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The Me Under the Label: How MBTI and Social Media Shape Identity?

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In late 2021, numerous TikTok videos began circulating under the hashtag #MBTI, attracting millions of views and sparking widespread conversations about personality types. Users enthusiastically presented themselves as INFPs, ESTJs, or other four-letter codes, offering humorous skits, daily vlogs, and “day-in-the-life” snippets that supposedly illustrated their personality type in action. This surge of interest prompted both curiosity and criticism: Were these short videos a fun way for people to express themselves, or had social media platforms and personality labels started to define users more than users defined themselves? By focusing on the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) phenomenon, this blog post explores how digital platforms and algorithmic trends help shape personal and collective identities.

MBTI and the Rise of Media Sociability

Originally developed by Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers during World War II, the MBTI is based on Carl Jung’s theories of psychological types (Myers & Myers, 1995). The test groups human personality into 16 distinct profiles, each characterized by preferences along four dichotomies: Introversion (I) vs. Extraversion (E), Intuition (N) vs. Sensing (S), Thinking (T) vs. Feeling (F), and Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P). MBTI has been a staple of corporate team-building workshops and self-help circles for decades—more recently it has experienced a cultural renaissance, thanks in part to TikTok, Instagram and Twitter.

Why do so many people take to the internet to post and celebrate these labels of identity? One reason is in the social nature of social media, where digital conviviality drives sharing as a kind of ritual participation. A common audience is created for the media events and rituals that Nick Couldry (2003) examines in “Media Rituals: A Critical Approach.” Posting their MBTI results or making memes about it falls under this framework: such activities are micro-rituals reaffirming one’s place within a larger digital tribal entity. Similar users find themselves within the same type and experience a sense of unity forming little mini “tribes” of ENFJs, ISTPs, etc. The bridging of these micro-communities across platforms illustrates how media usage can function as a collective identity rite. Another aspect of MBTI’s popularity is its simplicity: a single four-letter code is easy to remember and share. TikTok’s algorithm, for instance, quickly learns to promote videos of a similar theme. Users who watch one MBTI comedy sketch will soon be served numerous others, thus creating a feedback loop that intensifies the interest and sense of belonging around these labels (TikTok, 2021).

Individual Identity vs. Group Identity in the Digital Sphere

In the digital context, identities can be performed and curated at will, leading to what sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) called “the presentation of self.” Social media platforms serve as virtual “stages,” where users carefully orchestrate how they present themselves to others. However, this self-presentation is never purely individualistic. In their book *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, Zizi Papacharissi (2011) highlights how digital identities often emerge at the intersection of personal self-expression and communal norms. When people adopt MBTI labels online, they simultaneously distinguish themselves (by

claiming an individual type) and affiliate with a collective (the “MBTI community”). That is the question, in then, do these types of group identification add to our sense of self, or take away?

Some people need the assurance of others with similar personalities. Meeting other INTJs who share a similar worldview can help an INTJ feel understood for the first time in their lives. Such meetings can create a place for more interaction where you could feel a oneness and similarity. Critics, on the other hand, say that identifying with a title based on a rigid definition could keep someone from growing. For example, someone young who fits really well into “Introversion” may then avoid social or leadership opportunities for fear that such activities don’t fit their MBTI code. This puzzle is akin to Goffman (1959) who noted once someone claims a specific “role” they will often act in alignment with the expectations of that role even if it does not truly represent a more complex, fundamental nature. This dynamic demonstrates that digital identity formation is not merely self-expression, but rather, to use the phrase popularized by danah boyd (2014) here, “playing to the crowd,” as teenagers curate their online identities for social bolstering and algorithmic exposure.

The Allure of the Label and Its Emotional Effects

For the uninitiated, to self proclaim MBTI letters is more than just a trend. And it frequently turns into a means for emotional expression and mental health discussion. Users on support forums on Reddit (r/mbti, for one) and other sites often mention anxiety issues or afflictions as a formative experience when discussing how finding their personality type helped them cope or comprehend their relationship stylings. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that labels, be they mental health diagnoses or personality labels, can alleviate distress by providing a name to experiences that have previously been unnamed (Thoits, 2011). However, these conversations can just as easily magnify anxiety. Others are concerned that they will somehow be “trapped” in a bad type or will try to “reform” their category into a more socially desirable category. These emotional stakes are compounded in the digital environment. The algorithm serves them more MBTI, further reinforcing the idea that personality typing is the definitive variable affecting social interactions. Further, the public nature of “likes” and “comments” can produce performance anxiety when people feel pressure to maintain—or consistently re-proclaim—the identity they are recognizing in public.

