THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON IDENTITY APPROPRIATION

INFLUÊNCIA DAS REDES SOCIAIS NA APROPRIAÇÃO IDENTITÁRIA

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Abstract: The digital revolution has transformed the way social media influences cultural identities. In Morocco, professional athletes, particularly Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou, play a crucial role in this field thanks to their global influence. This study explores the impact of their social media activities on the identity of Moroccan citizens. By sharing life moments, professional achievements, and patriotic messages, Hakimi and Bounou strengthen the sense of national pride and unity among Moroccans. Their posts, which highlight Moroccan culture through music, cuisine, and traditions, contribute to promoting the country's cultural heritage. Additionally, their collaborations with both local and international brands support the Moroccan economy and enhance the global image of Morocco. The continuous interaction of these athletes with the Moroccan public promotes a two-way communication where citizens actively participate in co-creating the national identity online. By engaging with the content shared by Hakimi and Bounou, Moroccans help shape the collective image of their country, thereby reinforcing national belonging and projecting a contemporary Moroccan identity on the global stage. This study highlights the importance of social media in shaping digital identity and national communication in Morocco, particularly in the northern region, illustrating the central role of athletes as influencers.

Keywords: Communication; Social Media; Digital Identity

Resumo: A revolução digital transformou a maneira como as redes sociais influenciam as identidades culturais. No Marrocos, os atletas profissionais, especialmente Achraf Hakimi e Yassine Bounou, desempenham um papel crucial nesse aspecto devido à sua influência global. Este estudo explora o impacto de suas ações nas redes sociais sobre a identidade dos cidadãos marroquinos. Ao compartilhar momentos de suas vidas, sucessos profissionais e mensagens patrióticas, Hakimi e Bounou reforçam o sentimento de orgulho nacional e unidade entre os marroquinos. Suas publicações, que destacam a cultura marroquina por meio da música, gastronomia e tradições, contribuem para a promoção do patrimônio cultural do país. Além disso, suas colaborações com marcas locais e internacionais apoiam a economia marroquina e fortalecem a imagem global do Marrocos. A interação contínua desses atletas com o público marroquino favorece uma comunicação bidirecional, onde os cidadãos participam

ativamente da co-criação da identidade nacional online. Ao interagir com o conteúdo de Hakimi e Bounou, os marroquinos ajudam a moldar a imagem coletiva de seu país, reforçando assim o senso de pertencimento nacional e projetando uma identidade marroquina contemporânea no cenário mundial. Este estudo destaca a importância das redes sociais na formação da identidade digital e a comunicação nacional no Marrocos, especialmente na região norte, ilustrando o papel central dos atletas como vetores de influência.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação; Redes Sociais; Identidade Digital

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed communication dynamics, particularly with the emergence of social media, which has become an essential platform for disseminating information and constructing cultural identities (Novak & El-Burki, 2016). These platforms offer a unique opportunity for individuals, communities, and even nations to express themselves and represent their identities on a global scale. Consequently, the boundaries between the local and the global are becoming blurred, allowing cultures to merge and identities to be reconfigured. In this context, public figures, particularly professional athletes, play a key role in how these identities are shaped and perceived (Charest et al., 2017).

Athletes, due to their visibility and popularity, have the ability to reach millions of people worldwide, and their influence often extends beyond the strictly sporting domain. In Morocco, football players such as Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou have successfully transcended their roles as athletes to become cultural icons. Through their activities on social media, they not only share their daily lives and professional achievements but also convey powerful messages tied to their Moroccan identity and culture. Their accounts on digital platforms thus become spaces for promoting values, traditions, and images of Morocco, contributing to the construction of a modern and dynamic Moroccan identity.

The use of social media by these athletes encompasses multiple dimensions. On one hand, their posts, whether patriotic or cultural, reinforce the sense of belonging among Moroccan citizens. These messages of national pride, often shared after sports victories or during significant moments, contribute to uniting the population around a common identity. On the other hand, by sharing elements of Moroccan culture, such as music, gastronomy, or traditions, Hakimi and Bounou enable their followers to reconnect with their cultural heritage while introducing it to an international audience. This cultural dimension is essential as it contributes to preserving and enhancing Moroccan heritage on the global stage (Billings & Anderson, 2022).

