

From Representation to Algorithmic Identity: Moroccan Influencers and the Politics of Digital Visibility

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Abstract

This article examines how algorithmic systems and social media platforms participate in the construction of “plastic identity” within Moroccan digital culture. Drawing on theories of representation, performativity, and the attention economy, the study investigates how influencers negotiate visibility, legitimacy, and audience engagement through technologically mediated self-performances. Using a qualitative content analysis of Instagram and TikTok content produced by three high-profile Moroccan influencers, the study explores the relationship between digital amplification, online recognition, and identity formation. The findings suggest that social media platforms increasingly function as systems of validation that reshape identity according to the logics of engagement, recognition, and platform governance. The article argues that “plastic identity” emerges as a flexible and performative mode of selfhood continuously reconstructed through audience interaction and technological mediation. By focusing on Moroccan digital spaces, the study contributes to broader debates on digital capitalism, identity construction, and contemporary forms of cultural production in platform-driven societies.

Keywords: plastic identity, algorithmic culture, attention economy, digital identity formation, social media influencers

1. Introduction

The rise of digital technology has profoundly transformed the ways individuals communicate, perceive themselves, and negotiate their identities. In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms no longer function merely as spaces of interaction and entertainment; rather, they

have evolved into powerful technological infrastructures that shape behaviours, values, aspirations, and even perceptions of reality (Young, 2012; Chan, 2022). Through algorithmic systems, personalised feeds, targeted advertising, and persuasive notification mechanisms, digital platforms increasingly mediate individuals' thoughts, emotions, and everyday practices (Bucher, 2018). Consequently, identity formation has become deeply intertwined with virtual environments governed by technological power, institutional influence, and systems of digital visibility.

The growing dominance of digital platforms has further intensified debates surrounding language, representation, cultural production, and social influence. The circulation of globalized content, combined with the expansion of persuasive communicative strategies, contributes to the emergence of what may be conceptualized as a “plastic identity” — a flexible, performative, and continuously reconstructed form of selfhood shaped through online validation and algorithmic reinforcement (Baym, 1997; Turkle, 1997). Within such digital environments, individuals are persistently exposed to aspirational narratives and idealized representations that influence both self-perception and social positioning. In this context, social media influencers have emerged as influential socializing agents whose linguistic practices, lifestyle performances, and curated digital personas actively participate in redefining contemporary norms of success, beauty, belonging, and authenticity (Gagovska, 2024).

Drawing on theories of representation and the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Hall, 1997), the present study investigates how social media algorithms participate in shaping what may be termed an “after-web identity.” More specifically, the article examines how digital platforms identify users' behavioural patterns, integrate them into personalised content ecosystems, and reinforce their alignment with specific online communities and dominant cultural narratives. To explore these dynamics, the study employs a qualitative analysis of three high-profile Moroccan social media influencers selected through purposive sampling. Through this contextual focus, the article seeks to provide deeper insights into the emergence of “plastic identity” within the contemporary Moroccan digital sphere.

The present analysis is organized around three interconnected dimensions: influencers as socializing agents, the dynamics of social validation and digital recognition, and the construction of plastic identity within contemporary digital culture. By examining these dimensions, the article seeks to contribute to broader debates surrounding technology, power, identity formation, and cultural production in platform-driven societies. Ultimately, the study

underscores the growing need to reconsider notions of agency, authenticity, and resistance within digital environments where identities are continuously negotiated, mediated, and reshaped through technological systems and algorithmic forms of visibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foundational Theories on Identity Construction

Identity formation constitutes a continuous and evolving process shaped by shifting societal norms, emerging perceptions, and changing interpretations of social and cultural realities. Within this perspective, identity construction may be understood as a dynamic historical process that has evolved through multiple phases, beginning with linguistic plurality, multilingual subjectivities, and diverse cultural affiliations, before extending into broader structures of cultural imperialism, hegemony, and neo-imperial domination. In the contemporary era, the expansion of digital spaces introduces an additional dimension to this process, further transforming the ways identities are negotiated, represented, and reconstructed within technologically mediated environments.

To better understand the contemporary dynamics of digital identity construction, it is essential to situate identity formation within its broader historical and postcolonial context. Frantz Fanon (1952, 1961) examined the psychological and racial consequences of colonial domination, emphasizing the fragmented and conflicted nature of identity formation under oppressive power structures. Expanding the relationship between discourse, power, and representation, Edward Said (1978, 1993) demonstrated how Western epistemological systems constructed the identities of the “Other” through cultural and ideological representations. Later, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) introduced the concepts of hybridity and the Third Space to explain how colonial encounters produce negotiated and hybrid identities rather than fixed or essentialized forms of subjectivity. Collectively, these postcolonial perspectives provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding the contemporary emergence of plastic identities within digitally mediated environments.

The transition from linguistic plurality and cultural imperialism to a technology-driven world may be understood as a continuation of broader dynamics of power, domination, and identity construction. In the contemporary digital era, technology increasingly functions as a new site of power in which digital platforms position users within algorithmically structured environments mediated through smartphones, computers, and social media networks. Within this emerging

digital ecosystem, global platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have transformed identity into a performative online construct shaped by visibility, interaction, and audience engagement. Consequently, digital spaces foster new modes of belonging, self-representation, and social recognition within virtual communities. Ultimately, contemporary identity formation cannot be fully understood without examining how algorithmic architectures curate human experience (Bucher, 2018), encourage a continuous and quantified performance of the self (Papacharissi, 2010), and commodify behaviour within the broader logics of digital capitalism (Zuboff, 2019).

