-class discussions about these topics • Observations |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Cutting, splitting, sound, special effects - "Creative" workarounds, indicating inability to carry out the task normally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions and explanations • Differences between storyboard and videos • Various help methods (following Friesem, 2017) • Peer support |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + More different elements and techniques used + Increased coherency in videos + Frequent inclusion of intro/outro + Creative explorations + Strategic use of bloopers - Limits connected to hard skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different assignments a creative freedom • Tips for length and structure • Storyboard • Brainstorming |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Positive promotions of self or environment - Decreased use of tools for self-promotion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on impact • Reflecting on message of video • Connections to general (critical) knowledge |
|---|---|

experience, making it difficult to provide an exact comparison of development. Nevertheless, a slight improvement of skills was noticed overall, for instance when participants were able to make their videos appear like their storyboards and there seemed to be increased control over what they were doing. Besides media literacy related examples of capability, a negative example of capability was that some participants had difficulty expressing oneself by finding the right words or coming up with suitable content for the assignments. Capability, too, was interlinked with the other building blocks of empowerment. An example of the role of capability as a building block of empowerment was demonstrated by Kevin, who had figured out how to add images as an overlay to his video and proudly and excitedly showed this to the researcher. Not only did he acquire this new skill autonomously, thereby increasing his capability, but it also became clear that this had made him more confident. Soon after, another participant referred to Kevin as the “special effects master” and referred a peer to him for help, demonstrating its mutual interaction with the supportive network as well.

Observing *autonomy* included occurrences of participants taking the initiative to start working, working mostly autonomously, and trying to overcome their own roadblocks. Due to differences in media skills, and thus capability, there seemed to be a difference in initial autonomy between participants. Indications of development were, in a way, visible in the course through increased autonomous activities (e.g., not requiring help, overcoming obstacles on their own) and expressions (awareness and determinedness towards one’s own desired end goal). A second sign of autonomy observed was the awareness of what one wants and a certain amount of determinedness to accomplish it. It was also expressed when some of the participants argued they would have liked more opportunity for autonomy in the course. An explicit example of autonomy and its embeddedness in empowerment was given by Fadime, who bumped into an issue with her video planning and editing when showing it to the researcher. When the researcher suggested a solution, Fadime decided that she wanted to solve it differently (note that her capability was not an obstacle here). This shows autonomy in solving her own problems and taking initiative, as well as confidence in her own idea.

The *supportive environment* amounts to the presence of a supportive network of people surrounding the participants, and how this helps to achieve their goals. This was visible mostly in terms of participants collaborating, asking questions and other friendly interaction. Collaborations and positive interactions were visible in the videos and in the progress of making them, and collaboration was sometimes planned (though because of time and convenience not always executed) in the section of the extended storyboards. Over the weeks, participants seemed to get familiar with the others and some expanded their collaborations and interactions beyond their initial friends, sometimes aided by mixing the groups. Sometimes collaboration also came with conflict, as is a natural part of the process (Friesem, 2014). Yet, importantly, the situations were always resolved, and relations continued normally in the weeks after. Throughout the weeks, and particularly during the final presentations of the city-related video, instances were noticed of participants complimenting each other on their work, giving each other feedback, and applauding each other – a valuable practice (Friesem & Green, 2020). An example the relevance of the supportive network in overall empowerment, is that of Nala, who informed the researcher “Because I worked together with Robin, I dared to [film myself]!” When the researcher asked whether this was because they had worked together, Nala responded “Yes, but when Robin left, I still dared to film. Because she helped me.” This shows that the supportive network also aided in the increase of this participant’s confidence and autonomy.

What interlinks these four building blocks, and the related observations and examples of visible empowerment, is their connection to *overcoming obstacles*. It was during and after such personal or group struggles that the building block of empowerment became most visible. Through being curious or ambitious, taking risks, learning from and with peers, and overcoming different kinds of obstacles, they empowered themselves. Learning new skills (capability), taking more risks and being proud of results (confidence), making one’s own decisions and working towards one’s own goals (autonomy), and relying on peers in terms of knowledge and support, as well as overcoming conflict (supportive network), all interlinked and contributed to a space that enabled self-expression, personal growth, and learning.



| Element | Examples of observed building blocks |
|------------------------|--|
| Confidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Showing ambition/confidence in storyboard and video shots+ Expressing confidence in skills in speech+ Expressing or demonstrating confidence in ability to overcome obstacles and/or work independently+ Confidence in finished product+ General confident attitude (e.g., when presenting or acting)- Hesitant to show storyboard or video- General self-doubt, insecurity, self-critical in skills or self |
| Capability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Media literacy skills and knowledge (see previous sections)+ Successfully and autonomously completing tasks+ Ease in brainstorming, generating ideas, and planning- Absence of media literacy skills (see previous section)- Dependency on others for various activities (related to autonomy)- Difficulty expressing oneself and/or generating ideas |
| Autonomy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Working autonomously by choice, not requiring help+ Overcoming obstacles on one's own+ Awareness of one's own goals and determinedness to accomplish them+ Working autonomously and proactively- Requiring help frequently (from peers or teacher)- Reluctantly starting an assignment |
| Supportive environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Including others in their film+ Working together+ Helping each other+ Providing compliments and feedback- Conflicts surrounding the video creation process- Other difficulty working together or unfriendly behavior |

Examples of observed indications of potential development

- + Improved confidence in presenting work
- + Highlighting their accomplishment to others
- Dissatisfaction and insecurity when autonomy and capability are lacking

-
- + Development of skills (e.g., video's similarity to storyboard, knowledge retention)
 - Continuing complications in video creation

-
- + Increased independent working (including in pairs), not needing help.
 - + Requesting increasing autonomy
 - Remained need for help focusing

-
- + Increased collaboration, increased mingling
 - + Planning to work together
 - + Compliments and positive feedback
 - Not planning together
-

6.5.3 Relating Empowerment and Media Literacy to Urban Identity

Several weeks of the course were dedicated to the topic of the city and, through this, exploring urban identity (see Chapter 5). The course was therefore used as a vessel to actively engage with and empower the participants' urban identity, through explicit discussions of the city, creative freedom in their discussion and expression of the topic, and interviews in which they were given space to further explain their produced materials and their meanings. This section discusses the way in which the potential impact of research on urban identity was noted, specifically in terms of media literacy and empowerment. See Table 6.3 for examples of such observations.

Sense of awareness & identity – Awareness of and engagement with identity played an important role in the research. Participants seemed to differ in terms of their ability to engage with urban identity in and outside of their videos, suggesting a difference in initial capability and autonomy. This could be observed through the ease or difficulty with which they were able to think about topics and express their experiences of the city in the group discussions, during the individual brainstorm activities, and in the final videos. While many topics were touched upon in the discussions and through the brainstorm materials, some participants still had difficulty coming up with ideas or made unclear or misconnections to the city later on in the process. In the brief retrospective interviews, participants were asked to evaluate the level of difficulty they experienced in making a video about the city. Five participants assessed it as an easy task (e.g., because it was easy to think about related topics), three participants indicated that it was not easy nor hard (challenges including having missed the brainstorm session, difficulty organizing the information, and difficulties during the filming process), and one participant expressed that he found it rather difficult as he had never actively considered the topic. Simultaneously, during and after the assignment, it also became clear that participants had creative ideas that they wanted to carry out, including going out and exploring the city, which were not possible within the constraints of the situation. More autonomy and support to exploring the environment might therefore aid empowerment.

Despite these differences, the majority of the participants expressed a greater sense of pride in the city after making the video, indicating a strengthe-

ned urban identity. An initial sense of autonomy and capability, in the form of awareness of this identity, therefore seemed to be required to autonomously work on this form of empowerment, yet awareness of this identity can be stimulated through various activities. Moreover, it can be argued that the role of the supportive environment may also have relevance for urban identity, as participants were working within a group of fellow inhabitants who functioned as both their co-producers, not only helping them make the videos about their shared environment and giving supportive feedback, but also as the audience, who watched and recognized parts of each other's videos. In this way, we can see urban identity as something that is shared and co-produced.

Sense of impact – A next step after being aware of one's urban identity and being able to produce content about it, would be to bring about a form of impact or change, regardless of its size. Previous research has argued that media literacy practices can contribute to democratic attitudes and civic engagement amongst adolescents (Hobbs et al., 2013). Participants were asked, after creating the videos, how they believed videos about the city could impact their audience's perception of the city and what they would want such videos to convey. And when presenting their videos, they were asked to reflect on what they hoped their audience would remember from their own video. While the majority of answers were aimed at a positive presentation, answers to both questions did not always exclusively focus on the city. In some cases, participants also promoted the local initiative or themselves. When asked about potential social impact of their videos, or similar other videos about the city, however, all nine present participants thought that the videos could have a form of (positive) impact. Some believed that it could shift the attention away from the city's issues. Others believed that with such videos they could teach their audience about the city, inspire people to move there, or could raise awareness of danger in the city and teach people to be safe. However, two participants believed their impact was limited to peers, "because, well, we are just children and grown-ups sort of have their own language," (Nala, female, 10). All in all, the participants' belief in their capability to have impact thus seemed to be mostly center around potential future videos. Nevertheless, this indicated that their (positive) engagement with the city was accompanied by an awareness of potential impact, although

that potential may be limited.

