Preface

The purpose of this book is to provide a new framework for understanding emerging adults and how they navigate developmental tasks and issues utilizing digital technologies. Emerging adulthood is a developmental period in the human lifespan. It is a period between adolescence and adulthood. Some of these individuals do not live on their own and many do not have sufficient income to be fully independent in their early to late 20s. It is a period characteristic of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in between. These individuals utilize a variety of means to explore their identity to find out about themselves. They grew up in a digital era, many of them not knowing a time in which digital media was not a huge part of their lives. Digital media is often used to help explore, develop, and maintain emerging adults’ identity, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships.

The aim of this book is to synthesize the research on emerging adults’ digital technology use and how these technologies hinder or help their identity development and formation, contribute to aggressive and prosocial behaviors, understand their sexuality, and describe how these technologies benefit or hinder their relationships with their parents, friends, and romantic partners. In places where the published research on a topic is missing, research from the face-to-face context was used to provide a starting point for understanding the same topics in relation to digital technologies. Gaps in the literature were identified and future research were proposed on these topics. Topics include relationship with parents, friendships, love, romantic relationships, sexting, aggression, prosocial behavior, technology addiction, identity development and formation, and the self.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is organized according to various contexts of how emerging adults connect with digital technologies. These contexts involve their identity, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships. Some of the chapters include overlapping information, especially when describing the nature of emerging adulthood. It is often difficult toconceptualize of one context separate from the others or how such contexts might overlap. Authors of chapters employ different terminology to refer to the emerging adulthood period, including adults, youths, young people, college students, students, and young adults.

Chapters 1 through 4 focus on emerging adults’ identity development, exploration, and formation as augmented by digital technologies. The purpose of Chapter 1 is to explore the role of networked platforms in the development of identity during emerging adulthood utilizing Erik Erikson’s theory as a theoretical framework. The authors describe identity development within the context of two case studies.
They conclude their chapter by discussing practical implications of new digital technologies on identity development in emerging adulthood. Chapter 2 focuses on Indonesian emerging adults’ self-comparisons through social media. The author also explains how social media influences how emerging adults view themselves. The authors of Chapter 3 examine identity consolidation of highly mobile Brazilian athletes. Digital technologies are explored as a context to help the acculturation process of these athletes. Chapter 4 discusses the potential of social networking websites to provide social support and help the psychologically well-being of individuals with health issues. The chapter concludes with a proposal about how social networking websites can be used to explore identity among individuals with health issues.

Chapters 5 through 7 focus on emerging adults’ sexuality. Using the developmental task framework, the authors of Chapter 5 explore the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youths through the digital media. The authors conclude with recommendations for future research to broaden our understanding of how digital contexts predict the development and well-being of LGBTQ youths. The purpose of Chapter 6 is to analyze online participation on LGBTQ websites among youths in Spain. The authors explain how social networking websites can help with alternative sexual identity. Chapter 7 describes the changes in sex education among young adults in Uganda and Kenya. In contrast to sex education previously being taught by paternal aunts and grandparents, the authors describe how social media has shifted sex education to social media. The authors explain the positives and negatives associated with using social media for sexuality-related information.

Chapters 8 through 16 focus on interpersonal relationships. More chapters are included in the context of interpersonal relationships, highlighting how far research has come on this topic. The authors of Chapters 8 and 9 explore how digital technologies are being used in the context of parent-emerging adult relationships. Chapter 8 summarizes research related to the influence of digital technologies on parent-emerging adult relationships from a Family Systems perspective. The authors of Chapter 9 content analyzed the online messages of Chinese international students who were studying and living in the United States. Their findings revealed that the students often sought out and provided assistance to their peers regarding understanding and acculturating to family life in the United States via a popular online forum. The aim of Chapters 10 through 13 was to describe how emerging adults navigate romantic relationships in the digital age. Chapter 10 focuses on the online dating experiences of people with disabilities by describing how these people communicate with potential partners and escape disability stigma. The authors of Chapter 11 applied thematic analysis to understanding Nigerian emerging adults’ use of social networking websites, particularly Facebook. They found that many of the dating couples spent hours on Facebook, although they did not feel comfortable with the hours their partner spent chatting with friends on Facebook. Chapter 12 reviews the existing literature on the nature of pornography use among emerging adults and how pornography impacts their romantic relationships. Chapter 13 reviews the existing literature on emerging adults’ engagement in and evaluations of sexting. The authors also describe risk factors associated with sexting victimization, such as attachment style and rejection sensitivity. In Chapter 14, the authors introduce research on the association between the online and offline lives of emerging adults. They also explain the factors that predict problematic digital technology use among emerging adults. The authors of Chapter 15 and 16 explore two forms of cyber harassment: Cyberstalking and cyber aggression. Chapter 15 describes the author’s research on the prevalence, behaviors, and tactics of cyberstalking perpetrators. She also explains the correlates of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, including personality characteristics, attachment styles, and relating to
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others. The final chapter, Chapter 16, describes the author’s research on the longitudinal relationships between adjustment difficulties and cyber aggression involvement among emerging adults. The author discusses future research directions for understanding the adjustment difficulties associated with emerging adults’ cyber aggression perpetration and victimization, and explains possible intervention programs aimed at reducing these behaviors.