Moreover, the collaborations with local and international brands highlighted by these athletes on their social media platforms also play a crucial role in their communication strategy. These partnerships not only support the local economy by promoting Moroccan products but also strengthen Morocco's image as a dynamic and evolving country. These actions help to reinforce national identity while projecting a positive image of Morocco internationally.

Finally, the interaction between these athletes and their audience on social media creates a participatory dynamic where Moroccan citizens become actors in the co-creation of a national identity online. By commenting, sharing, and interacting with the content posted by Hakimi and Bounou, they contribute to shaping the collective image of Morocco. This participatory process not only reinforces the sense of belonging and national pride but also contributes to the development of a contemporary Moroccan identity rooted in tradition while being open to the world.

This article aims to analyze the impact of this dynamic on digital identity and national communication in Morocco, highlighting the central role of professional athletes such as Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou. By exploring their communication strategies and the

influence they exert on Moroccan citizens, we seek to understand how these interactions shape the image of Morocco both locally and internationally.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity Appropriation

Identity appropriation, sometimes equated with cultural appropriation in specific contexts, refers to the process through which an individual or group adopts elements of another culture or identity and integrates them into their own. This phenomenon raises significant questions related to power dynamics, particularly when dominant groups adopt aspects of marginalized cultures without a deep understanding of their context or meaning. According to Matthes (2016), this process can be perceived as a form of exploitation, as it tends to diminish or distort the identity of a group by transforming it into a consumable object or a decontextualized symbol.

In the context of social media, identity appropriation takes on various forms. For instance, practical symbols or aesthetic elements belonging to specific cultures are sometimes used superficially to increase recognition without acknowledging their historical or cultural significance. This appropriation can lead to the invisibilization of the complexity and richness of the original group's identity, reducing these elements to mere cultural products (Lu & Yu, 2018).

A Fine Line Between Cultural Exchange and Exploitation

The boundary between legitimate cultural exchange and exploitative identity appropriation remains blurred. As Rogers (2006) notes, cultural appropriation can oscillate between being a mutually enriching exchange and an exploitative practice that exacerbates power inequalities. Legitimate cultural exchange typically occurs in contexts of balanced interactions where both parties benefit from mutual learning and respect for cultural traditions. In contrast, appropriation becomes problematic when it is motivated by commercial interests, a lack of recognition, or biased representation of minority cultures.

An Underexplored Field

Although we live in a globalized world where intercultural interactions are ubiquitous, identity appropriation remains an underexplored research area. Most existing studies focus on cultural appropriation in general. The works of Rogers (2006) and Matthes (2016) highlight the need to delve deeper into the identity-related impacts of cultural appropriation. These researchers emphasize the necessity of a more thorough analysis of the identity implications, calling for multidimensional research that examines not only the immediate effects of appropriation on affected communities but also its long-term repercussions on individual and collective identity construction.

In a world where digital networks play an increasing role in the dissemination and consumption of cultural practices, it is crucial to understand how this dynamic of appropriation impacts identities. Future studies should adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining communication sciences, anthropology, and sociology to propose theoretical frameworks capable of fully addressing the complex issues of identity appropriation.

Narrative Communication

Narrative communication in organizations, often referred to as storytelling, is a communication method that uses stories to convey messages and values within an organization.

It is considered a powerful tool to improve organizational communication and to address the diverse needs of a heterogeneous workforce (Barker & Gower, 2010).

Narrative Communication: A Powerful Approach in a Connected World

Narrative communication relies on the use of stories to convey messages, construct meaning, and influence perceptions. This approach highlights the central role of storytelling in human communication and its ability to shape individual and collective identities. Fisher (1984) introduced the concept of the "narrative paradigm," emphasizing that human beings understand and interpret the world primarily through stories. This model underscores the importance of narratives as the foundation of communication and social cohesion.