Awareness of and confidence in potential impact connects to various building blocks of empowerment and media literacy. In terms of capability and autonomy, one needs to develop sufficient media skills to make a video with a message (hard skills and creative engagement), but also have awareness of their audience and their own ability (as well as desire and opportunity) to create a message that may influence their audience's perception of the city (general critical knowledge and strategic use of media). It also needs to be noted that this impact is linked to the supportive network, which is in this case be their peers who act as both co-creators, impacting the shaping of the messages, as well the audience who consumes the content.

It must also be noted that impact can be perceived as negative. Some of the participants chose or planned to also mention the negative sides of this city, reflecting part of their lived experience. While this was never more than a brief mention in a generally positively-oriented product, it can be argued to demonstrate a sense of awareness of city-related issues and the confidence to reflect on it publicly. Moreover, one of the participants that created the singing video said that while they intended that their video reflect a positive image of the city, she felt like the opposite was accomplished through their video. While this did not have to do with the content about the city but rather her embarrassment of singing, it shows that a low level of confidence can undermine the sense of empowerment of a participant.

6.6 Discussion

This study explored how adolescents in Rotterdam construct their urban identity using social media through a video course case study in which participants created and reflected on their own videos about themselves and the city. Combining results helps us define some first insights to further explore.

First, online urban identity expressions in many cases seemed to be connected to one's personal everyday experiences that were being presented through spatial, symbolic, and social elements. This emphasis on one's everyday



| Element | Examples of observations in data |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Sense of awareness and identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to talk about, reflect upon, or create content about the city and its inhabitants (or, oppositely, making incorrect connections or not being able to come up with content or answers) • Sense of connection and pride • Connections made in content and discussions to self • Self-reported level of difficulty |
| Sense of impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reported belief in potential for impact • Awareness and quality of (retrospective) self-reported message of content • Self-reported perceived potential of impact • Perceived audience/reach |

Table 6.3 Examples of observations of urban identity and how they were integrated in the media making course.

action space seems to go against Lalli's (1992) statement that the city should be seen as having more of a "global function" (p. 293). Rather, the observed focus emphasizes the everyday local environment, where the city may function more as a symbolic, rather than physical, living space, as most of everyday life takes place in the neighborhood. The presentation of everyday experiences in the city demonstrates what is meaningful to the participant and worthy of mentioning and how they position themselves in the city. This personal-oriented focus fits with social media's recognized role as an important space for identity construction and self-presentation (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). While the nature of the vlog assignment may to some extent have prompted participants to create

a self-oriented end-product, they had ample freedom and examples to pick their own approach, demonstrated by those who chose to take a general approach. The relationship between urban identity and other identities was also visible in various participants who demonstrated interest in, and previous experience with, presenting the city *through*, or in the background of, a vlog about their lives, and thereby saying something about themselves through the presence of the city, rather than creating content specifically *about* the city. This is in line with the finding by Humphreys and Liao (2011) who conclude that presentations of places in digital spaces have been used to tell narratives about oneself.

A second, related insight is that, despite clear awareness of negative experiences in the city and with fellow inhabitants, they were almost exclusively presented in a positive or neutral light in the created content. This choice relates to the idea that people rather attempt to mitigate negative impacts on how they are perceived by others and present themselves in a positive light (Goffman, 1959; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel, 1981). Being negative about one's city or fellow inhabitants online therefore may not contribute to a positive online self-presentation, and thus self-image, as such statements about one's environment, or group of inhabitants one belongs to, negatively reflects on the individual. This would suggest that the question of 'what do I truly believe or perceive about my city and its inhabitants' is not necessarily central when making the video, but, in favor of a positive self-presentation, adolescents may rather choose to focus on 'what do I want others to know and/or believe about my city and my life in it' and frame their environment in a positive light.

A third insight concerns the observed discrepancies between ideas about forms of belonging in the city. Notable differences between expressions about (1) who qualifies as a Rotterdammer and (2) what characterizes a typical Rotterdammer emerged from the analysis in this chapter. The first was defined mostly by spatially-based characteristics, whereas the second also included symbolic and social markers. One could argue that such paradoxes might be indicative of distinctions between unchangeable attributes on the one hand, and certain forms of performativity (both online and offline) on the other (see Van Zoonen & Turner (2014) for further discussion on this distinction in identity management). Moreover, the observed discrepancy also relates to the cultural diversity

that characterizes Rotterdam, with a positively toned awareness of (cultural) diversity in the city on the one hand, yet explicit emphasis on traditional Dutch culture and demographics on the other. Similar to the discrepancy between knowing what is present in the city, and what is presented in the videos about the city, this again seems to point towards a difference between who qualifies and what characterizes. This result is somewhat surprising considering Rotterdam's history as a city of migration and diversity (Van de Laar & Van der Schoor, 2019). Moreover, with the concept of urban identity partially based on the understanding of the city as a symbol for social contacts (Lalli, 1992), this discrepancy raises questions in view of participants' identification of themselves and their friends and family as Rotterdammers, despite their various cultural backgrounds. One could argue that this seems indicate two co-existing definitions of what it means to belong. Other contextually expressed identities, such as cultural identities, could be seen as an extra dimension or layer to one's urban identity – demonstrating the possibility of hybridity of identities. While the number of such disclosures in the videos were limited, it confirms previous research indicating that for young people with non-dominant cultural backgrounds local identification is important (Day & Badou, 2019).

Finally, the participatory action research approach allowed for an additional focus on a broader impact. The intersection between media literacy, empowerment, and urban identity (see Chapter 5), was visible in observed empirical examples during the course. While the process of operationalization is complicated and needs a tailored approach based on the context (Zimmerman, 1995), the observed examples, which often showed moments of overcoming obstacles, demonstrate that the structure and direction of the course may have helped stimulate these three topics. Simultaneously, they also show the strong interconnection between the three individual concepts. While these findings only include instances observed and interpreted by the researchers, these observed moments of expressed empowerment in the context of media literacy and urban identity made perceptible the importance and the interconnections of the building blocks in action.

This study had several limitations that require further discussion and consideration. Firstly, due to the explorative and intensive nature of the study, we were

only able to gather data with a rather small group of participants in one specific area of Rotterdam, and the COVID-19 pandemic further complicated this. Our results therefore should be understood within this context and regarding the value of the active involvement of participants in researching their urban-related social media productions. Secondly, while the age of the participants was selected for theoretical reasons of identity construction and various techniques were used to stimulate conversation, the young age also impacted the extent to which we noticed we were able to discuss questions of (urban) identity in depth with them. Future research could benefit from exploration on how this urban identity construction changes in later stages of development. Fourthly, we need to recognize the context and audience. As the uniqueness of social media in terms of identity construction lies in the absence of parents and testing of boundaries among peers (boyd, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011), the presence of teachers and researchers may impact the created products and discussions, as is inevitable in this type of research. Videos may therefore differ from what participants would have created in our absence. Furthermore, the adolescent that joined the course as participants already had an interest in creating videos. Therefore, it should be noted that not every adolescent might create videos (e.g., Jansz et al., 2015; Kushner, 2016). Finally, the inability to move our video-making practices outside of the location where the course was taught inevitably impacted what participants were able to show in their videos. While we provided the earlier described solutions and asked participants what they would have done differently, future research would benefit from an approach that allows for less restrictions.

6.7 Conclusion

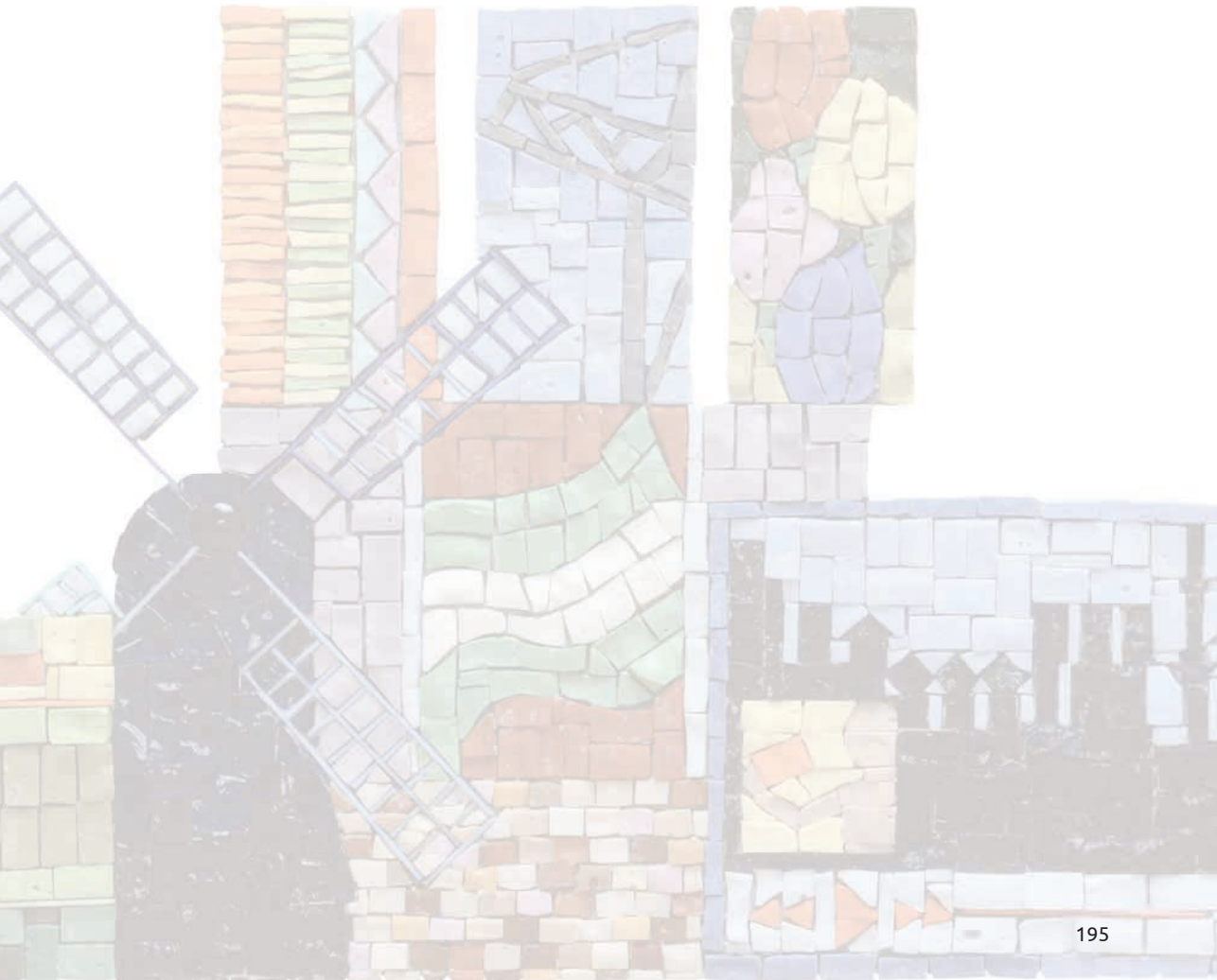
The main objective of this study was to explore how adolescents in the super-diverse city of Rotterdam construct and negotiate their urban identity using social media, by focusing on how they reflect on the city and its inhabitants in (the process of making) a video, as well as by looking at how they relate this to themselves. Results were strongly intertwined. By means of investigating both

