

The Impact of Social Media on the Cultural Identity of the Young Generation in the Society 5.0 Era



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ABSTRACT

The development of information and communication technology has brought very significant changes to the social life of modern society, especially among the younger generation. One of the tangible manifestations of this development is the presence of social media which is now an integral part of daily activities. Social media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a space for self-expression, opinion formation, and arena for social and cultural identity construction. In the context of Indonesia's young generation, social media has a great influence in shaping their mindsets, behaviors, and ways of understanding and representing cultural identities in the midst of an increasingly strong flow of digital globalization. This study aims to describe the influence of social media on the construction of cultural identity of the young generation of Indonesia. The approach used is qualitative with a descriptive method, through in-depth interview techniques, observation, and literature study. The results of the study show that social media has an ambivalent role. On the one hand, social media can strengthen awareness of local culture through the dissemination of creative content with nuances of local wisdom. But on the other hand, social media also encourages a shift in values, lifestyles, and cultural symbols due to strong global cultural penetration. These findings confirm that digital literacy and culture-based character education are very important to equip the younger generation to be able to adapt critically without losing their identity and national values in the midst of the rapid flow of global modernization.

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Introduction

Cultural identity is a fundamental aspect in the formation of the character and identity of a nation. It is a marker that distinguishes one community from another through values, norms, symbols, language, and social practices that are inherited from generation to generation. For the Indonesian nation, which is known for its ethnic and cultural diversity, cultural identity not only serves as a symbol of national pride, but also as a moral foundation in the life of society, nation, and state. In the context of modern society, cultural identity is not static, but dynamic and constantly negotiated according to the changing times. The process of globalization, which is characterized by information flows, cultural migration, and the development of digital technology, has caused a major transformation in the way individuals understand and express their identity. Digital globalization, according to Appadurai (1996), creates *global cultural flows* that allow the mixing of cultural values across borders.

The presence of social media is one of the most tangible manifestations of the phenomenon of digital globalization. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (Twitter) are new virtual spaces where young people interact, express, and construct their social and cultural identities. Through social media, geographical and social boundaries become blurred; Virtual space replaces traditional public spaces as an arena for communication and self-representation (Nasrullah, 2020). For the young generation of Indonesia, social media has now become an integral part of daily life. Online activities are no

longer just entertainment, but also a form of social and cultural participation. Digital content consumption and production patterns shape the way we think, act, and even look. In this context, social media plays an ideological role: it shapes views of what is considered "modern," "cool," and "worthy of recognition" (Hidayat & Sari, 2021).

This phenomenon poses a paradox. On the one hand, social media opens up a democratic space for more inclusive cultural expression. But on the other hand, it also has the potential to create cultural homogenization due to the dominance of global values that often displace local identities. Popular culture from the West, South Korea, or Japan, for example, is the main reference for the expression of the Indonesian young generation in dressing, speaking, and interacting. The process of imitation of global culture, according to Hall (1996), is a form of *cultural hybridization* in which individual identities are formed through the mixing of local and global cultures. However, if this process is not balanced by a critical awareness of the roots of the local culture, then what happens is *cultural dislocation*—the detachment of the individual from the original cultural context.

This study views the importance of understanding how social media affects the construction of cultural identity of the Indonesian young generation. Its main objective is to explore the dynamics between global cultural acceptance and efforts to defend local values. Thus, this study not only sees social media as a technological instrument, but also as a *cultural arena* that shapes the social and ideological consciousness of the younger generation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with several young informants who were active users of social media, observation of digital content with cultural nuances, and a review of relevant literature. This approach allows researchers to understand the subjective meaning behind the growing digital culture practices among the younger generation.

The results of the study show that social media plays a role as a strong forum for self-expression. The younger generation uses social media to display their personal and social identities, including local cultural symbols. However, such forms of representation are often influenced by a global aesthetic that emphasizes popularity and visuality, rather than deep cultural meaning. For example, many young users display traditional clothing or regional dances only as part of a trend or viral content, not as an expression of cultural awareness. This phenomenon shows a shift in meaning from cultural substance to cultural commodification—where cultural values become products that are consumed quickly and superficially. However, the research also found a positive side.