In the context of social media, narrative communication takes on a unique dimension. Stories shared by public figures, such as athletes or influencers, play a key role in constructing collective identities and creating deep emotional connections with their audiences. These narratives, often infused with emotions and values, help strengthen audience engagement while building a coherent and authentic image for the storyteller (Hancox, 2011).

Digital Storytelling: A Participatory and Inclusive Tool

With the rise of digital technologies, narratives have evolved into multimedia formats, transforming modes of expression and communication. Hancox (2011) defines digital stories as short multimedia narratives that combine photographs, videos, drawings, and voice recordings to convey personal experiences. These digital stories are not limited to individual productions; they also represent a space for participatory culture. They help expand digital culture, particularly within communities often marginalized or underrepresented in the realm of digital citizenship.

Hartley and McWilliam (2009) emphasize that digital storytelling has become a powerful tool for documenting stories within communities. This tool bridges the gap between everyday cultural practices and professional media, offering an accessible platform to document human experiences and share diverse perspectives. Indeed, digital storytelling provides an opportunity to democratize storytelling by allowing often underrepresented voices to emerge and take their place in the public sphere.

Narrative Communication and Its Contemporary Implications

In a world where social media plays a predominant role, narrative communication, amplified by digital tools, emerges as a strategic lever for institutions, public figures, and communities. It helps strengthen emotional bonds, establish authentic connections, and promote collective or institutional identities. In this sense, narrative storytelling, whether individual or communal, constitutes an essential tool for navigating an increasingly saturated and competitive communication environment.

Future research should delve deeper into the long-term effects of narrative communication and digital storytelling on perceptions, behaviors, and social interactions. A more detailed understanding of these dynamics would contribute to the development of even more inclusive and engaging communication strategies.

The Influence of Social Media

Social media plays a central role in the construction and expression of individual and collective identity, offering digital spaces where users can create, share, and modify their public image. These platforms allow individuals to present themselves selectively, often highlighting valued aspects of their identity or adopting cultural, social, or aesthetic elements to enhance their online image. This phenomenon, closely tied to personal image management, falls within

a dynamic where identity construction becomes an active process influenced by interactions and feedback from other users.

According to Marwick and boyd (2010), identity on social media is shaped by two key factors: perceived audience and the phenomenon of "context collapse." A perceived audience refers to the idea that users adjust their behavior and communication based on the expectations of an imagined audience, even though this audience is often vague or invisible. Context collapse, on the other hand, refers to the way different social spheres—family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances—intersect on a single platform, making identity management even more complex. This blending of audiences with varied expectations pushes users to adopt narrative strategies, often balancing authenticity and social performance.

Furthermore, social media facilitates collective identity construction through participation in online communities and social movements. Users can gather around shared causes, interests, or values, thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging. For example, hashtags and viral campaigns not only showcase specific identity aspects but also contribute to the normalization of certain discourses or practices.

However, this online identity construction is not without challenges. The ability to select and modify shared content, often influenced by dominant cultural and social norms, can lead to a disconnection between digital identity and real identity. Users, striving to meet the implicit expectations of their audience, may feel increased pressure to perform or maintain a coherent image, which can result in identity-related stress. Additionally, platform algorithms frequently amplify specific content, indirectly influencing users' choices about what they share and value.