2.2. Conceptual Clarification: Plastic Identity, Algorithmic Identity, and After-Web Identity

It is necessary, at this juncture, to clarify the conceptual distinctions underpinning the present analysis, as three interrelated yet analytically distinct notions recur throughout this study: “plastic identity,” “algorithmic identity,” and “after-web identity.” While these concepts are deeply interconnected within contemporary digital culture, they each designate a specific dimension of technologically mediated selfhood and should not be treated as interchangeable.

“Plastic identity” constitutes the broadest and most encompassing concept within this framework. Drawing on Elliott’s (2018) theorization of bodily and subjective plasticity, as well as Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity, plastic identity refers to the fluid, malleable, and continuously reconstructed condition of selfhood that emerges when individuals negotiate visibility, recognition, and social acceptance within digitally mediated environments. It designates identity not as a stable or culturally fixed essence, but as a performative construct perpetually reshaped through audience interaction, aesthetic self-branding, and the imperatives of digital circulation.

“Algorithmic identity,” by contrast, designates a more specific and technologically determined dimension of this broader plasticity. It refers to the identity that is produced, classified, and regulated through the automated logics of platform architectures — recommendation systems, engagement metrics, personalized feeds, and behavioral data collection. As Bucher (2018) argues, algorithmic systems do not merely reflect pre-existing identities; they actively participate in their production by determining what content is amplified, which behaviors are rewarded, and which forms of self-presentation gain visibility within digital ecosystems. Algorithmic identity is therefore not solely the product of individual agency, but emerges at the intersection of human performance and machine-driven categorization.

Finally, the concept of “after-web identity” designates the broader cultural and subjective condition that follows from prolonged immersion within these algorithmically structured environments. It refers to a mode of selfhood in which the boundaries between the online and offline self have become increasingly blurred, and in which digital validation, platform recognition, and virtual community belonging have come to constitute primary sources of identity formation and social legitimacy. The “after-web” subject is one whose sense of self has been so deeply shaped by networked participation that identity outside these digital structures becomes increasingly difficult to sustain or articulate.

Taken together, these three concepts form a nested analytical framework: plastic identity names the general condition of malleability; algorithmic identity specifies the technological mechanism through which this malleability is structured and governed; and after-web identity designates the broader existential and cultural condition that results from sustained participation in platform-driven digital life. It is within this conceptual architecture that the present study examines the identity performances of Moroccan social media influencers.

2.3. Digital Platforms and the Concept of Identity Construction

The posthuman condition increasingly emerges as a consequence of globalization, digital capitalism, and the pervasive pursuit of online visibility (Hayles, 1999). Driven by the accelerated circulation of information, digital platforms increasingly participate in the reconfiguration of the human self, fostering what may be described as a fluid and unstable form of identity. Within these digitally mediated environments, platforms become deeply invested in the production and circulation of transient linguistic, social, and cultural realities, including curated lifestyles, mediated belief systems, aspirational imagery, and globally circulating values (Badmington, 2000, 2003). By enabling the rapid dissemination of information beyond geographical and national boundaries, digital platforms create spaces of continuous and unbounded circulation. Under the discourse of openness, accessibility, and democratization, such environments present themselves as participatory spaces where users experience the illusion of unrestricted freedom and autonomous self-expression.

This fluidity becomes particularly visible within context-specific sociopolitical transformations. For instance, Lui (2018) employs the concept of “plasticity” to demonstrate how individuals’ sense of belonging and national identification continuously adapt in response to structural and cultural shifts. Such dependence on digital mediation reflects a broader

systemic transformation in the relationship between human subjectivity and technological infrastructures. Sherry Turkle (1997, 2011) explores this enduring entanglement between human beings and machines, arguing that individuals increasingly rely on technological interfaces for emotional validation, psychological reassurance, and social connection. In contrast, Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2004) conceptualizes contemporary technological culture as an excessive form of intervention that gradually dominates the self, positioning the digital sphere as a space where human subjectivity becomes increasingly regulated, fragmented, and mediated through technological systems.

Such an intense entanglement between the human subject and technology inevitably generates tensions between the authentic self and its digitally mediated representation. This disjunction resonates with Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theory of hyperreality, wherein individuals engage more profoundly with simulations, signs, and mediated representations than with material reality itself. Within these digitally structured environments, the continuous regulation and curation of self-presentation contribute to the emergence of what may be conceptualized as "plastic identity" — a condition in which individuals continuously negotiate the pressures of visibility, recognition, integration, and social acceptance within algorithmically governed systems.

Furthermore, the notion of plastic identity closely resonates with Judith Butler's (1990) framework of performativity, which conceptualizes identity as the product of repeated social and cultural performances rather than a fixed or essential condition. Within digital environments, the repetition of stylized behaviours, self-branding practices, posting rituals, and sociolinguistic performances progressively destabilizes the idea of an authentic and stable self. Instead, identity becomes a calculated and highly mediated performance optimized for visibility, audience engagement, and algorithmic recognition. In this context, self-presentation increasingly operates as a strategic performance designed to attract attention and align with dominant online communities and platform logics. Consequently, plastic identity intersects with what may be termed an "algorithmic identity," shaped by the imperatives of the contemporary attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001), where the continuous production of engagement and visibility becomes central. Within this market-oriented digital framework, the self is transformed into a flexible and commodified construct that is continuously curated, edited, and reconstructed. Both the body and identity consequently function as customizable interfaces adapted for hypervisibility and public consumption, recalling Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation. This phenomenon further resonates with

broader sociological transformations identified by Anthony Elliott (2018), who associates contemporary identity formation with a culture of bodily plasticity and aesthetic transformation, illustrating the extent to which the demand for malleability has permeated both physical and virtual forms of subjectivity.