the process and the created videos, this study demonstrates that urban identity construction in these media products predominantly happened through a personal approach in representing the spatial, symbolic, and social environment that together make the city. By presenting a primarily positive portrayal of the city, the adolescents constructed an image of their surroundings that contributes to a positive self-presentation. Specific characteristics of the city of Rotterdam that hold great value for identity construction, such as its super-diverse characteristics, were recognized and valued by adolescents, but also displayed some complex discrepancies with regards to various individual understandings of elements of urban identity. However, by considering themselves (proud) inhabitants of the city, and some participants constructing (culturally) hybrid identities in the process, the adolescents demonstrated a generally inclusive and positive identification with the city and its inhabitants. The findings also illustrate some of the potential interconnections between negotiating urban identity online and media literacy and empowerment within the context of this PAR study. In turn, this demonstrates how the various conditions of users may provide a foundation for this form of online engagement and the negotiation of urban identity. Further research, however, is needed to further understand these interconnections. Based on these findings, we want to conclude that it is important to consider social media practices when investigating urban identity construction and negotiation of adolescents, as such expressions are part of everyday self-presentations. At the same time, such identity practices likely happen in the background of everyday social media use, and should therefore not be overstated as distinctly outlined media practices. However, this research showed that when adolescents create videos that are specifically focused on the city, they demonstrate a close relationship to their built and social surroundings. In doing so, adolescents not only construct and negotiate their own connection to the city, but they also contribute to (semi-)public constructions of the city and its inhabitants that are visible for their peers to see.



7

General Conclusion & Discussion



Rotterdam adolescents are not only inhabitants of the city in the physical, offline world, but also live in and experience it in an online environment. This added layer or dimension to the city brings its own opportunities and complexities. To understand what such a new online dimension adds for these identity-exploring individuals in terms of identification with and belonging to the city and its inhabitants requires an interdisciplinary view and explorative approach. In this dissertation, I explored this through the question of how and to what extent Rotterdam's adolescents' social media use contributes to the creation and negotiation of their urban identity. In the previous chapters, I took several steps to answer this question, each study shedding new light on the question in its own way. First, I created a broader framework to understand urban identity in an online environment. In the first empirical study, I explored the urban-identity related social media ecology of Rotterdam adolescents by means of a survey. The second empirical study investigated the urban related content and networks to which these adolescents are exposed by looking at local social media influencers that were popular with the research participants through a thematic analysis combined with a network analysis. The final empirical study turned the hypothetical lens back on the adolescents by means of a video production course with the goal to explore and understand adolescents' urban-related social media video productions. As part of a methodological contribution, I reported on the theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic approach towards this participatory action research (PAR) study. I also considered the ways in which impact in the form of empowerment and media literacy could be observed in such a project.

In this final chapter, I will present the most important overarching conclusions. To achieve this, I will briefly synthesize the key findings of the previous chapters and discuss their relation to and implications for other scholarly work. After that, I will discuss the limitations of the projects and provide recommendations for future research and the implications of this research for society.

7.1 Drawing Conclusions, Discussing the Findings

7.1.1 Broadening the Framework of Investigating Urban Identity Online

In order to answer the research question, I required a broad framework to understand urban identity in the online environment in terms of what it can entail and how we can observe it. Several insights were gathered that tell us about the broad nature of online urban identity and demonstrate how this dissertation has synthesized earlier work and expanded its scope beyond previous understandings.

Firstly, the online environment provides a multitude of ways in which to engage with the city and its inhabitants. Combining literature on urban identity with existing knowledge on online identity construction, it was possible to outline a comprehensive conceptual model, the *trans-spatial urban identity model*, that can be used as a framework to understand and investigate urban identity online. It demonstrated the broadness and multidimensionality of urban identity-related practices by outlining the dimensions and unique circumstances which should be taken into account when studying urban identity online. Empirically supported by the various chapters, this dissertation suggests that urban identity constructions can be made by various types of users (e.g., everyday amateur users as well as professional influencers), can occur in different elements of the content (e.g., location information, online local social networks, and various visual and auditory clues in uploaded content), and can range from subtle to explicit (e.g., explicitly mentioning one's relationship to the city versus small indications, such as local accents or environmental clues). We therefore need to keep broadening the scope of future research in this topic, and actively consider and explore the role of the unique, yet ever-changing, online affordances in it.

Secondly, both personal and social elements of urban identity could be found in the urban-related online content. This underlines the importance that other scholars have laid on each: from the everyday, individual experiences and the role of the environment of the personal dimension of urban identity (e.g., Lalli, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983), to the importance of a local sense of (group) belonging and identification (e.g., Valera & Guàrdia, 2002; Day & Badou, 2019;

Entzinger, 2009). The quest to incorporate both highlights the inextricable overlap of these elements in the online environment, demonstrating the interrelation between, and mutual impact of, (experience of) place and people (in line with e.g., Stedman (2003)). However, as I will discuss in section 7.1.2 and 7.2.1, one of them can be more prominent than the other.

Together, the findings of this dissertation illustrate the broader mutual shaping of the physical and online urban space, suggesting that while the offline physical experiences and interaction serve as a basis for online urban identity engagement, online representations can add to the ways in which people can engage with the physical city and its inhabitants. All in all, by broadening and deepening this scope of online urban identity research, this dissertation therefore contributed not only in terms of its empirical case study, but also contributed to a larger theoretical framework concerning our understanding of urban identity construction in an online environment.

7.1.2 Social Media Consumption: Relatable Rotterdam SMIs

In this dissertation I chose to explore specific practices of various forms of social media engagement, which each have their own implications, in depth. Social media consumption was found to be the most prominent form of engagement, confirming previous research (e.g., Jansz et al., 2015; Van Driel et al., 2019). In order to investigate the urban-related messages that Rotterdam adolescents consume, I zoomed in on local social media influencers, which, with this urban-related similarity, have the potential of being adolescents' role models (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Tolberg & Drogos, 2019). Local influencers were part of the social media repertoires of Rotterdam adolescents, who could actively name the influencers that they followed, suggesting awareness of a shared identity. On top of that, the intensity of following local influencers was found to be correlated with urban identity and group self-esteem (as part of a social urban identity, pointing at one's perception of one's own group). Together these findings suggest that local influencers indeed play a role in local adolescents' identification with, and perception of, their urban environment.

The visibility of this similarity may play an important role here. Local influencers' content relates to the city in a variety of ways: among others through their

personal identification with it, what they show in or say about the city and its inhabitants, using the city as the background location for their content, as well as their interaction and affiliation with other local influencers. Such clues towards urban identity do not need to be explicit – in many cases they rather inhabit the context of the video and are visible to the eye only of someone for whom it is recognizable. Network structures, both in content and on the profile pages, also demonstrated an implicit affiliation with the city and thus emphasized urban identity. In short, the urban identity of the influencer may become visible, and therefore relatable, through various physical, social, and symbolic connections to the city. The content provides the viewer with a presentation of the city and its inhabitants through the lens of a particular media idol. The identity encapsulates the overall experience of the city by means of the broader cultural, symbolic, and social framework in which the city and its inhabitants are embedded: the everyday experiences that are relatable to Rotterdammers.

This relatability could therefore feed the urban experience and identification of their young viewers. It makes the local influencer themselves relatable through a recognition in similar personal experiences, whilst shaping ideas about what it means to be a Rotterdam inhabitant and how the city can be perceived, which could in turn broaden (or limit) the viewers scope of experiences.