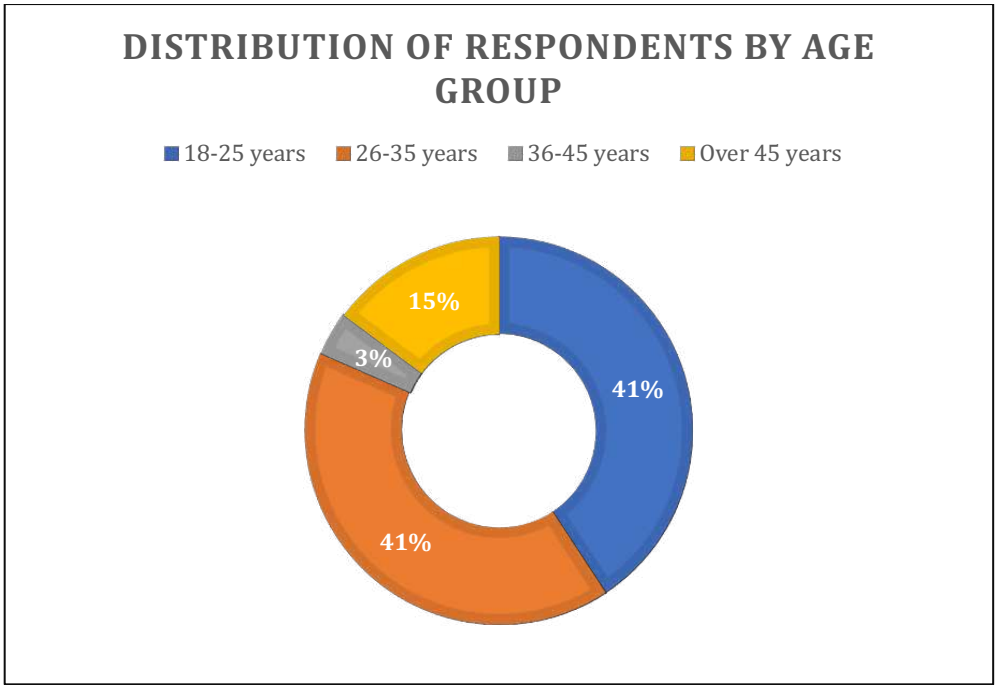
Thus, social media is not merely a communication tool; it acts as a space where identity dynamics are constantly redefined. These platforms transform how individuals perceive themselves, interact with others, and participate in broader communities. Understanding this influence is crucial to addressing the social, psychological, and cultural challenges of our time.

3. METHODS

To analyze the impact of Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou's social media posts on the identity appropriation of Moroccan users, a qualitative study was conducted. An online questionnaire was distributed to a targeted sample of active Moroccan social media users. The questions aimed to understand users' perceptions of the athletes' posts and their impact on their sense of national belonging. Additionally, a content analysis of Hakimi and Bounou's posts was carried out to identify recurring themes. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, enabling the establishment of links between users' perceptions and the athletes' communication strategies.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As part of this study, a questionnaire was conducted to explore the influence of social media posts by public figures such as Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou on Moroccan identity. It is important to note that all respondents in our survey come from the northern region of Morocco, a specific geographical area that may play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and responses. This regional concentration of participants enables us to identify trends and derive relevant insights specific to this area, while also considering the cultural and social context characteristic of northern Morocco. The following data analysis builds on this geographic specificity to provide a deeper understanding of identity dynamics as perceived by the inhabitants of this region.

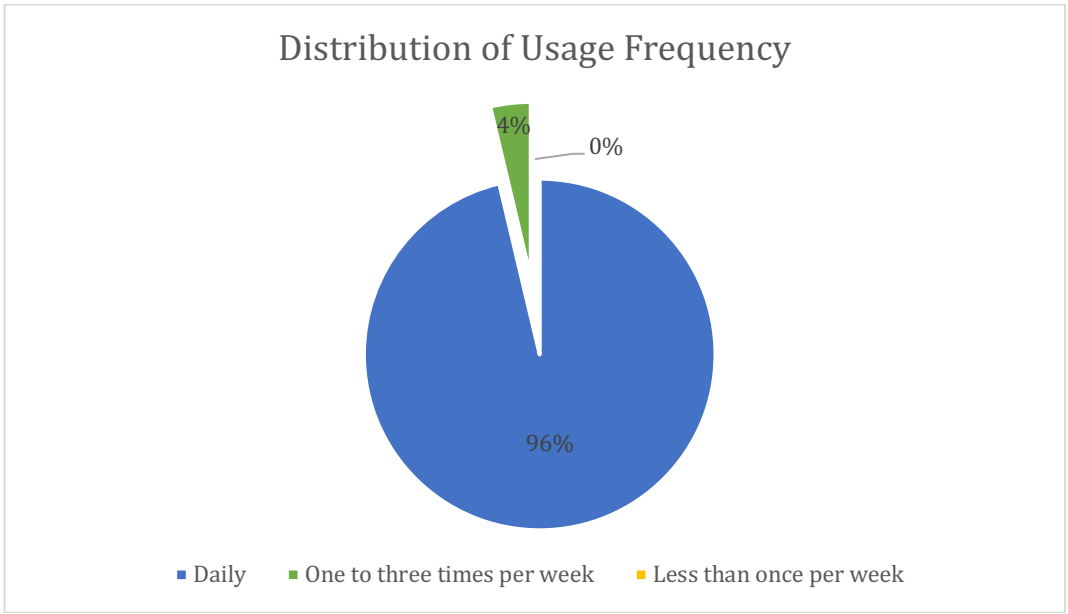


Graph 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group.
Source:

The fact that all respondents are concentrated in the northern region suggests that the results of this questionnaire specifically reflect the perceptions and behaviors of the inhabitants of this area. This could be attributed to a strong presence of young adults in the region, aligning with the observed concentration in the "18–25 years" and "26–35 years" age groups.

The significant representation of young adults (81.4%) may indicate that this demographic is particularly active on social media, especially when it comes to following and interacting with public figures such as Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou.

This data highlights that our sample is predominantly young and regionally focused in northern Morocco, which will have a notable influence on the conclusions drawn from this questionnaire.



Graph 2: Distribution of Usage Frequency

Source:

The vast majority of respondents, 96.3%, use social media daily. This indicates a strong online presence and a well-established habit of consulting and interacting on social platforms.

A very small proportion of respondents, 3.7%, use social media less frequently, approximately one to three times a week. No respondent selected the option of using social media less than once a week, demonstrating that all participants engage with social media at least once a week.

The fact that 96.3% of respondents use social media daily suggests a high potential for engagement with content published on these platforms. Public figures such as Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou can thus expect to reach a wide audience within this population through their daily posts.

This frequency of use highlights that social media plays a central role in the daily lives of respondents, which could significantly influence their perception of Moroccan identity, particularly when interacting with patriotic or identity-focused content.

To determine whether the difference in social media usage frequency among age groups is statistically significant, a Chi-Square test will be performed.

The Chi-Square test (Test Khi-Deux)

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between age and frequency of social media usage.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between age and frequency of social media usage.

Data Setup:

Table 1: Observed frequencies (O)

Frequency	18–25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	Over 45 years	Total
Daily usage	1107	1107	11	206	2431
1–3 times per week	0	0	70	199	269
Total	1107	1107	81	405	2700

Step 1: Calculate Expected Frequencies (E)

Table 2: the expected frequencies

Frequency	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	Over 45 years	Total
Daily usage	996,71	996,71	72,93	364,65	2431
1–3 times per week	110,29	110,29	8,07	40,35	269
Total	1107	1107	81	405	2700

Step 2: Calculate Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2)

Table 3: The individual contributions to χ^2

Frequency	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	Over 45 years	Total
Daily usage	12,20	12,20	52,59	69,02	146,02
1–3 times per week	110,29	110,29	475,26	623,79	1319,62
Total	122,49	122,49	527,85	692,81	1465,65

Chi-Square Calculated: 1465.65

Board 1: Chi-Square

Chi-Square Theoretical	
Significance Level (α)	0,05
DL=(L-1) - (C1) Degrees of Freedom (df)	3
χ^2 with Critical Value	7,8147279