2.4. Influencers as Agents of Identity Negotiation

Driven by the imperatives of digital capitalism and the pursuit of profit maximization, the primary measure of self-worth has progressively shifted from an internal sense of subjectivity to an externalized online persona shaped through systems of algorithmic recognition, visibility, and social validation. Within contemporary digital culture, identity increasingly operates according to the logics of performance, engagement, and platform visibility rather than notions of authenticity or stable selfhood. This technological reconfiguration of the subject aligns with critical posthumanist perspectives, which argue that contemporary individuals are becoming increasingly integrated into technological assemblages, transforming human bodies and subjectivities into interconnected nodes within expansive digital and technological networks (Hayles, 1999; Badmington, 2000).

This systemic transformation becomes particularly visible within localized contexts such as the Moroccan digital landscape, where influencers increasingly function as influential mediating agents in the negotiation of identity and social visibility. Through their online performances, these digital actors often expose the perceived fragility and ongoing reconfiguration of traditional Moroccan identity within a rapidly globalizing technological environment. In navigating the tensions between local cultural norms and transnational digital influences, influencers construct highly curated and idealized representations of everyday life, generating a persistent tension between lived realities and virtual self-presentations. By mobilizing diverse digital mechanisms, aesthetic codes, and identity markers, they craft self-performances strategically optimized to align with algorithmic logics and evolving online trends. Ultimately, these influencers secure forms of digital legitimacy through linguistic performances, affective self-display, and the promotion of globalized subcultural aesthetics, all carefully calibrated to maximize audience engagement, visibility, and platform recognition.

Building upon these theoretical considerations, the present study investigates the extent to which Moroccan digital influencers participate in the construction of what may be conceptualized as “plastic identity,” a technologically mediated form of selfhood shaped by

algorithmic visibility, digital recognition, and the imperatives of the attention economy. More specifically, the article examines how social media platforms and influencer cultures contribute to the continuous negotiation and reconstruction of identity within contemporary digital environments. To explore these dynamics systematically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do digital platforms and social media influencers function as socializing agents that shape and reconstruct identity within contemporary digital culture?
- 2) To what extent do the technological affordances and algorithmic logics of social media platforms shape, regulate, and constrain online identity performances?

The present study hypothesizes that digital platforms, through their algorithmic logics and systems of social validation, contribute to the emergence of “plastic identities” continuously reshaped according to the imperatives of visibility, recognition, and audience engagement. As illustrated in Figure 1, digital platforms position influencers as mediating agents who employ branding and self-marketing strategies to generate algorithmic amplification and audience interaction. Within this digitally mediated process, both content producers and consumers progressively participate in the construction of identities increasingly governed by algorithmic visibility rather than culturally grounded forms of subjectivity.