7.1.3 Social Media Production: Self-Presentation and Positive Messages

Rotterdam adolescents not only consume content, some, though not many, also produce their own (in line with findings by Jansz et al. (2015) and Van Driel et al. (2019)). The discussions and examples during the video making study showed that the city was sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly included in videos. During the study, the adolescents presented the city mostly in a personal and positive manner. They used various spatial, social, and symbolic elements to do so. Negative topics and opinions, such as the presence of criminality, were touched upon in group discussions, but rarely showed up in the videos. Explicit comparisons and differentiation were mostly absent. These findings relate to various theories of self-presentation and identity construction.

The predominant focus on the everyday physical and social environment

points towards a tendency of engaging predominantly with the personal dimension of urban identity – their own personal everyday experience, rather than talking about an identity that is group-based. While the local influencers, too, showed their personal experiences of the city, their presentations in hindsight more often included this social context. Related to this, whereas in the local influencer content the city also mostly appeared implicitly or in the background, the adolescents focused mostly on relating the city to their everyday lives. In both cases, the city becomes part of self-presentation in a natural way, similar to the way the city functions as the background of their everyday lives. This focal point on oneself in the media products – with the city moving towards the background, as a prop in a self-narrative – is illustrative of and connects to previous research that underlines the dominance of self-presentation in adolescent social media use (e.g., boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). This tendency for users to talk mostly through the city, rather than about it, is in line with findings by Humphreys and Liao (2011), who found that communication through place can function as a form of place-based storytelling and self-presentation, and argue that discussions about and through place are not mutually exclusive – stories about places may be used to reveal something about oneself. In our study we saw this happen in both directions: they reveal something about the city through a discussion about one’s life and vice versa.

This framework of self-presentation and identity construction also explains the predominantly neutral or positive presentations of, and narratives about, the city and its inhabitants. The almost full absence of negative topics or opinions in the videos is in line with the idea that there is a preference for attributing positive characteristics to one’s group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel, 1981). An unfavorable representation of one’s social group(s) and environment would negatively reflect on the individual and conflict with a positive self-perception, and therefore will be avoided or reframed (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel, 1981). At the same time, this connection may also explain the presence of negative topics and representations in the group discussions of the video making study where discussing such topics can be interpreted as creating a sense of shared experience in a safe group of peers with a similar urban identity.

Finally, results show the complexity in defining what it means to be an inhabitant of the city. There seemed to be various forms of qualifying and characterizing as a Rotterdammer, which in some cases conflicted with participants' own identities. Related to this, while theory would also suggest the presence of differentiation from other cities and their inhabitants to distinguish one's own identity (e.g., Belanche et al. 2017; Lalli, 1992), which was present in the local influencers' content, it was barely observed in the productions and discussions of the adolescents. Both these findings suggest an absence of a clear conception or difficulties conceptualizing what characterizes a typical inhabitant among the adolescents. One explanation for this could be the prevalence of engaging with the personal dimension of urban identity as compared to the limited engagement with the social dimension of urban identity, as these differentiations and comparisons rely on group identities. In line with this, the absence of differentiation could potentially be explained by an age- and development-related limitation of experiences outside of the city and thus with a broader perception of the group. This discussion on age and urban identity is further elaborated on in section 7.2.1.

7.1.4 Content & Context: The Role of Super-Diversity and Other Cultural Elements

Diversity and cultural elements are frequently present in urban-related content. In particular, the topic of cultural diversity stands out in the content, and requires particular attention as the survey showed that Rotterdam adolescents with a migration background identified more strongly with the city of Rotterdam than those without. This finding is also in line with previous research on the importance of city-related identification (Day & Badou, 2019; Entzinger, 2009). The presence of diversity is also reflected in the social media accounts that Rotterdam adolescents follow. The local influencers observed in this study represent various forms of diversity, with a predominance of cultural diversity, via their own diverse backgrounds, various elements included in their videos, as well as their affiliation network and position in a thematic network within the recommender system. Regarding the content produced in the video making course, the Rotterdam adolescents showed a positive orientation towards

cultural diversity, identified it as a characteristic of Rotterdam, and included elements of diversity in their own videos. Super-diversity therefore is presented as a positive, everyday element of the city, even an enriching quality of the city. These findings are in line with previous research that has identified diversity as an important characteristic of Rotterdam (e.g., Belabas & Eshuis, 2019; Nientied, 2018; Scholten et al., 2019b), and has found a generally positive acknowledgement of diversity as a characteristic of the city (Day and Badou, 2019). The absence of negative associations with diversity emphasizes this acceptance, and perhaps even celebration, of diversity as a characteristic of the city.

The diversity-related results were accentuated by the unique social characteristics of the online environment investigated in the local influencer study, reflecting urban realities in the online context. This supports work by scholars who have emphasized and explored online networks and algorithms and their relation to local or topical interaction (Hutchinson, 2021; Lutkenhaus et al., 2019; Pfetsch et al., 2021). These findings show that thematic clusters can exist through various forms of interaction (Lutkenhaus et al., 2019), and even focus on or center around the city (Pfetsch et al., 2021).

In addition to a focus on and appreciation of diversity, various examples of traditional Dutch culture and elements were found in the consumed and produced content. While results of the survey and video production study showed that local adolescents from various backgrounds qualified themselves as Rotterdammers, some examples in the discussions of the video production study showed a variety of different characterizations, including less diverse ones. While results did not go into how this affects their feelings of belonging, it might indicate a dichotomy between being a Rotterdammer with and without a migration background. Further research is needed investigate this. Such discrepancies could point to feelings of being different from some of the other inhabitants yet belonging to this group at the same time. Simultaneously, results also showed indications of intersectionality as providing a different way to look at this phenomenon. Previous research has shown that hybrid identities are a way to combine various forms of identities and belongings into unique new frameworks as a way of making sense of oneself and one's position in relation to others. Similar to findings by scholars in the field of culture, refugee and

migration studies (e.g, Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019; Udwan et al., 2020; De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Georgiou, 2013), this dissertation shows that, Rotterdam adolescents are inevitably provided with examples of various complex identities (via the social media produced by influencers) that reflect the super-diversity of the city and potentially add to these examples themselves (via their own produced content). Our research does not show, however, the exact in-depth workings of these interactions between these identities in the online environment. Yet it becomes clear that this hybridity in relation to urban identity is a topic worth further exploration in the future.

7.1.5 Making Identity Research Impactful

This dissertation also contributed to various insights in terms of the ways in which identity-themed participatory action research can be impactful and what is required for this approach. The video production course in the direction of (urban) identity offered opportunities to combine media literacy, (urban) identity exploration and expression, and empowerment. Focusing on small, observable elements of such concepts allowed for these topics to become an active part of the PAR study, alongside the main topic of studying urban identity. Expressions of empowerment in relation to the other two concepts became mostly visible after moments of struggle, where individual building blocks of these concepts could be identified. Participants said to feel prouder of the city after creating the video, and showed various indications of feeling empowered and having improved their media literacy skills during the course. As these concepts seem to be interlinked and hold potential to be stimulated by research-related activities, further research is advised to learn more about how this form of PAR research can have a positive impact in future studies. The findings simultaneously suggest that it would be difficult to fully isolate these various forms of impact in the context of the study, and they should be considered in relation to each other. In line with recent work emphasizing the connection between media literacy and media-related empowerment (Rozendaal & Figner, 2020; Rozendaal, 2018), this study suggests that positive outcomes, such as being capable, confident, autonomous, and supported in expressing one's (urban) identity, can result from such a (video production) project. It is one of the unique benefits of

conducting this type of tailored research. Earlier chapters suggests that other benefits of engaging with urban identity might exist as well. While the results of the survey study showed no correlation to personal urban identity, personal self-esteem was connected to a sense of belonging to a group of fellow inhabitants (part of social urban identity).

To aim for and potentially achieve such impact, a carefully planned yet flexible approach is required. The video production study was designed in a way to inspire certain behaviors and skills through planned activities and teaching methods. While measuring impact in such a setting remains difficult, the small-scale set-up of the project allowed us to explore the process, give each participant personal attention, and observe examples of general trends and patterns over time. Such an approach allows researchers to capture a process that is organic and sometimes non-linear (see Darby (2017)). However, as Literat et al. (2018) rightfully argue, we must be careful to categorize participation practices as inherently powerful and emphasize that it is crucial to look at “what participation is good for, and for whom” (p. 261). Participants and the collaborating local initiative were actively involved in the process of creating and adjusting the course, which helped co-create the research (in line with Darby, 2017) and keep it fitting and relevant. I would therefore like to emphasize the value and importance of actively including participants in the research, as various other scholars have done in similar research as well (e.g., Leurs et al, 2018; Friesem, 2016; Buckingham, 2008), even at the participants’ young age. Be it with impact in mind or as a side goal, recognizing the potential impact of research on its participants and trying to actively incorporate participants in the research in some form is beneficial for both researcher, participant, and, in some cases, a collaborating party.

7.2 Limitations and Recommendations

7.2.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Doing research requires making difficult choices, dealing with unexpected circumstances, as well as learning what works, and which next steps could be fruitful. Like every research project, this dissertation has a number of limitati-

ons, and it comes with several recommendations. In this section, I will discuss the limitations of this project, and its related scholarly recommendations based on this dissertation's findings.