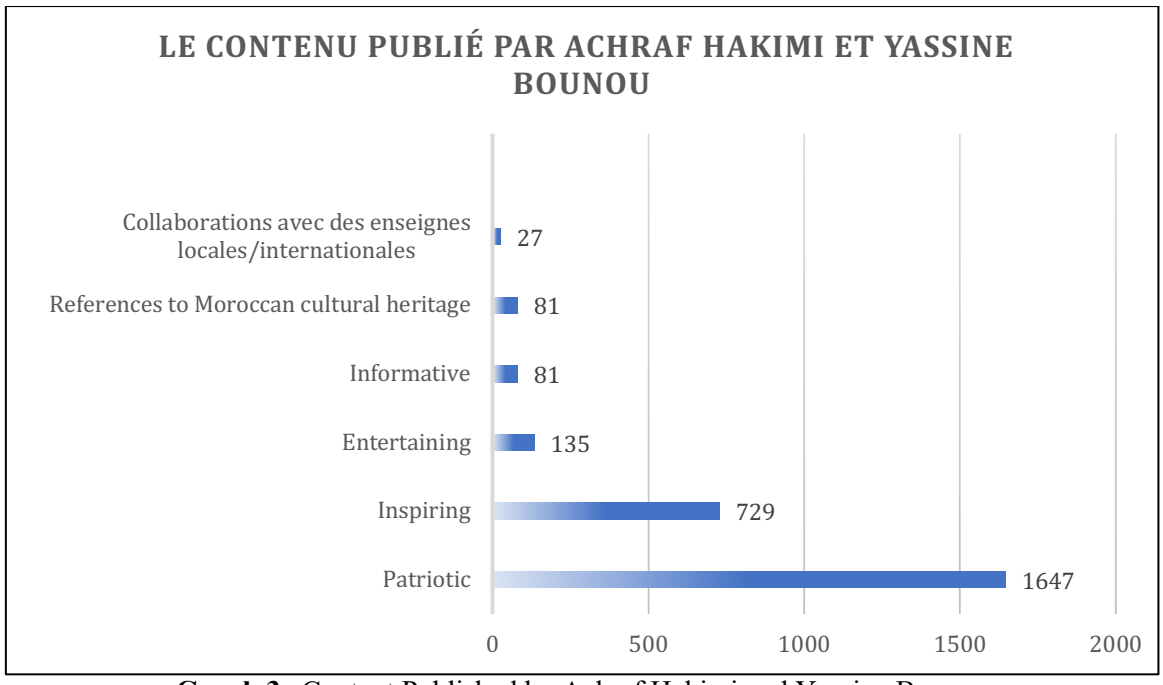
The calculated χ^2 statistic is 1,465.65, which is far greater than the critical value of 7.815.

Since the calculated χ^2 value (1,465.65) exceeds the critical value (7.815), we **reject the null hypothesis (H_0).** This indicates that there is a significant relationship between age and the frequency of social media usage. Younger age groups are significantly more likely to use social media daily compared to older age groups.

A Chi-Square value of 1465.65 is extremely high, well above the theoretical critical value of 7.815 for 3 degrees of freedom. This suggests that the differences between observed and expected values are significant, and the null hypothesis (which states that there is no relationship between the variables) is rejected.

The analysis demonstrates a significant relationship between age and the frequency of social media use, with the calculated Chi-Square value of 1465.65 far exceeding the critical threshold. This indicates that age strongly influences online behaviors, with young adults using social media much more frequently than older groups.

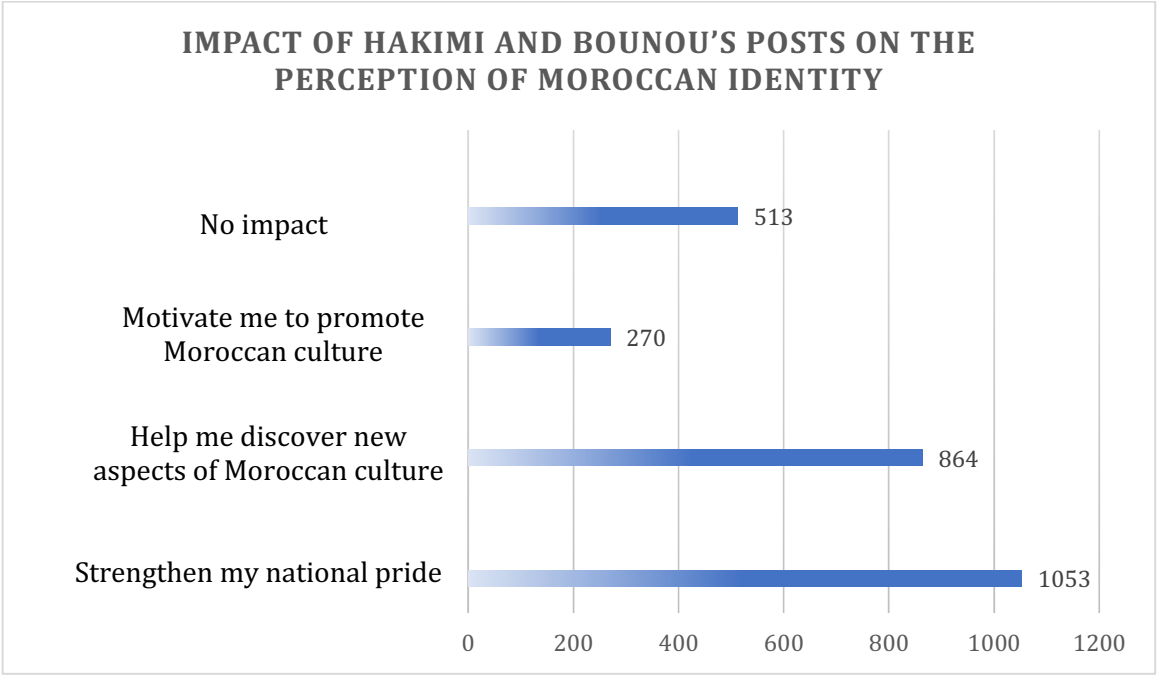
These findings highlight the importance of tailoring communication strategies to different age groups.



