TOEFL Listening Lesson 34

Setting: A classroom discussion in a Sociology course.

<u>Questions</u>

1. What is the main purpose of the discussion?

A. To compare various social media platforms and their popularity

B. To explore how individuals develop a sense of identity through online and offline interactions

C. To explain how to use social media for academic research

D. To criticize the use of social media among college students

2. According to the professor, what does the term "curated identity" refer to?

A. A profile that uses false information to deceive others

B. An identity developed through social media marketing strategies

C. A selective presentation of oneself on social media platforms

D. A type of identity imposed by social media algorithms

3. What example does a student give to illustrate using different identities on different platforms?

A. Maintaining both public and private accounts

B. Posting serious news on one platform and ignoring others

C. Being fashionable on Instagram and humorous on Twitter

D. Avoiding all social media except for academic purposes

4. What does the professor imply about the role of hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic?

A. They are used mainly for entertainment purposes

B. They help users find discounts and promotions

C. They act as identity markers that can promote empowerment

D. They are irrelevant to sociological research

5. Why does the professor mention platform architecture toward the end of the discussion?

A. To explain the technical design of social media websites

B. To highlight how platform design affects user identity expression

C. To criticize the lack of privacy features in social networks

D. To describe how to create a personal website

Professor: All right, everyone. Today, we're exploring how social media shapes our sense of identity—how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how that dynamic has changed in the digital age. To start us off, who can tell me what we mean by "identity formation" in a sociological context?

Student 1: Isn't it the process of developing a distinct personality or self-concept?

Professor: Exactly. And that process used to occur mainly through face-to-face interactions—family, school, community. But now, with the internet and especially social media, much of it happens online. So, let me ask: How many of you feel that your social media profiles reflect your "true" self?

Student 2: Honestly, not completely. I usually post what I think looks good or will get likes, not necessarily what I'm actually doing or feeling.

Professor: That's very common. Social media tends to encourage what's called a "curated identity"—a selective version of the self. Sociologist Erving Goffman talked about the idea of the "presentation of self" in everyday life, using theatrical metaphors like front stage and backstage behavior. On social media, most people only present their front stage selves. Can anyone think of a consequence of this?

Student 3: Maybe people compare themselves to these ideal versions and feel inadequate?

Professor: Right. There's growing evidence that constant exposure to curated identities contributes to anxiety and low self-esteem, especially among young users. Now, does anyone feel like they use different identities for different platforms?

Student 4: Definitely. On Instagram I try to look stylish and put together, but on Twitter, I post more random thoughts or jokes. It's like I'm different people on each one.

Professor: Fascinating. That's something sociologists refer to as "context collapse"—when multiple audiences are brought together in one online space, making it harder to manage self-presentation. But in your case, you're segmenting those identities across platforms, which is one way of dealing with it.

Student 1: Sometimes I feel like managing all of that is exhausting, like I have to maintain a brand.

Professor: Yes, and you're not alone. In fact, researchers now talk about "performative identity"—where individuals feel pressure to continuously perform for an imagined audience. This performative aspect can reinforce societal norms or challenge them, depending on the platform and how it's used. For instance, has anyone noticed how certain hashtags are used to assert aspects of identity?

Student 2: Like #BlackGirlMagic or #ProudToBe?

Professor: Exactly. Hashtags can function as identity signifiers. They offer community and validation, but they also structure how identity is expressed. There's a political dimension here too—minority groups

have used social media to amplify their voices and counter dominant narratives.

Student 3: But is that always positive? I feel like sometimes it just creates echo chambers.

Professor: Good point. Social media can both empower and isolate. It fosters solidarity, but algorithms often filter content, so users may only encounter views that reinforce their own. That can limit exposure to diverse perspectives, which is essential for developing a well-rounded social identity.

Student 4: So, what does that mean for our real-life identities?

Professor: That's the big question. For many people, online identity is no longer separate from offline identity—it's intertwined. Employers look at social media profiles. Friendships are maintained through apps. Political beliefs are shaped by what people share and repost. As sociologists, we must ask: Are we becoming more authentic, or more strategic in how we present ourselves?

Student 1: I think it depends. Sometimes I use social media to be more honest, like sharing mental health struggles I wouldn't talk about in person.

Professor: That's a powerful example. Social media can break down stigma and encourage vulnerability—but only if users feel safe doing so. Trust, audience awareness, and platform design all shape whether identity expression feels empowering or risky.

Student 2: So it's not just about the user, but also how the platforms are built?

Professor: Precisely. The architecture of platforms—the way profiles, likes, and comments are structured—shapes behavior and identity performance. It's a two-way street. We influence the platforms, and they influence us.

Student 3: Makes me wonder who's really in control of our identities online.

Professor: That's a key takeaway. In the digital age, identity is not fixed or entirely self-determined—it's negotiated between the individual, their audience, and the platforms they use. And that's why studying social media is now central to understanding modern identity.

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Correct answer: C. A selective presentation of oneself on social media platforms

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