The first limitation and recommendations pertain to the specific context of the research. In this study we focused on the city of Rotterdam as a case study for this research, predominantly zooming in on two neighborhoods in the west of Rotterdam (Chapter 3 including a socio-demographically contrasting neighborhood in the east as well). This decision was in line with our goal to conduct an explorative study with the aim to result in in-depth knowledge. However, this specific focus inspires two future areas to explore. Firstly, while many large Dutch cities have a lot in common, they also have their unique characteristics. Future research is therefore advised to explore (online) urban media engagement and urban identity in the context of other cities, both in the Netherlands and in other countries. Comparisons could be made to other post-industrial cities through research that engages with local partners, for example, in the UNIC consortium in which universities and city councils of 10 post-industrial European cities (including Rotterdam) collaborate. Another comparative approach that is worth further investigation is on how online urban identity in a big city differs from place identity in a smaller town or local region. Research by Belanche et al. (2021) demonstrated that rural place identity, like urban place identity, also yields strong results, with affective and evaluative dimensions of this identity being higher than those in the city. However, the way in which this presents itself online has not been researched. Local affiliation in such cases might have a different focus or character than a large Dutch city with its urban elements, cultural diversity, opportunities, and societal issues. For instance, in rural regions, such as the Achterhoek, diversity may be less of a focus point: in 2022, 54% of the Rotterdam population had a migration background, versus 12% of the Achterhoek population (Statistics Netherlands, 2022). Nevertheless, a clear awareness of local identity seems to exist, as is exemplified by the introduction and frequent use of the Achterhoek flag (Stichting Pak An, n.d.).

The second topic requiring further exploration relates to development and awareness of urban identity in relation to age. This dissertation focused specifically on early-adolescents because of the importance of this stage in identity

development (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993). Because of the difficulty in discussing topics surrounding identity, various techniques were applied to make this more accessible for the young participants (e.g., Gauntlett, 2007; Prosser & Burke, 2008). Regardless of this, we noticed that discussing topics related to or describing (urban) identity with adolescents remained quite difficult. Several explanations for this are possible. While the variation in stages of identity development could have explanations such as individual differences and gender differences (e.g., Branje, 2022; Bogaerts, 2021; Verschueren et al., 2017), this dissertation's results imply that early adolescents may still find themselves at the very start of an active exploration and awareness of urban identity and the accompanying sense of belonging, which can be supported by identity development theories (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993). Various age-related contextual factors may also play a role in shaping urban identity (see Belanche et al. (2021) for an overview), in particular its social element. Results focused on adolescents in their last two years of elementary school, which means their everyday life is likely still often limited to their neighborhood and those living in it, which was also reflected in the created content. As Leurs and Georgiou (2016) demonstrate, mobilities and networks partly shape the experience of the city. Gaining more freedom to explore the city and world, both physically and socially, and being increasingly exposed to others from outside their neighborhood and the city, both online *and* offline, would provide experiences and examples that are needed to differentiate one's city and group of inhabitants from others – something which was strikingly absent in the created videos. Further research is therefore recommended to understand the differences in relevance of urban identity (and its negotiation) in different stages of one's life, for instance by investigating what happens in the first years of secondary education.

A third topic worth further exploration deals with the types of engagement that we have not addressed in-depth in this dissertation: participation. This dissertation has focused mostly on consumption and production practices to see what urban related media adolescents shared, expressed, and were presented with. While participation and communication were briefly touched upon in the survey study and in the video production study, these topics deserve deeper

investigation in the future. Practices such as sharing, commenting, and liking also provide a way to negotiate urban identities in an interactive way. What makes this particularly interesting is the finding that participation negatively related to group self-esteem. Future research should further explore this form of engagement. This could be done by focusing on negotiations of urban identity in comment sections specifically below city-related content, or the extent to which adolescents choose to share and like city-related content or local influencers, which could emphasize their affiliation with the city or contradict existing messages.

Finally, the fourth point of reflection regards the methodological strengths and limitations of this dissertation. The multi-perspective and multi-method approach of this dissertation has allowed for a valuable first broad exploration of online urban identity among adolescents. Each of the individual studies had a different methodological approach with their own strengths and limitations. There are a number I want to highlight. First, I want to emphasize the unique benefits of incorporating online networks in research on influential online figures to contextualize the created content. The local influencer study showed the importance of these contextual factors in shaping the different urban-identity related discourses. Next steps in research could include further analyses of online discourses on urban identity, larger analyses of city-related online networks, and could even go towards intervention methods in which urban identity is used as a common factor to stimulate attitudes or behaviors. However, an important limitation that needs to be considered is the possibility of echo chambers or even the absence of dialogue (Colleoni, et al., 2014; Lutkenhaus et al., 2019; Van Zoonen et al., 2011), which could limit exposure or impact. Second, while the choices for our objects of study in the local influencer study were informed by a survey, the view in the analysis was that of an adult. A next question for research could therefore be on what young viewers specifically pick up from these videos in terms of urban identity. A study could be set up including the young viewers in the analysis process, asking them about the city related content present in the videos of their favorite local influencers and its relation to their sense of belonging. This could also be done by means of an experimental study, in which the group of adolescents would be compared with a control

group of adolescents from other regions. Third, taking a PAR approach has been very valuable to this project, because it allowed for a phenomenological, longitudinal approach in which not only the end product is visible, but the process of its creation is also captured. I would therefore like to encourage researchers to actively engage their participants where possible, especially when the topics have a phenomenological nature, whilst actively taking into account the potential impact of the research and activities on the participants, as these activities can also be opportunities for them to learn and grow (e.g., Day Langhout & Thomas; Literat et al., 2018). However, the intensive circumstances of the PAR study also created limitations. During the video making study, participants recorded their videos mostly inside and with the means available to them. Due to various reasons, among which was the COVID pandemic, the participants were not able to go out on the streets to create content, neither were the participants able to go out in their own time and collect the material as easily. While we suggested the option to bring their own photos or videos or use existing materials from the internet, participants were therefore unfortunately limited in their ways of presenting the city. Future projects would benefit from taking the participants out on the streets to create their videos. Moreover, while the course was broad and covered various themes, the city-related video was made as an assignment, which may have impacted what participants produced. While the content that participants had previously made in their own time was discussed during the course, the researchers did not have access to this material, nor were we able to see participants previous expressions of urban identity. A next step in future research could therefore be to ask participants to share previously uploaded content in combination with interviews.

7.2.2 Contributions and Implications for Society

Online urban identity is embedded in everyday local life. The findings of this dissertations therefore have several relevant insights for society and various societal actors.

Local media consumption and production can be used to get in touch with local adolescents. First of all, the presence of the physical and social city in the online environment is relevant for policy makers, urban planners, and communi-

ty builders. The findings of this dissertation can be used in constructing approaches to engage youth locally, strengthen their urban identity, and inspire their connection to fellow inhabitants. Previous studies have also demonstrated the impact of urban media production in creating a sense of community and the acceptance of diversity within a group (e.g., Charmaraman, 2013). This dissertation's perspective can also be used to explore what the local environment means to adolescent youth in the context of specific topics. This can be used to align decisions and directions with their local values and interests, and thus helps to better cater to this group. Moreover, results indicate that this might be specifically relevant for migrant youth. Rather than focusing on national identities, this research supports previous research (Day & Badou, 2019; Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008) which emphasizes the importance of one's connection to one's city and fellow inhabitants. One way in which this can be explored by municipalities and local organizations is through collaborating with local role models that have a local reach, a local network, and from whose activities it becomes clear that they are inhabitants of the city. Related projects have started similar activities with local peer groups, such as the municipality's campaign "Geweldig Rotterdam" [Amazing Rotterdam] (Geweldig Rotterdam, n.d.) against knife violence in Rotterdam and through action research "INFLUENCE!" by a collaboration between various local initiatives and the Erasmus University Rotterdam (New Momentum, n.d.) that stimulate healthy lifestyles. "Charlois en de Sterren" [Charlois and the Stars] by New Momentum is another example of using research to engage with the local identity, in this case on a neighborhood scale. The results of this dissertation reinforce the importance of such projects.

Local (social) media influencers can potentially address local youth and convey messages by emphasizing their shared urban identity. This dissertation's findings also hold important information for local content creators, in particular local social media influencers. As potential role models for adolescents, local influencers should be made aware of their impact based on the city as a common factor. Putting emphasis on this identity might strengthen the bond through a sense of similarity, whilst one could also imagine that, in this line of reasoning, negative examples could weaken it. The way in which this identity is given shape by the influencer may in turn impact how audiences look

at what it means to be an inhabitant of that city. More research is needed to learn about the extent of this impact, but at this point it can be argued that the potential is there and needs to be taken into account.

Having youth create social media messages regarding their urban identity in a responsible and well considered way requires media literacy training. In turn, being able to express one's identity clearly can be seen as an empowering skill. Finally, educators may benefit from the initial indications of the relation between online urban identity, media literacy, and empowerment. The ability to express oneself on certain topics and to critically think about the impact of content also relates to the ways in which one is able to explore urban identity online. Media literacy may play an important role in how and in what ways urban identity is expressed, which may in turn impact the young creators themselves as well as their audience of peers. Schools and other educational institutions may therefore also consider combining city-related topics with their teachings concerning media literacy.