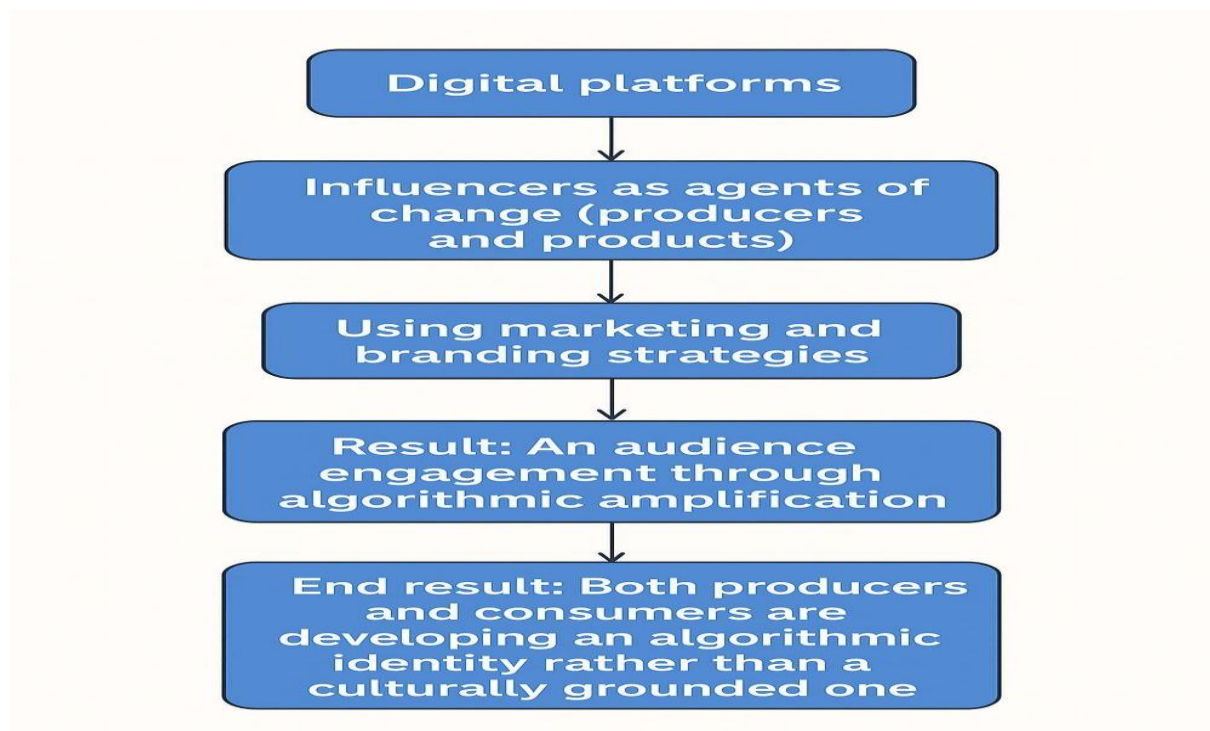


Figure 1. Conceptual model of algorithmic identity mediation

3. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative interpretive content analysis to investigate the role of algorithmic amplification in shaping forms of “plastic identity” within contemporary digital environments. Qualitative content analysis was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach given the interpretive and exploratory nature of the research questions, which seek to examine not merely the frequency of particular online behaviors, but rather the deeper sociocultural meanings, identity strategies, and power dynamics embedded within digitally mediated self-presentations (Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012). Unlike quantitative approaches that prioritize statistical generalizability, qualitative interpretive content analysis allows for a theoretically informed and context-sensitive examination of how identity is performed, negotiated, and reconstructed within platform-driven environments.

3.1. Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

The analysis focuses on three Moroccan social media influencers selected through purposive sampling; a non-probability sampling strategy widely employed in qualitative research when the aim is to generate theoretical insight rather than statistical representativeness (Patton, 2002). Participants were selected on the basis of four criteria: (1) sustained digital visibility and active presence across Instagram and TikTok during the period spanning 2024 to 2025; (2) a substantial and measurable audience engagement demonstrating consistent algorithmic amplification; (3) the visibility of distinct and analytically contrasting identity performances across the corpus; and (4) the capacity of each case to illuminate a different dimension of plastic identity construction within the Moroccan digital landscape. The deliberate selection of three analytically contrasting cases reflects a multiple case study logic (Yin, 2014), wherein each influencer functions as a distinct instantiation of the broader theoretical phenomenon under investigation, thereby enabling cross-case comparison and theoretical elaboration.

3.2. Data Collection

The corpus consists of the twenty most recent Instagram posts and TikTok videos published by each participant within the selected timeframe, in addition to their accompanying captions, scripts, and publicly visible audience interactions. Data collection extended across a twelve-month period from 2024 to 2025, yielding a total corpus of sixty posts and sixty short-form videos, supplemented by their associated comment threads and engagement metrics as retrieved through Social Blade (n.d.) analytics. The decision to collect the twenty most recent posts per

platform per influencer was informed by the principle of recency, ensuring that the analyzed content reflects the influencers' most current identity performances and their alignment with prevailing algorithmic and cultural logics. Visual content, linguistic performances, aesthetic choices, and patterns of audience interaction were all treated as analytically meaningful data within the interpretive framework.

3.3. Analytical Framework and Coding Procedure

The analytical framework was structured around four theoretically derived interpretive categories: visibility, recognition, integration, and social acceptance. These categories were not approached as fixed quantitative variables but as theoretically informed interpretive dimensions derived from scholarship on performativity (Butler, 1990), digital identity construction (Papacharissi, 2010), algorithmic culture (Bucher, 2018), and the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001). While the framework was initially theory-driven, the analytical categories were further refined through iterative engagement with the empirical corpus, following the principles of abductive reasoning characteristic of qualitative interpretive inquiry (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014).

More specifically, "visibility" was operationalized as the extent of exposure generated through platform circulation, algorithmic amplification, and engagement mechanisms. "Recognition" referred to processes of audience and algorithmic acknowledgment of the influencer's online persona, as reflected in follower counts, likes, shares, and comment patterns. "Integration" examined the degree to which particular identity performances were incorporated into broader online communities, digital discourse, and dominant cultural narratives circulating within the Moroccan digital sphere. Finally, "acceptance" referred to forms of social validation reflected through sustained audience interaction, positive engagement, and the progressive normalization of particular identity performances within digital culture.

The analytical process followed a three-stage procedure. In the first stage, each item in the corpus was read and viewed in its entirety to develop a preliminary understanding of the influencer's self-presentation strategies and identity performances. In the second stage, the four analytical categories were systematically applied to the corpus through a process of thematic coding, wherein recurring patterns of identity construction, linguistic performance, aesthetic self-branding, and audience interaction were identified and organized. In the third stage, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify convergences and divergences across the three

influencer profiles, enabling theoretically grounded comparative observations about the dynamics of plastic identity within the Moroccan digital context.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The ethical dimensions of the present study require careful and explicit elaboration, given the sensitive nature of the identity performances under investigation and the particular sociocultural context within which the selected influencers operate. Although all content analyzed in this study is publicly accessible through digital platforms, the mere public availability of data does not, in itself, constitute sufficient ethical justification for its academic use without further reflexive consideration. As Markham and Buchanan (2012) argue in their ethical guidelines for internet research, researchers bear a responsibility that extends beyond questions of legal access to encompass broader considerations of potential harm, dignity, contextual integrity, and the vulnerability of research subjects — particularly when the content under investigation engages with socially sensitive, culturally contested, or personally vulnerable dimensions of identity.

In recognition of these ethical obligations, all participants in this study have been assigned pseudonyms — referred to throughout as “Influencer A,” “Influencer B,” and “Influencer C” — with the aim of minimizing the risk of direct identification and the social harm that may follow from public association with academically framed interpretations of one’s online identity performances.