Social media opens up space for the emergence of *cultural influencers* who actively introduce local culture to the wider public. They use visual language, modern narratives, and communicative styles that are close to the younger generation, so that they are able to revive interest in local traditions and wisdom (Putra, 2022). For example, a number of creators on TikTok popularized traditional regional dances with a modern style that still maintains original elements. Similarly, educational YouTube channels introduce regional languages, archipelago culinary, and Pancasila values through a creative and light format. This kind of practice is a concrete example of how social media can be a space for cultural revitalization.

Thus, social media has two faces: as a potential as well as a challenge for the development of national cultural identity. It can be a means of empowering local culture, but it can also be a tool for global cultural penetration that erodes the nation's identity. This condition requires digital literacy based on cultural values. Digital literacy in this context does not only mean technical ability in using media, but also critical ability to understand the meaning, ideology, and values contained in every digital content. UNESCO (2019) emphasizes the importance of *critical digital literacy* to build cultural awareness in the midst of a global flood of information. Culture-based character education is an important instrument to instill this awareness. Schools, colleges, and social institutions need to integrate cultural values education in digital literacy practices. Thus, the young generation is not only a user of technology, but also a cultural agent who is able to maintain national identity in the digital space.

In a theoretical framework, the construction of cultural identity in social media can be understood through the approach of symbolic interactionism, as proposed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. This perspective emphasizes that identity is not something static or innate, but rather the result of a process of social interaction that is full of meaning. In the context of social media, the digital space is becoming a new arena where symbols, signs, and self-representation operate intensely and quickly. A person's identity is formed through how he interprets himself and how he is interpreted by other users in a vast network of virtual communication.

Every upload on social media, whether in the form of photos, texts, videos, or emojis, is not just a self-expression, but a symbolic action that carries social and cultural messages. Through these uploads, individuals negotiate the self-image they want to display, as well as build the desired social perception of others. Comments, *likes*, and shares become forms of feedback that reinforce or renegotiate the meaning of the constructed identity. This process mirrors the concept of *the looking-glass self* introduced by Cooley, in which one's self is formed through reflection on the other person's view of oneself.

Furthermore, symbolic interactions on social media do not occur in a neutral space, but are framed by algorithms and the prevailing digital culture. Algorithms determine the visibility of content, which indirectly forms a symbolic hierarchy of what is considered popular, relevant, and worthy of emulation. In this context, the formation of cultural identity is a social process that is also technological, because it is influenced by digital structures that regulate the flow of information and interaction between individuals. Thus, cultural identity in the digital era is not only a product of communication, but also the result of interaction between humans and technology.

The Indonesian cultural context provides an additional dimension to this dynamic. The younger generation living in the midst of cultural plurality and technological advances face the challenge of balancing traditional values with the need for social recognition in cyberspace. In every symbolic act on social media, they interact not only as individuals, but also as representations of a specific cultural group. Thus, social media serves as an arena of symbolic contestation where national, local, and global identities negotiate with each other in a fluid digital space.

Therefore, the construction of cultural identity through symbolic interaction on social media needs to be understood not as a simple process, but as a complex and dynamic social practice. It includes interconnected dimensions of communication, technology, and culture. Through the perspective of symbolic interactionism, it can be understood that every digital symbol — whether words, images, or signs — becomes a medium for forming a new collective identity that reflects the social changes of Indonesian society in the era of digital globalization.