7.3 Concluding Thoughts: An Alphabet of Experiences

Embarking on this journey of exploring urban identity amongst adolescents in their critical phase of identity development and in spaces in which they spend much of their time and attention offered a variety of new insights. It demonstrated the importance, uniqueness, everydayness, and versatility of urban identity in an online environment. Looking at the everyday role of online expressions about the city that we saw in this project, be it explicitly or implicitly, they reflect the unique circumstances of one's life, provided local role models, and give one a new space to define what it means to belong, to define their experience of the city, and to define their experience of being an inhabitant. Simultaneously, it is a story that seems to be guided by a tendency towards positive self-presentation, whilst the complexities of the city are known yet not always discussed.

During this project, there was one quote that, in retrospect, seems to capture the findings beautifully. After creating her video about Rotterdam (see Chapter

6), participant Flora said that she was prouder of the being an inhabitant of the city than before “because we now expressed what (we in) Rotterdam have to offer, and if you can complete the whole alphabet with that, then you have a lot to celebrate.” It made me smile because I knew it reflected so much of what I had seen. There is a lot to explore about Rotterdam in terms of its diversity in people, spatial characteristics, and cultural abundance. Simultaneously, there is an undeniable richness in the diversity of perceptions and experiences of the city, as well as the range of ways in which these perceptions and experiences can be expressed online. Researching online urban identity provides a unique opportunity to capture the multifaceted hybridity of living everyday life in a city – online and offline – and what it means to its young inhabitants growing up in it. I therefore hope that this work may inspire further research into this valuable and impactful direction.

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Appendices

Chapter 5 and 6: Participant list

| # | Pseudonym | Age (Oct '20) | Gender |
|-----|-----------|------------------|--------|
| P1 | Samir | 10 | M |
| P2 | Fadime | 10 | F |
| P3 | Nala | 11 | F |
| P4 | Robin | 10 | F |
| P5 | Zahid | 10 | M |
| P6 | Randell | 11 | M |
| P7 | Flora | 10 | F |
| P8 | Kevin | 10 | M |
| P9 | Feline | 10 | F |
| P10 | Amani | 11 | F |

Summary

The city is the background of many people's everyday lives. It is a space that wcontextualizes many of one's experiences, memories, and ideas. Previous research has explored connections to place from a variety of perspectives (e.g., Proshansky, 1978; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). The city has been found to play an important role in the everyday life, and through this, the construction of one's identity – the *urban identity* (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983). This concept focuses on one's experiences of and ideas about the city and its inhabitants. In recent decades, the city is something that is no longer only experienced offline but may also be experienced and negotiated online (e.g., Farman, 2015; Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014; Wilken & Humphreys, 2021; Yılmaz & Kocabalkanlı, 2021). This is particularly relevant for the adolescent population, who, in this important developmental phase in which they find themselves (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993), are known to use the online space for identity construction (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). This process might be complicated by the super-diversity that nowadays characterizes various big cities (Vertovec, 2007). However, at the same time the city can be understood as a commonality of all kinds of different individuals in their everyday experience of place. As a space for identity construction and negotiation, social media therefore deserves our attention in light of *urban* identity construction, especially for adolescents who find themselves in the situation where they try to understand who they are and where they belong. Focusing on the super-diverse city of Rotterdam, this dissertation therefore aims to explore question how and to what extent Rotterdam adolescents' social media use contribute to the creation and negotiation of their urban identity. To do so, the topic is addressed from a variety of angles and using several methods to create a broad understanding of the phenomenon.

To be able to understand and contextualize the various aspects of online urban identity, one first needs to understand its various dimensions. In **Chapter 2**, this dissertation starts by outlining a conceptual model, the *trans-spatial urban identity model*, that builds on and adds to previous work on online urban identity. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the layered hybridity and

mutual influence of online and offline construction of urban identity. To provide a systematic way to understand urban identity, the model proposes several dimensions. It emphasizes the personal and social elements of urban identity, arguing that they are intertwined but both need to be actively considered. It also focuses on the difference between a user's own expressions that they share and those that they consume from others. The Chapter also discusses a variety of unique affordances of the online environment that need to be considered in order to conduct research in this field. Finally, two cases are provided, focusing on consumption and production, that bring to light various relevant contexts and demonstrate the conceptual model's value. The *trans-spatial urban identity model* provides a background to understand the focus points of the Chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 sets out on a general exploration of urban identity and its presence in Rotterdam adolescents' social media ecology by means of a survey among 324 young participants. It focuses on the relationship between various forms of social media engagement and urban identity. In this Chapter, particular attention is paid to differences between adolescents with or without a migration background in order to take into account the relevance of cultural diversity in the city, building on earlier research that emphasized the importance of a local identity to youngsters with a migrant background (e.g., Day & Badou, 2019). Results show various correlations among and between social media use and urban identity, both its personal and social aspects. It was also found that (personal) urban identity was significantly higher among adolescents with a migrant background. Findings demonstrate the relevance of social media engagement in relation to urban identity, and implicate the importance of urban identity in the context of a culturally diverse city.

In **Chapter 4**, this dissertation dives into the world of local influencers as everyday media idols for Rotterdam adolescents, and therefore focuses on what Rotterdam adolescents consume. Based on the local influencers reported in the survey study, this study explores the content of a number of these influencers in depth by means of a thematic analysis of their YouTube video content, and a network analysis of their affiliation network and related channel networks on the platform. Results show a plethora of ways in which the city

appears in the content of these local influencers that could provide viewers with a recognizable framework for urban identity, including various local settings, fellow inhabitants, various cultural elements, its (super-) diversity, and references to one's own presence in or identification with the city. The network structures further emphasized this affiliation with the city, through its various cultural themes, diversity, and local networks.

The next two chapters move towards social media content production by means of a participatory action research study conducted with Rotterdam adolescents. In **Chapter 5**, the design of the study is explained in detail. The Chapter explains how a multiple-week video making course was created to explore urban identity construction practices during audio-visual social media content production, which was carried out in collaboration with a local philanthropic initiative. The Chapter provides an illustrated approach towards designing and conducting a study in which both the process of and created materials are taken into account when investigating identity construction. Additionally, it provides an illustration of how media literacy and empowerment, as two concepts that were considered as potentially process-related results, were approached by means of conceptualizing its subcomponents as building blocks easily applicable to the study. The procedure and analysis are discussed in detail, and followed by a reflection on the lessons learned, including insights on value of collaborating, the active design for positive impact, the importance of flexibility, and the complexity of the dual role of being a researcher and teacher in the context of this study.

Chapter 6 reports on the results of the PAR study. Combining a thematic and interpretative approach in interpreting the data, a thematic illustration was created of the PAR study with 10 participants. Not only did the study look at the created materials, but also at brainstorm materials, group discussions, brief interviews, and observations. The results describe how the city was presented in process as well as in the created materials (a video introducing oneself and a video about life in the city). Various spatial environments, symbolic elements, and social network elements are discussed inside and outside the videos. The predominantly personal, positive tone of the videos stood out, whereas negative and comparative expressions in videos seemed mostly absent. The

presentation of the city mainly happened as a part of self-presentation. While participants identified themselves as inhabitants of the city, discussions showed various ideas existed about what characterizes inhabitants. Participants also reported ideas and behaviors outside of the course regarding urban related content, which emphasized the importance of self-presentation in urban identity-related content, as well as a gap between ideas for videos and the ultimately created materials. Finally, the Chapter also provides empirical examples of how the building blocks of media literacy and empowerment could be observed in the course, and how they (inter)related to each other and to the (stimulation of) urban identity. This emphasizes the potential for applicability of this type of conceptual building blocks in future participatory action research.

The dissertation is concluded by **Chapter 7**, where findings of the various studies are combined to draw more general conclusions, discuss limitations and opportunities, and see implications for research and society. It discusses the importance of broadening our understanding of the role of the online realm in urban identity construction, the unique findings for adolescents growing up in a trans-spatial environment both in terms of consumption and production, the relevance of online urban identity for living in a super-diverse city, and the practical and impactful implications of identity research. A discussion of limitations and related recommendations for future research include the focus on Rotterdam as a case study, the complexities of identity development and age, the need for a focus on participation, and the most important strengths and limitations of our mixed-method and multi-method approach. Recommendations for societal actors include the advice to use knowledge about online urban identity to strengthen a sense of belonging, make local social media influencers aware of their potential function as local role models, and the need for media literacy education to support a healthy and safe way of expressing urban identity online.