4. Data Description and Analysis

The following analysis examines three interconnected cases through which identity is negotiated, performed, and reconstructed within contemporary Moroccan digital spaces. Each case is analyzed according to the shared interpretive framework structured around the analytical categories of visibility, recognition, integration, and social acceptance. Rather than treating these categories as discrete or sequential dimensions, the analysis approaches them as mutually constitutive processes through which plastic identity emerges and is continuously reshaped within algorithmically governed environments. Particular analytical attention is devoted to the observable strategies influencers employ in constructing online self-presentations — including linguistic performances, aesthetic self-branding, audience interaction, and forms of digitally mediated self-disclosure — and to the ways in which these strategies intersect with platform logics, cultural norms, and the imperatives of the attention economy.

4.1. Case 1 — Influencer A

Influencer A is a Moroccan rapper whose digital persona is constructed around a rebellious street identity characterized by the hybrid use of Darija, French, and English slang. Through this multilingual and transgressive linguistic performance, the influencer cultivates a highly marketable online persona that derives visibility and engagement from challenging dominant norms surrounding “proper” Moroccan speech and socially acceptable public discourse.

Consider Table 1 and Graph 1.

Table 1. Instagram

Nbr of Followers	Engagement Rate	Average Likes	Average Comments
4,397,792	4.76%	206,601.75	2,719.63

Source: Social Blade— Table 1

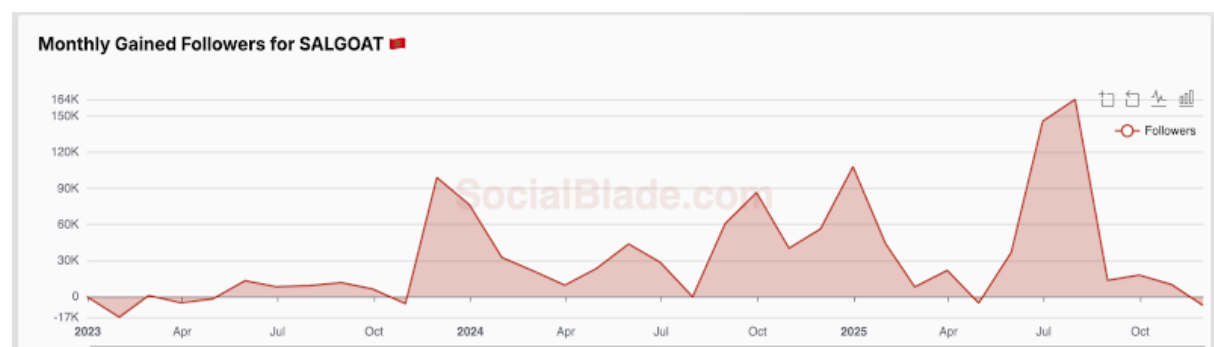


Figure 1. Monthly Gained Followers — Period: 2024–2025 — Source: Social Blade— Graph 1

4.1.1. Recognition

In terms of recognition, Influencer A’s digital visibility is not merely a quantitative achievement but a socioculturally significant phenomenon that illustrates how transgressive linguistic performances can be converted into forms of algorithmic and social capital within Moroccan digital culture. His deliberate mobilization of slang, code-switching, and morally provocative discourse functions simultaneously as a performative identity practice and as a calculated mechanism of differentiation within an increasingly saturated digital attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001). With more than 4.3 million followers and an engagement rate of 4.76% — considerably above the platform average for accounts of comparable size — Influencer A demonstrates a remarkable capacity for sustained digital recognition. Critically, this recognition is not passively received but actively produced through the repetition of stylized behaviors and transgressive linguistic markers that, in Butler’s (1990) terms, constitute identity through their very performance. The average of more than 200,000 likes and approximately

3,000 comments per post reflects not simply audience appreciation but a recursive process of algorithmic reinforcement: high engagement signals platform relevance, which generates further amplification, which in turn produces additional engagement. Within this feedback loop, the influencer's plastic identity — centered on linguistic transgression and street authenticity — is not only expressed but continuously reproduced and legitimized through technological mediation.

4.1.2. *Integration*

In terms of integration, Graph 1 reveals a trajectory of sustained and progressively expanding digital presence, indicating that Influencer A's identity performance has achieved meaningful incorporation into broader Moroccan online discourse rather than remaining confined to a niche audience. The steady increase in monthly followers suggests that the influencer's transgressive persona resonates with wider sociocultural tensions surrounding generational identity, linguistic authenticity, and the negotiation of modernity within Moroccan society. From the perspective of Papacharissi's (2010) networked self, this pattern of integration reflects the capacity of digital platforms to create communities of recognition organized not around shared geography or institutional belonging, but around shared aesthetic sensibilities and performative identity practices. Influencer A's linguistic performances thus function not merely as individual expressions of selfhood but as cultural reference points through which younger Moroccan digital audiences collectively negotiate their own identities in relation to globalized subcultural aesthetics and localized social realities.

4.1.3. *Acceptance*

In terms of acceptance, the sustained high engagement metrics — particularly the volume of comments and shares — reveal a process through which the influencer's transgressive identity has progressively acquired social legitimacy within Moroccan digital culture. Drawing on Baudrillard's (1994) theorization of hyperreality, it can be argued that the identity Influencer A performs online has, through its repeated digital circulation, come to carry greater cultural weight than the social norms it ostensibly transgresses. Likes, shares, and comment interactions function here not merely as indicators of popularity but as mechanisms of social normalization through which previously marginal or controversial linguistic practices are gradually rendered culturally legible and symbolically legitimate. Consequently, the influencer's plastic identity — initially constructed around transgression and provocation — is progressively absorbed into

the mainstream of Moroccan digital culture, illustrating the paradoxical capacity of algorithmic platforms to simultaneously amplify and domesticate cultural dissent.