Graph 3: Content Published by Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou
Source:

This graph highlights that the patriotic and inspiring content shared by Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou is the most appreciated by their audience, with an overwhelming majority of respondents considering it the most impactful. To maintain this strong engagement, they should continue prioritizing these types of content.

Furthermore, while entertaining and informative aspects are less frequently mentioned, they present opportunities for diversification to attract a broader audience and meet varied expectations.



Graph 4: Impact of Hakimi and Bounou's Posts on the Perception of Moroccan Identity

Source:

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The graph reveals that the posts by Hakimi and Bounou have a significant impact on the perception of Moroccan identity, particularly by strengthening national pride and educating their audience about the country's culture. However, there remains a notable proportion of individuals for whom these posts have no marked effect, suggesting potential for improvement or adaptation of the content to reach an even broader audience.

5. CONCLUSION

The social media posts of Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou go beyond merely showcasing their sports careers; they also play a key role in promoting Moroccan identity. By highlighting cultural elements such as traditions, symbols, or national values, these public figures contribute to a form of collective identity appropriation. This appropriation manifests when these cultural elements are integrated into digital narratives that aim to strengthen national pride and foster a sense of belonging among their audiences, both within Morocco and the Moroccan diaspora.

By mobilizing symbols of Moroccan identity (e.g., flags, cultural celebrations, or symbolic gestures), their posts serve a dual purpose: they reflect and amplify facets of their native culture while enabling active reappropriation by audiences. These audiences, inspired by such content, can themselves become actors in cultural diffusion, sharing and celebrating these narratives within their own social circles, thereby reinforcing the role of social media as vectors for participatory identity appropriation (Radwan, 2022).

However, this dynamic also raises questions about the risks of incomplete or superficial identity appropriation. As highlighted by the concept of context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2010), social media platforms bring together diverse audiences, requiring creators to simplify or stylize their content to appeal to a broad public. In this process, some complex or profound aspects of Moroccan identity might be reduced to easily recognizable or even "consumable" symbols, thereby losing part of their richness and context. This phenomenon reflects a tension between the intent to promote a national identity and the risk of its standardization or decontextualization.

Furthermore, the way users appropriate this content also raises the issue of identity authenticity. Digital narratives shared by public figures, while inspiring, may sometimes be interpreted differently depending on cultural contexts and audience perceptions. Some interpretations may lead to creative and authentic reappropriation, while others may result in more superficial appropriation, where cultural elements are adopted without a genuine understanding or respect for their deeper meaning.

Thus, the posts of Achraf Hakimi and Yassine Bounou perfectly illustrate the complex dynamics of identity appropriation in the digital context. They demonstrate how social media not only enables the valorization of a national identity but also transforms it into a space for interaction, reappropriation, and cultural sharing. These digital narratives, though powerful, require strategic reflection and an inclusive approach to maximize their positive impact while respecting the diversity and richness of Moroccan identity (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2013).

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