Samenvatting

De stad functioneert als de achtergrond van vele mensen hun alledaagse leven. Het is een omgeving/ruimte die vele van iemands ervaringen, herinneringen, en ideeën contextualiseert. Eerder onderzoek heeft de verbindingen met plaats vanuit verschillende perspectieven onderzocht (e.g., Proshansky, 1978; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Uit onderzoek is gebleken dat de stad, door zijn belangrijke positie in het alledaagse leven, een belangrijke rol speelt in de constructie van iemands identiteit – de stadsidentiteit of *urban identity* (Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983). Dit concept focust zich op iemands ervaringen van en ideeën over de stad en zijn inwoners. In de afgelopen decennia is de stad niet meer alleen een offline ervaring, maar deze kan nu ook online ervaren en besproken worden (e.g., Farman, 2015; Saker, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014; Wilken & Humphreys, 2021; Yilmaz & Kocabalkanli, 2021). Dit is met name relevant met betrekking tot de adolescente populatie, die, in deze belangrijke ontwikkelingsfase van hun leven (Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; Marcia, 1993), bekend staan om het gebruik van de online omgeving voor hun identiteitsconstructie (boyd, 2014; Granic et al., 2020). Dit proces wordt mogelijk gecompliceerd door de superdiversiteit (Vertovec, 2007) die vandaag de dag de grote stad karakteriseert. Aan de andere kant biedt het ook een overeenkomst tussen verschillende soorten individuen in hun dagelijkse ervaring van hun omgeving. Als een ruimte voor identiteitsconstructie en onderhandelingen, verdienen social media daarom onze aandacht in het licht van *urban identity* constructie, met name voor adolescenten die zich in een situatie bevinden waar ze proberen te ontdekken wie ze zijn en waar ze sociaal gezien thuishoren. Zich richtende op de superdiverse stad Rotterdam, heeft deze dissertatie daarom als doel de vraag te onderzoeken hoe en in hoeverre het sociale media gebruik van Rotterdamse adolescenten een bijdrage kan leveren aan de creatie en onderhandelingen van hun *urban identity*. Om een breed begrip van dit fenomeen te kunnen krijgen, wordt het onderwerp vanaf verschillende invalshoeken en met behulp van verschillende methodes belicht.

Om het mogelijk te maken om de verschillende aspecten van online urban identity te kunnen begrijpen en contextualiseren moet men eerst zijn verschil-

lende dimensies begrijpen. In **Hoofdstuk 2** start deze dissertatie daarom met het schetsen van een conceptueel model, de *trans-spatial urban identity model*, die voortbouwt op en toevoegt aan bestaand wetenschappelijk werk over urban identity. Het benadrukt het belang van het herkennen van de gelaagde hybriditeit en wederzijdse invloed van de online en offline constructie van urban identity. Om een systematische manier te bieden om urban identity te begrijpen, oppert het model verschillende dimensies. Het benadrukt de persoonlijke en sociale elementen van urban identity, en betoogt dat deze met elkaar verweven zijn maar beide actief overwogen dienen te worden. Het benadrukt ook het verschil tussen iemands eigen gedeelde uitdrukken en uitdrukken die ze van anderen zien. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt ook een verscheidenheid aan unieke *affordances* van de online omgeving die overwogen moeten worden om onderzoek te doen in dit veld. Tot slot worden twee casussen besproken, zich richtende op consumptie en productie van sociale media content, die verschillende relevante contexten aan het licht brengen en de waarde van het model demonstreren. De *trans-spatial urban identity model* biedt een achtergrond om de focus punten van de daaropvolgende hoofdstukken te begrijpen.

Hoofdstuk 3 gaat op een algemene verkenning naar urban identity en zijn aanwezigheid in de sociale media ecologie van Rotterdamse adolescenten door middel van een enquête onder 324 jonge participanten. Het hoofdstuk focust zich op de relatie tussen verschillende vormen van sociale media gebruik en urban identity. In dit hoofdstuk wordt er bijzondere aandacht besteed aan het verschil tussen adolescenten met of zonder migratieachtergrond om rekening te houden met de relevantie van culturele verschillen in de stad. Dit bouwt voort op eerder onderzoek dat het belang van de lokale identiteit onder jongeren met een migratieachtergrond heeft benadrukt (e.g., Day & Badou, 2019). Resultaten laten verschillende correlaties zien onder en tussen social media gebruik en urban identity, zowel in zijn persoonlijke als sociale aspecten. Uit de resultaten bleek ook dat (persoonlijke) urban identity significant hoger was onder adolescenten met een migratieachtergrond. Bevindingen benadrukken de relevantie van social media gebruik in relatie tot urban identity, en impliceren het belang van urban identity in een context van een cultureel diverse stad.

In **Hoofdstuk 4** duikt deze dissertatie in de wereld van locale influencers als

dagelijkse media idolen voor Rotterdamse adolescenten, en focust zich hiermee op wat Rotterdamse adolescenten consumeren. Op basis van de lokale influencers die in de enquête van hoofdstuk 3 genoemd werden onderzoekt dit hoofdstuk de content van een aantal van deze influencers in de diepte door middel van een thematische analyse van hun YouTube video content en een netwerk-analyse van hun *affiliation network* en *related channel networks* op het platform. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat er een verscheidenheid aan manieren zijn waarop de stad naar voren komt in de content van deze lokale influencers, waarmee ze hun kijkers een herkenbaar raamwerk voor urban identity kunnen bieden, waaronder verschillende lokale omgevingen, mede stadbewoners, verschillende culturele elementen, de (super-)diversiteit, en referenties naar iemands eigen aanwezigheid in en identificatie met de stad. De onderzochte netwerkstructuren banadrukken deze verbondenheid met de stad verder door de culturele themas, diversiteit, en lokale netwerken.

De volgende twee hoofdstukken richten zich op social media content productie door middel van een participierend actie onderzoek met Rotterdamse adolescenten. In **Hoofdstuk 5** wordt het ontwerp van de studie in detail uitgelegd. Dit hoofdstuk omschrijft hoe de videoproductie cursus van meerdere weken was gemaakt om de urban identity constructie tijdens audio-visuele social media content productie te kunnen onderzoeken. Dit project werd uitgevoerd in samenwerking met een lokaal filantropisch initiatief. Het hoofdstuk biedt een uitgewerkte aanpak voor het ontwerpen en uitvoeren van een studie die zowel rekening houdt met het proces als de gecreëerde materialen in het onderzoek naar identiteitsconstructie. Daarnaast biedt dit hoofdstuk ook een toelichting op hoe media geletterdheid en *empowerment*, als twee concepten die beschouwd werden als mogelijk bijkomende resultaten van het proces, benaderd werden door middel van het conceptualiseren van hun sub componenten als bouwstenen die eenvoudig toepasbaar waren op de studie. De procedure en analyse worden in detail besproken, gevolgd door een reflectie op de leerpunten, waaronder inzichten betreft de waarde van samenwerkingen, het actieve ontwerpen voor positieve impact, het belang van flexibiliteit, en de complexiteit van de dubbele rol van researcher en leraar in de context van deze studie.

Hoofdstuk 6 rapporteert op de resultaten van de PAR studie. Thematische analyse en een interpretatieve aanpak worden gecombineerd in de interpretatie van de data, waarmee een thematische illustratie wordt gecreëerd van de PAR studie met 10 participanten. De studie keek niet alleen naar de gecreëerde materialen, maar ook naar brainstorm materialen, groepsdiscussies, korte interviews, en observaties. De resultaten beschrijven hoe de stad werd gepresenteerd in het proces zowel als de gecreëerde materialen (waaronder een introductie video van de participant en een video over het leven in de stad). Verschillende ruimtelijke omgevingen, symbolische elementen, en sociale netwerk elementen werden binnen en buiten de video's besproken. De voornamelijk persoonlijke, positieve toon van de video's viel op, terwijl de negatieve en vergelijkende uitingen grotendeels wegbleven uit de video's. De presentatie van de stad gebeurde voornamelijk als onderdeel van zelfpresentatie. Terwijl participanten zichzelf identificeerde als bewoners van de stad, lieten de discussies zien dat ze allerlei verschillende ideeën hadden over wat de Rotterdammer karakteriseert. Participanten rapporteerden ook deels over hun ideeën en gedrag met betrekking tot stads-gerelateerde content buiten de cursus, waarin het belang van zelfpresentatie in relatie tot urban identity gerelateerde content verder naar voren kwam, en liet ook een verschil zien tussen de ideeën voor mogelijkheden en uiteindelijk gecreëerde materialen. Tot slot biedt het Hoofdstuk ook empirische voorbeelden van hoe de bouwstenen van media geletterdheid en empowerment zichtbaar waren gedurende de cursus, en hoe deze relateerden tot elkaar en tot de (stimulatie van) urban identity. Dit benadrukt het de toepasselijkheid van dit type bouwstenen in toekomstig participerend actie onderzoek.

De dissertatie wordt afgesloten in **Hoofdstuk 7**, waar de bevindingen van de verschillende studies gecombineerd worden om meer algemene conclusies te kunnen trekken, de beperkingen en mogelijkheden van het onderzoek te kunnen bespreken, en de implicaties voor onderzoek en de maatschappij te bespreken. Het bespreekt het belang van het verbreden van het begrip van de rol van de online omgeving in de constructie van urban identity, de unieke bevindingen voor adolescenten die opgroeien in een trans-spatiale omgeving met betrekking tot hun media consumptie en productie, de relevantie van online urban

identity voor het leven in een super-diverse stad, en de praktische en impactvolle implicaties van dit type identiteitsonderzoek. Een discussie van beperkingen en gerelateerde aanbevelingen voor toekomstig onderzoek omvatten de focus op Rotterdam als een case study, de complexiteiten van identiteitsontwikkeling en leeftijd, de behoefte voor een focus op participatie, en belangrijkste sterke en zwakke punten van de gemixte- en multi-methodologische aanpak. Aanbevelingen voor sociale actoren zijn onder andere het advies om gebruik te maken van de kennis over online urban identity om het gevoel van erbij horen te versterken, lokale social media influencers bewust te maken van hun potentiële functie als lokale rolmodellen, en het belang om onderwijs op het gebied van media geletterdheid om op een gezonde en veilige manier urban identity te kunnen uiten.