In addition, cultural mediation theory (Couldry, 2012) is also relevant to explain how social media plays a role in mediating cultural experiences. The media not only channels messages, but also constructs cultural realities through algorithms, aesthetics, and capitalistic logic that govern the visibility of content. Therefore, efforts to maintain Indonesia's cultural identity in the digital era require a comprehensive strategy: increasing digital literacy, strengthening character education, and supporting public policies that favor cultural preservation. The government, educational institutions, and the community need to collaborate in building a healthy and civilized digital ecosystem. Strengthening national policies in the field of culture and digital transformation is important to direct the use of social media in a productive and educational direction. Programs such as *digital culture campaigns*, *cultural influencers*, or online festivals based on local wisdom can be a strategic means of strengthening the nation's identity in cyberspace. Ultimately, social media is not an absolute threat to cultural identity, but rather a mirror of how the younger generation manages its cultural heritage in the modern era. With strong literacy and deep cultural awareness, social media can actually become a new medium for the revival of national culture in the midst of the inevitable flow of digital globalization.

Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of understanding social phenomena in depth through the interpretation of the meaning behind the social actions of the younger generation in using social media (Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions, and practices of digital culture that cannot be explained through quantitative data alone. The focus of the research is directed at informants' subjective interpretation of their cultural identity in the digital space, including how social interactions in social media shape cultural awareness and self-representation.

The research subjects consisted of ten main informants aged 18–25 years who actively used social media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (Twitter), and were domiciled in urban areas in Indonesia. The selection of informants was carried out using *purposive sampling techniques* based on their involvement in digital cultural activities. Data was obtained through three main techniques, namely: (1) in-depth interviews on informants' cultural perceptions and behaviors on social media, (2) online observations of accounts that display local and global cultural elements, and (3) literature studies from scientific journals, articles, and research reports relevant to the theme of cultural identity and social media.

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive analysis model Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which includes three main stages: *data reduction*, *data display*, and *conclusion drawing/verification*. The analysis process was carried out simultaneously from the time the data collection took place until the final interpretation stage. The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation and member check techniques, to ensure the consistency, credibility, and validity of the research results. A reflective approach is used in the interpretation of the findings in order to be able to uncover the cultural meaning implied behind the digital practices of the younger generation and its relevance to the formation of Indonesian cultural identity in the era of digital globalization.

Results and Discussion

This study found that social media has transformed into a new social space that greatly influences the formation of the cultural identity of the young generation of Indonesia. Based on the results of interviews and online observations, the informants considered social media as a medium that provides unlimited freedom of self-expression. They can display their self-image, aesthetic taste, and outlook on life through personalized curated photos, videos, and narratives. Social media, thus, becomes an arena where identity is no longer fixed, but is constantly being negotiated and reconstructed according to social dynamics and circulating global trends.

This freedom of expression, on the one hand, provides an opportunity for the younger generation to display the diversity of local cultures. But on the other hand, it also gives birth to serious challenges to traditional cultural values. The results of the interviews showed that most of the informants adopted more lifestyles, dress styles, and communication patterns inspired by Western and Korean cultures. This confirms the shift in cultural orientation from local to global. This finding is in line with Hall's (1996) view that cultural identity is *fluid* and constantly changes according to the social context and media used.

In the theoretical framework of *cultural globalization*, this process of imitation of global culture is a form of *cultural hybridization*, in which elements of local culture are mixed with global values in the process of self-representation. However, without adequate cultural awareness, the process can lead to *cultural displacement*—a condition in which individuals are detached from their own identity roots. This is evident in the behavior of the younger generation who prefer to display global cultural symbols on their digital profiles rather than local cultural expressions that are considered "less modern".

The results of observations on social media content also show that digital platform algorithms reinforce this tendency. The algorithm automatically promotes content that has

global appeal and high viral potential. As a result, more educational or reflective local cultural content often drowns in the flood of entertainment content. This phenomenon strengthens cultural homogenization and creates symbolic uniformity in the digital space that has the potential to erode Indonesia's cultural plurality.

On the other hand, social media also offers a great opportunity for the revitalization of local culture. Several informants showed creative ability to use social media as a forum for promoting regional culture. For example, there are those who create traditional dance content with a modern touch, introduce regional culinary specialties through vlogs, or revive the use of regional languages through educational content. This phenomenon shows that social media is not only an agent of globalization, but also an arena of *cultural resistance*—resistance to global cultural domination through the creation of innovative local narratives.