4.2. Case 2 — Influencer B

Influencer B is a young Moroccan TikTok content creator based in Tangier whose online visibility is largely shaped through the performance of a fluid and nonconventional gendered identity. Through frequent live streams and short-form videos, the influencer combines masculine and feminine aesthetics by experimenting with clothing styles, makeup practices, bodily presentation, and performative self-expression. In addition to aesthetic experimentation, the influencer publicly exposes aspects of personal and intimate life, including discussions of socially sensitive topics, staged interpersonal conflicts, and emotionally charged relationships — practices that challenge traditional Moroccan conceptions of privacy, morality, and socially acceptable self-presentation.

Consider Table 2 and Graph 2.

Table 2. TikTok

Nbr of Followers	Average Likes	Likes	Average Comments
878,200	61,300.30	19.8 M	Not Set

Source: Social Blade— Table 2

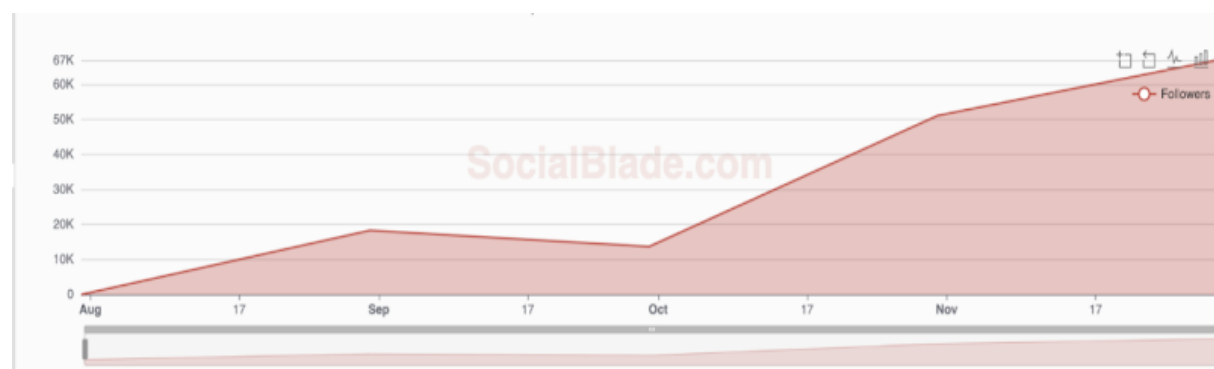


Figure 2. Monthly Gained Followers — Source: Social Blade — Graph 2

4.2.1. Recognition

In terms of recognition, both Table 2 and Graph 2 reveal a trajectory of moderate but progressively expanding digital visibility punctuated by sharp increases in monthly follower growth — reaching approximately 50,000 new followers during periods of heightened algorithmic amplification. These fluctuations are analytically significant, as they illustrate the extent to which digital recognition within platform environments is not a stable or organically

accumulating condition but a volatile phenomenon governed by algorithmic logics that selectively amplify particular content at particular moments (Bucher, 2018). Influencer B's online presence therefore exemplifies a core characteristic of plastic identity: its recognition is structurally contingent upon platform dynamics rather than grounded in stable cultural or institutional forms of legitimacy. Each spike in visibility represents not merely increased audience attention but a moment of algorithmic validation through which the influencer's nonconformist identity performance is temporarily elevated into broader digital circulation, thereby acquiring a provisional form of social recognition that must be continuously renewed through sustained content production and audience engagement.

4.2.2. *Integration*

In terms of integration, Influencer B occupies a deeply contested yet analytically revealing position within the Moroccan sociocultural landscape. While the influencer's content frequently generates criticism and moral condemnation for challenging dominant gender norms and conventional understandings of acceptable self-presentation, its sustained circulation across digital platforms simultaneously reflects meaningful forms of integration within online communities that provide spaces for negotiating marginalized identities and alternative modes of self-expression. This dynamic resonates with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space — a liminal zone of cultural negotiation in which dominant norms are neither straightforwardly reproduced nor entirely subverted, but continuously renegotiated through hybrid performances. Influencer B's digital presence can thus be understood as occupying precisely such a third space: neither fully accepted nor entirely excluded from Moroccan digital public discourse, but persistently present within it, challenging its boundaries and expanding the range of identities that can be publicly performed and symbolically recognized within the platform environment.

4.2.3. *Acceptance*

In terms of acceptance, audience engagement with Influencer B's content extends beyond numerical indicators to reflect broader processes of symbolic and cultural negotiation. The sustained generation of likes, comments, and shares — even when these interactions include critical or hostile responses — constitutes a form of algorithmic validation that contributes to the normalization and gradual legitimization of the influencer's identity performance within digital culture. As Zuboff (2019) argues, digital platforms are fundamentally indifferent to the moral valence of the behaviors they amplify; what matters algorithmically is the generation of

engagement, regardless of whether that engagement is affirmative or adversarial. Within this logic, controversy itself becomes a mechanism of visibility, and Influencer B's contested identity performance is consequently rendered increasingly socially legible — not despite the resistance it provokes, but partly through it. This dynamic illustrates a defining feature of plastic identity within algorithmic environments: social acceptance is not a prerequisite for digital legitimacy but rather an outcome of sustained visibility and circulation.