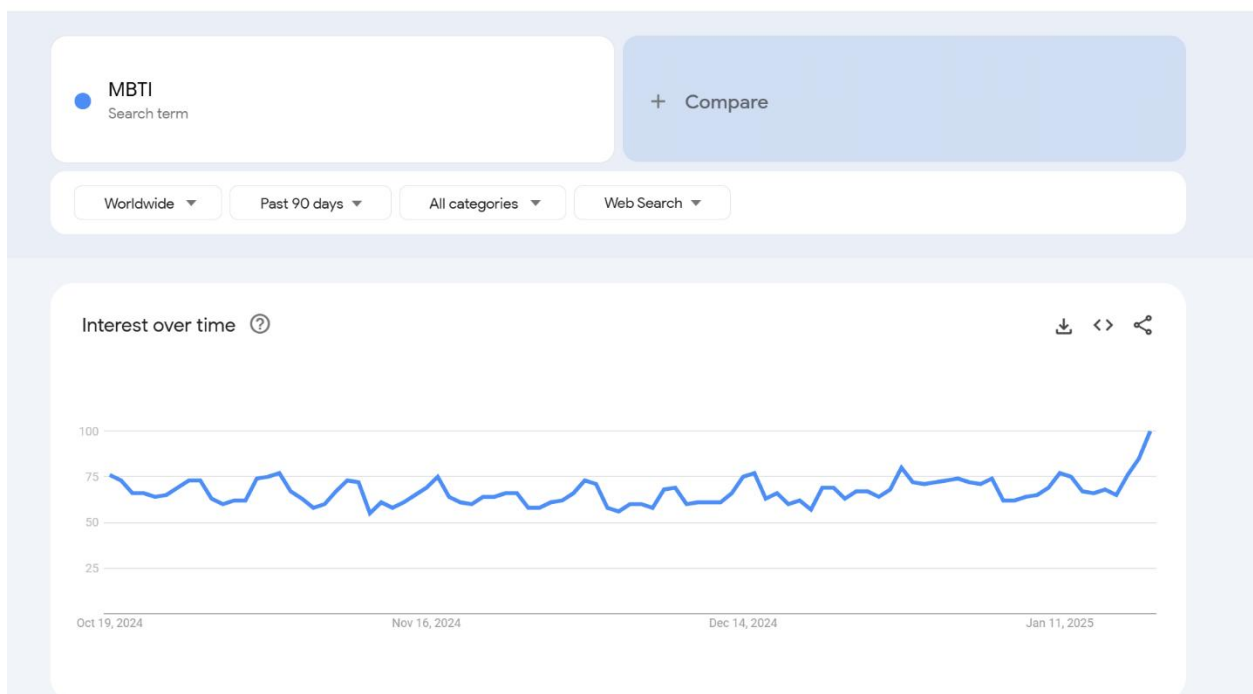
Big Data and the Commoditization of Identity

The popularity of MBTI on social media cannot be fully understood without examining the role of big data. Every time a user takes a personality quiz on a site like [16Personalities](#) or shares a MBTI-themed TikTok, they contribute data to a larger ecosystem. Platforms and data brokers can track user preferences, engagement patterns, and personal traits to refine their recommendation systems and targeted advertising. In this sense, identity is commodified: it becomes a product to be bought, sold, or harnessed for marketing campaigns (Fuchs, 2014).



Website about MBTI test (16Personalities, 2025)

One example is the personalization of e-commerce. An individual who identifies as INFJ might be served ads for self-care products or introspective journaling apps that cater to that personality's perceived needs. Such commodification raises ethical questions about the extent to which we can separate who we truly are from how big data labels us. In her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story," novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) warns against the oversimplification that occurs when complex identities are reduced to a single narrative or label.



Google Trends of MBTI in past 90 days (screenshot on 2025.1.19) (Google Trends, 2025)

Moreover, big data fosters an environment in which trends become self-perpetuating. A video or post about MBTI that garners significant engagement will be amplified by recommendation systems, prompting more people to discuss or debate MBTI, which in turn fuels further algorithmic circulation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPTrDt_VybY

Youtube video about MBTI (Sprouts, 2023)

As Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013) argue in *Spreadable Media*, the capacity of digital networks to magnify niche interests—turning them into viral phenomena—can reshape social discourses in unprecedented ways. In this process, MBTI ceases to be just a psychological tool and becomes a branded label, a meme, and a commodity.

Negotiating Authenticity and Diversity

The question that inevitably arises is whether these identity labels—amplified by big data and social media—are eroding personal authenticity and diversity. Does the MBTI craze impose a rigid structure on how individuals interpret themselves and others, replacing nuance with simplified categories? Critics of MBTI have pointed out that the test lacks robust scientific grounding and can be misleading (Furnham & Crump, 2005). Indeed, the notion of confining all human personalities into 16 boxes seems reductive at best and invalid at worst.

Nonetheless, many users still find the MBTI framework appealing because it offers a conversation starter and a lens for introspection. Online communities dedicated to MBTI foster discussions on mental well-being, relationships, and career aspirations. These forums, much like offline support groups, can play a positive role in validating people's experiences. Diversity can emerge from these discussions, especially when community members engage critically with the concept of personality typing and acknowledge that no single category can fully define them. The tension between wanting to belong to a group and wanting to express personal uniqueness often encourages deeper self-reflection and dialogue.

Conclusion

The modern mania for MBTI and the memeification of identity is a particularly illuminating case study in the construction, performativity, and circulation of identity in the digital realm. To put it another way, the ubiquitous sharing of MBTI test results is at once media sociability and community-building, a reflection of community cohesion that corresponds nicely with theories of collective identity formation. A special kind of belonging can be leveraged copy-and-pasted when users make a post about their type, effectively participating in a ritual. However, human nature is not static; it is a constantly adjusting system that is responding to our relationships, our life experiences, and our own growth. By contrast, when solo identity markers—an MBTI code, or aught else—are blasted across platforms, there's potential over-simplification,

commodification, and anxiety, which can arise. We might engage with MBTI—or other tools of self-discovery—as a starting point rather than an endpoint, ensuring that the nuances of our experiences and the transformative potential of human life remain intact. In this delicate balance between self-expression and collective belonging, the debate over MBTI in digital culture may yet pave the way for more inclusive and pluralistic notions of identity.

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