This finding strengthens the argument of Wijaya (2021) that cultural symbols on social media have undergone a change in meaning from traditional expressions to digital aesthetic forms. However, these changes are not always negative. If managed with a strong cultural vision, digital aesthetics can be an effective cultural communication strategy to capture the attention of the younger generation who live in visual logic and trends. Observations also show that cultural practices in the digital space often display ambiguity between preservation and commodification. Traditional clothing, for example, is used in *TikTok dance challenge* content not only to preserve culture, but also as a strategy to attract *engagement*. Thus, cultural values have been transformed into *cultural commodities*, symbolic products that are consumed in the context of the *attention economy*. This phenomenon reflects how local culture negotiates with the capitalistic logic of digital media.

Reflective awareness of the importance of maintaining local cultural values is an indicator of the existence of a dialectical process between tradition and modernity among the younger generation. The informants who have this awareness show that local culture does not always have to be in a defensive position against the flow of globalization. On the contrary, culture can appear dynamic, transforming according to the development of the times without losing the substance of the values contained in it. This awareness indicates that the younger generation has the ability to reinterpret traditional values in a digital context, rather than simply copying their form symbolically.

This concrete form of reflective awareness can be seen in the way informants combine traditional and modern elements in the production of digital content. They perform gamelan music with electronic arrangements, traditional clothing with contemporary visual styles, or narrate local wisdom through podcast and vlog media. This phenomenon shows the existence of a creative process that reflects *cultural hybridization*, where local values are integrated with global technology and aesthetics. In this context, social media has become a space for cultural interaction that is no longer hierarchical between local and global, but rather dialogical and mutually influential.

This kind of creativity affirms the birth of a new cultural identity that Robertson (1995) calls *glocal identity*, that is, an identity that is rooted locally but has a global form of expression. This identity allows the younger generation to stay connected to its cultural roots while actively participating in the world's communication flow. This concept shifts the traditional view of modernity as a threat to tradition, into modernity as an opportunity to expand local cultural horizons to a global level.

However, a major challenge arises when digital globalization creates conditions that Suryadi (2020) describes as "superficial cosmopolitanism". This phenomenon illustrates openness to global culture without a process of critical reflection on local values. The younger generation in this context tends to experience identity disorientation, where they become citizens of the world symbolically, but lose the depth of meaning to their culture of origin. As a result, local culture only becomes an aesthetic ornament that loses the spirit of value and morality that should be inherent in it.

This tendency of "superficial cosmopolitanism" can be seen from the digital behavior of some informants who prefer universal values such as unlimited freedom, individualism, and

total self-expression. These values are often at odds with Indonesian cultural principles that emphasize togetherness, politeness, and social balance. This shift in values reflects a complex moral and social transition among the younger generation, where communal values are replaced by more pragmatic and globalist personal values.

However, such shifts do not necessarily have to be interpreted as cultural regression. Within the framework of social constructivism, the change in cultural identity is the result of a constant process of negotiation between individuals, technology, and their social environment. The young generation is not only a victim of the current of globalization, but also actors who are able to shape new directions and meanings for their culture. Therefore, it is important to see these dynamics as part of the natural process of cultural evolution in the digital age. To maintain a balance between global openness and local cultural integrity, systematic efforts are needed through culture-based character education, strengthening digital literacy, and support for local creative communities. Collaboration between educational institutions, governments, and cultural influencers can strengthen the process of positive glocalization. Thus, the young generation can become agents of change who are not only adaptive to the global world, but also consistent in fighting for the noble values of the nation's culture.

The impact of this situation is the emergence of symptoms of *cultural disorientation*, namely a loss of attachment to local cultural roots. Informants who experience this phenomenon admit that it is difficult to define "what is Indonesian culture" because their digital identity is more influenced by global styles. This condition shows the urgency of cultural literacy and character education that is contextual with the digital era, so that the younger generation can sort out which global elements enrich and which erode their own cultural values. Additionally, popularity-oriented social media algorithms reinforce cultural biases. Local content that is educational in nature often receives less attention than entertainment content that follows global trends. As a result, cultural representation on social media becomes uneven, colored by popular cultural hegemony that tends to be superficial and consumptive. This situation requires creative intervention from the government, educators, and cultural actors so that the digital ecosystem becomes a fair space for the diversity of national cultural expressions.