Portfolio

Academic articles

- Van Eldik, A.K., Stoltenberg, D., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (Under review). The trans-spatial urban identity model: Toward an understanding of urban identity in a mediated world.
- Van Eldik, A. K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2019a). Urban & online: Social media use among adolescents and sense of belonging to a super-diverse city. *Media and Communication*, 7(2), 242-253. <http://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i2.1879>
- Van Eldik, A. K., Kneer, J., Lutkenhaus, R. O., & Jansz, J. (2019b). Urban influencers: An analysis of urban identity in YouTube content of local social media influencers in a super-diverse city. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 2876. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02876>

Other publications during this project

- Kneer, J., Van Eldik, A.K., Eischeid, S., & Usta, M. (2019). With a little help from my friends: Peer coaching for refugee adolescents and the role of social media. *Media and Communication*, 7(2), 264-274. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i2.1876>

Courses followed during the PhD-Project

- Imposter Syndrome (2017 - 1 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Your personal PhD work-life balance: how to do less, but achieve more (2018 – 1 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- How to manage your PhD project (2018 – 1 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Various pedagogical and didactic training sessions at (2017 – 2020 – 1 EC)
The local philanthropic initiative in Rotterdam (Anonymized for the sake of this study)

- Professionalism and integrity in research (1 EC - 2018)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- International Summer School 2018: Trust in Mediated Communication (2 EC - 2018)
Department of Communication at the University of Munster, Germany (in collaboration with Michigan State University & University of California Santa Barbara)
- Analytic storytelling (2.5 EC – 2018)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Participatory Action Research (1 EC – 2019)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Data Analysis with R (1 EC – 2019)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Photovoice (2 EC – 2020)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Great thinkers of the 20th century (2020 – 2.5 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Responsible research data management (RDM) (2020 - 1 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Self-presentation: focus, structure, interaction and visualization (2020 – 2.5 EC)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Multilevel modelling 1: An introduction (2020 – 2.5 EGSH)
Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities; Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- University Teaching Qualification (2020)

Risbo, Erasmus University Rotterdam

- Basic Examination Qualification (2020)

Risbo, Erasmus University Rotterdam

- Microlab: How to analyze and evaluate your assessment (2020)

Risbo, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Other trainings followed during the PhD-project

- SEO Specialization (2016)
Coursera; UC Davis (MOOC)
- Introduction to Psychology (2020)
Coursera; Yale University (MOOC)

Courses and workshops taught during PhD-project

- Introduction to Human Communication (2018 – 2020)
Term 1, Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication, BA-1 course
tutorial teacher. [+ Online guest lecture]
- Communication Technologies and their Impacts (2018 – 2021)
Term 4, Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication, BA-1 course
tutorial teacher. [+ Online guest lecture]
- Academic Supervisor for IBCoM internship students (2018 – 2021)
- Various courses at the local philanthropic initiative in Rotterdam

Invited Guest lectures

- “Intermezzo: A sense of belonging to the city – the role of the internet”
Communication Technologies and their Impacts, online recorded guest lec-
ture Term 4 (2020), Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication,
Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- “Guestlecture: Anne van Eldik on Urban Identity” Introduction to Human
Communication, online recorded guest lecture Term 4 (2020), Erasmus School
of History, Culture, and Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- “Urban Influencers.” Organizing the Creative Industries, 19 April 2023, Rad-
boud University Nijmegen.

Conferences, symposia, and workshops during the PhD project

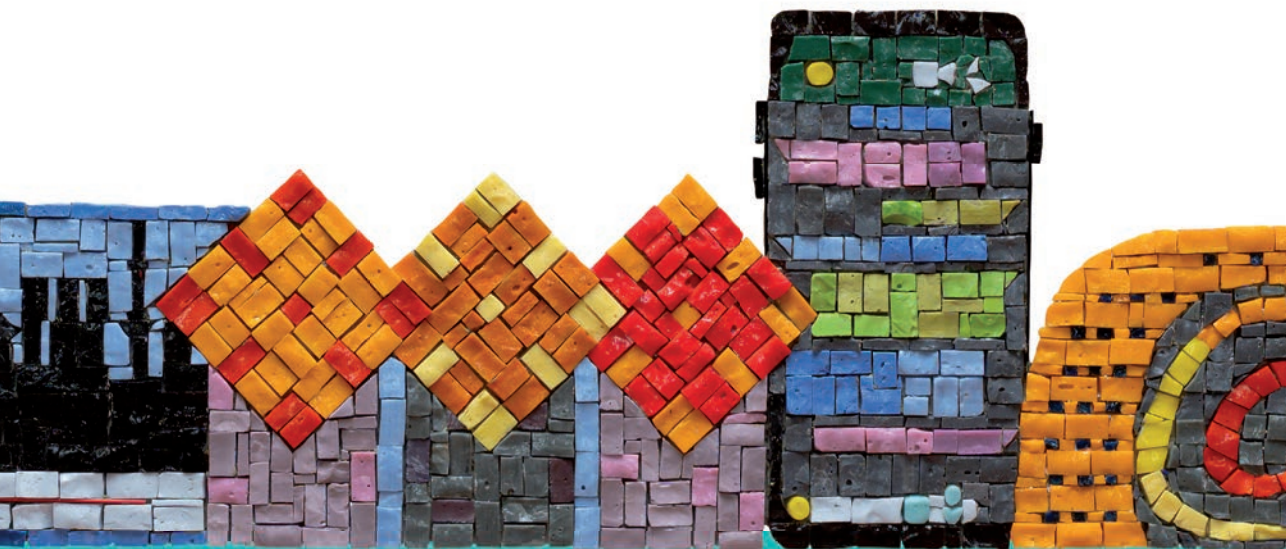
- Empowering Cities and Citizens: Learning and co-creating in an urbanising world.
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2018). Empowering Children through Media. [Rotterdam, The Netherlands]
- Etmaal van de Communicatiewetenschap
 - Van Eldik, A.K., & Jansz, J. (2018) Settling in using Social Media: The role of social media during international students' freshmen year in the Netherlands. [Gent, Belgium]
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2019). Online in the City: Young people's social media use and its' relation to a sense of belonging to the (super-diverse) city. [Nijmegen, The Netherlands]
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., Lutkenhaus, R., & Jansz, J. (2020). Influencers & the Super-Diverse City: Expressions of urban identity in local influencers' YouTube content. [Amsterdam, The Netherlands]
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2021). This is my city, this is me: Investigating the role of social media video production in the expression and negotiation of adolescents' urban identity. [online]
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2022). Reflections on a video production study: Urban identity, media literacy, and empowerment. [accepted]
- European Communication Research and Education Association Conference
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2021). This is my city, this is me: Investigating the role of social media video production in the expression and negotiation of adolescents' urban identity. [online]
- International Communication Association Conference
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2019). Social media and the City: The relation between media use and urban identity among young people in cities. [Washington D.C., USA]
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Stoltenberg, D., Kneer, J., & Jansz, J. (2021). The *trans-spatial urban identity model*: Toward an understanding of urban identity in a mediated world. [Denver, USA, online]
- Werkconferentie: Kennis van Mediawijsheid
 - Van Eldik, A.K., Kneer, J., Lutkenhaus, R., & Jansz, J. (2020). #010 #mijnstad: De rol van sociale media en influencers in het leven van jongeren in de stad. [Hilversum, The Netherlands]

About the Author

Anne van Eldik (1993) started her academic journey with a Bachelor's degree in English Language & Culture (American Studies; 2014, Radboud University Nijmegen), after which she directed her attention to the world of media and communication with a Master's degree in Media, Culture & Society (2015) and a Research master's degree in Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts (abridged program) (2016) at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication. Both her master's theses focused on the use of social media in everyday life – the first investigating the norms and expectations regarding responsiveness and content on Mobile Instant Messaging platforms, and the second looking at the role of social media during the international student's freshmen year in the Netherlands.

In 2017 Anne started as a PhD candidate at the Erasmus Research Center for Media, Communication & Culture, as part of which she also taught several tutorial classes and supervised Internship students in the International Bachelor of Communication and Media (IBCoM). As part of her academic work, Anne participated in various international conferences, courses, and workshops. Next to her academic work, she obtained her University Teaching Qualification, her Basic Examination Qualification, and fulfilled roles as member of the EGSH PhD council (2018-2019) and (vice-)chair of the PhD club (2019-2021). On top of this, she was part of the Vital Cities and Citizens network and the Centre for BOLD Cities.

Anne's research interests focus on that what happens online in and through the everyday experience: everyday (creative) social media use, the role of media use in identity construction, social media influencers, and the workings and everyday relevance of urban identity.



Nowadays, the city is no longer confined to offline experiences; there are also online opportunities for experience and engagement. Earlier research shows that the experience of one's physical and social living environment helps shape part of how one perceives oneself and their place in the world. But what role does the online environment play in this context for adolescents who are avid users of social media and who use this environment to construct and negotiate their identities? And what is the role of the super-diverse character of a big city such as Rotterdam? Using Rotterdam as a case study, this dissertation focuses on the question of how and to what extent the social media use of Rotterdam adolescents contributes to the construction of their urban identity. By empirically exploring this question from a variety of angles and practices, ranging from the content and networks of local influencers to the process and results of adolescents' own video production, this dissertation aims to create a broad understanding of the phenomenon.