4.3. Case 3 — Influencer C

Influencer C represents a distinct and particularly complex manifestation of plastic identity. While Influencer A primarily relies on transgressive linguistic performances and Influencer B negotiates visibility through the destabilization of dominant moral conventions, Influencer C embodies a more profound form of identity plasticity centered on the continuous and public reconstruction of gendered selfhood within digital environments. Within the context of a traditionally conservative sociocultural framework, the influencer has generated considerable public debate through the progressive transformation and public negotiation of identity over time, illustrating how online platforms can function as spaces where identities are continuously reshaped, performed, and socially negotiated beyond the boundaries of conventional cultural expectations.

Consider Table 3 and Graph 3.

Table 3. Audience Size and Engagement Metrics of Influencer C

Nbr of Followers	Engagement Rate	Average Likes	Average Comments
768,570	0.57%	4,288.31	105.19

Source: Social Blade— Table 3

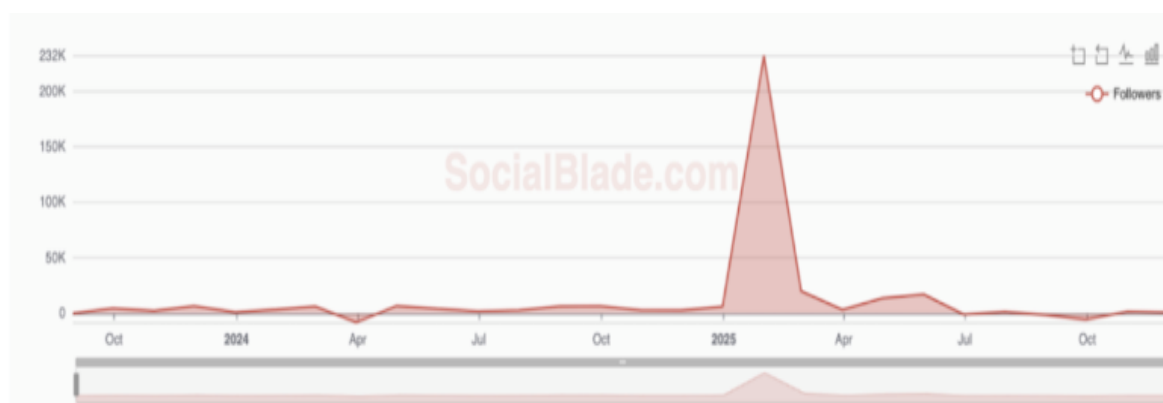


Figure 3. Monthly Gained Followers — Source: Social Blade — Graph 3

4.3.1. *Recognition*

In terms of recognition, the case of Influencer C presents an analytically productive tension between audience size and engagement depth. Despite maintaining a substantial digital audience of nearly 770,000 followers, the influencer's engagement rate of 0.57% remains considerably below platform averages, suggesting a form of visibility that is broad in reach but relatively limited in active audience participation. This disjunction invites a more nuanced understanding of digital recognition within the framework of plastic identity: visibility and recognition, while structurally related, are not equivalent conditions. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model, it can be argued that Influencer C occupies a position of high social awareness — many users are conscious of the influencer's existence and ongoing identity performance — without necessarily generating the sustained affective investment that characterizes deeper forms of audience recognition. Nevertheless, as Graph 3 illustrates, a notable shift in audience attention emerged in early 2025, reflecting a growing normalization of the influencer's identity performance within online discourse and suggesting that algorithmic circulation can gradually produce recognition even in the absence of high engagement, through the cumulative effect of repeated exposure and platform presence.

4.3.2. *Integration*

In terms of integration, Influencer C represents a visible and socially significant challenge to dominant gender norms and conventional understandings of identity within Moroccan society. Rather than adopting an overtly confrontational or transgressive discursive strategy — as observed in the cases of Influencers A and B — Influencer C negotiates identity transformation through gradual self-presentation, sustained aesthetic performance, and the strategic cultivation of digital visibility over time. This relatively measured mode of identity negotiation reflects what Elliott (2018) describes as a culture of bodily plasticity, wherein transformation is not enacted as a singular rupture but as an incremental and socially calibrated process of self-reconstruction. The progressive and non-confrontational nature of this approach facilitates the circulation and integration of the influencer's content within broader online communities, enabling alternative forms of gender expression to enter Moroccan public digital discourse in ways that are more likely to be engaged with, debated, and ultimately normalized than content that provokes immediate moral rejection.

4.3.3. *Acceptance*

In terms of acceptance, the case of Influencer C illustrates that the social legitimization of marginalized identity performances within digital culture is neither linear nor uncontested, but is rather produced through an ongoing and uneven process of algorithmic circulation, audience negotiation, and cultural renegotiation. While the influencer's relatively low engagement rate suggests that active social acceptance remains partial and contested, the sustained growth of the audience base and the increased visibility observed in early 2025 indicate a progressive expansion of the social space within which this identity performance is recognized as culturally legible. This dynamic resonates with Turkle's (2011) observation that digital environments create conditions for the emergence of selves that might not find expression within offline social contexts, providing platforms through which marginalized subjectivities can gradually accumulate visibility, recognition, and partial forms of social acceptance. Ultimately, the case of Influencer C demonstrates that within algorithmically governed digital environments, acceptance is not a binary condition but a gradual, negotiated, and platform-mediated process through which previously invisible or socially unrecognized identities can progressively acquire symbolic legitimacy and cultural presence.

5. Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study suggest that identity construction has undergone a progressive transformation shaped by multiple historical and sociocultural shifts, ranging from linguistic plurality and cultural imperialism to the contemporary emergence of "plastic identity" within digitally mediated environments. Across the three analyzed cases, identity no longer appears as a stable or culturally fixed condition, but rather as a fluid and continuously negotiated performance shaped through visibility, audience interaction, and algorithmic circulation.

The analysis further demonstrates that the legitimacy of "plastic identity" increasingly derives less from traditional social institutions and more from systems of digital recognition, platform visibility, and audience engagement. Through mechanisms such as likes, comments, shares, and algorithmic amplification, social media platforms participate in the production of new forms of symbolic legitimacy and social validation. In this context, online communities actively contribute to the normalization and circulation of particular identity performances within digital culture.

Furthermore, the study reveals that digital platforms increasingly structure identity performances by privileging specific aesthetics, narratives, linguistic practices, and behavioral patterns. Within these platform-driven environments, influencers occupy a hybrid position as both technological subjects and cultural intermediaries who transform visibility and audience attention into symbolic, social, and economic capital. Consequently, identity becomes progressively shaped according to the logics of performance, engagement, and digital circulation rather than exclusively through culturally grounded forms of subjectivity.

Drawing on the Theory of the Attention Economy, the findings additionally illustrate how digital platforms commodify user attention by identifying patterns of engagement and integrating individuals into personalized content ecosystems. Through these processes, algorithmic systems contribute not only to the circulation of online content, but also to the continuous reconstruction, regulation, and legitimization of identity itself. Ultimately, the concept of “plastic identity” reflects a broader transformation in which identity increasingly operates as a flexible, performative, and platform-governed construct shaped through technological mediation and algorithmic visibility.

6. Limitations of the Study

The present study is subject to several limitations that simultaneously constitute productive directions for future research. The sample of three influencers, while analytically purposive and theoretically generative, does not permit broad empirical generalization across the Moroccan digital landscape. Future studies would benefit from expanding the corpus to include a wider range of influencer profiles across different content categories, platform types, and regional contexts within Morocco, in order to examine whether the dynamics of plastic identity identified here hold across more diverse digital environments and audience demographics.

Given the rapidly evolving nature of platform architectures and algorithmic systems, longitudinal research designs capable of tracking the transformation of identity performances over extended time periods would constitute a valuable methodological complement to the synchronic cross-case analysis employed here. As platforms continue to evolve, as new forms of algorithmic governance emerge, and as Moroccan digital culture continues to negotiate the tensions between global connectivity and local cultural specificity, the dynamics of plastic identity will themselves continue to shift — making sustained scholarly attention to this domain both analytically necessary and socially significant.

7. Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the ways in which algorithmic amplification shapes and governs processes of identity construction among Moroccan social media influencers, through the analytical lens of plastic identity. By engaging with three empirically distinct yet theoretically interconnected cases, the analysis has demonstrated that identity within contemporary digital environments is neither a stable cultural inheritance nor a freely chosen individual project, but rather an ongoing, performative, and algorithmically mediated process of construction, negotiation, and continuous reconstruction.

Each of the three cases examined in this study illuminates a distinct dimension of plastic identity as it manifests within the specific sociocultural context of Moroccan digital culture. Influencer A's case reveals how transgressive linguistic performances — grounded in code-switching, slang, and deliberate moral provocation — can be converted into durable forms of algorithmic and social capital, illustrating the extent to which platform logics reward differentiation and affective intensity over cultural conformity. The analysis demonstrates that within high-engagement digital environments, identity transgression does not necessarily result in social exclusion but can instead generate sustained recognition and progressive normalization, as the repetition of stylized performances accumulates visibility and gradually reshapes the boundaries of what is culturally legible within Moroccan online discourse.

Influencer B's case foregrounds the constitutive role of controversy and moral contestation in the production of digital visibility. The analysis reveals that within algorithmically governed environments, hostile engagement and affirmative recognition are not categorically distinct in their effects on identity legitimization: both generate the metrics of attention upon which platform amplification depends. This finding complicates simplistic narratives of social acceptance as a prerequisite for digital legitimacy, suggesting instead that sustained visibility — even when contested — functions as a mechanism through which marginalized identity performances progressively acquire cultural presence and symbolic recognition within digital public spheres.

Influencer C's case contributes a third and complementary perspective, demonstrating that plastic identity need not be constructed through confrontation or provocation but can equally emerge through gradual, measured, and strategically calibrated processes of self-transformation. The progressive reconstruction of gendered selfhood performed by Influencer

C illustrates how digital platforms can function as spaces of identity becoming — environments in which selves are not simply expressed but incrementally produced through sustained aesthetic performance, audience interaction, and the cumulative effects of algorithmic circulation over time.

Taken together, these three cases establish that plastic identity within Moroccan digital culture is neither uniform nor unidirectional. It is shaped by the intersection of individual performative strategies, platform algorithmic logics, broader postcolonial cultural tensions, and the specific sociocultural norms and moral frameworks that govern Moroccan public life. The study thus confirms and extends the theoretical proposition that identity in the digital age cannot be understood independently of the technological architectures within which it is produced, circulated, and socially evaluated.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. No financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced the research, analysis, or conclusions presented in this work.

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