The results of the study also show that the young generation with a high level of cultural awareness is able to use social media strategically to strengthen local identity. They not only produce cultural content, but also narrate its meaning. For example, by explaining the philosophy behind traditional dances or traditional clothing symbols in the description of the post. This shows that the younger generation can become agents of cultural transformation when they understand the value context of the symbols they display. Factors influencing this cultural awareness include cultural character-based education, the role of the family, and the support of creative communities that encourage pride in local identity. Culture-based digital literacy is an important means to build the reflective abilities of the younger generation in navigating complex digital spaces. As stated by Kartika and Nugroho (2022), digital strategies that combine creativity and cultural values are able to create a *digital identity* rooted in local wisdom.

Cross-sector collaboration is the key to the success of the strategy. The government can play a role in providing policies that support cultural preservation in the digital space, while educational institutions can instill cultural values through digital literacy curriculum. Influencers and creative communities act as bridges that connect cultural values with a language of communication that appeals to the younger generation. This approach will give birth to a digital space that is not only informative and entertaining, but also educational and reflective. Thus, the results of this study confirm that social media has an ambivalent role: it is a threat as well as an opportunity for the cultural identity of Indonesia's young generation. The main challenge is not technology, but the extent to which people are able to build cultural awareness and digital ethics in using it. If the young generation is equipped with strong cultural literacy, social media can actually become a new medium for the revival of national culture that is adaptive to the times but still rooted in the noble values of the nation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that social media plays a very significant role in the process of forming the cultural identity of the young generation of Indonesia. The presence of social media has created new spaces for self-expression, value exchange, and the formation of social meaning that were previously limited to physical space. The younger generation uses digital platforms not only as a means of communication, but also as an arena for the representation of identities that reflect their outlook on life, cultural preferences, and social aspirations. In this context, social media functions as a social and cultural medium that helps construct the way individuals interpret culture and Indonesianness in the midst of the rapid and intense flow of digital globalization.

However, the results of the study also show that there is an ambivalence of the role of social media on cultural identity. On the one hand, social media can be an effective means for the promotion and revitalization of local culture through the dissemination of creative content that highlights the values of local wisdom. On the other hand, the massive penetration of global culture in the digital space has led to a shift in the values and behavior patterns of the younger generation. Popular culture that is universal and commercial in nature often shifts the meaning of traditional culture to mere symbols of entertainment and digital aesthetics. This condition emphasizes the need for critical awareness so that social media does not become an instrument of cultural homogenization, but rather a vehicle for strengthening adaptive and dynamic national identity.

In the socio-cultural context, strengthening the cultural awareness of the younger generation is an urgent need. The educational process—both formal and informal—must place cultural literacy and digital ethics as integral parts of 21st-century learning. Schools and colleges play a strategic role in shaping a reflective understanding of cultural identity, so that learners are able to navigate the digital space without losing their roots in local values. The role of family and community is also important as an initial socialization space that instills a sense of pride in one's own culture and critical ability to be critical of external influences.

In addition to educational institutions and families, the government and digital industry players need to collaborate in building a healthy cultural ecosystem in cyberspace. The government can encourage policies that support the digitization of local culture through campaigns, online festivals, and empowering content creators based on cultural values. Meanwhile, social media platforms need to be encouraged to be more responsive to cultural diversity through inclusive algorithms and digital literacy programs. Collaboration between academics, the creative community, and the public sector will strengthen the competitiveness of Indonesian culture in the global arena without losing its national identity.

Thus, culture-based digital literacy is the main key in building a modern, creative, and nationalist young generation. This literacy is not only about the ability to use technology, but also about wisdom in interpreting and selecting cultural information that is circulating. The young generation who are culturally literate and digitally ethical will be able to make social media a means of learning, innovation, and cultural diplomacy that strengthens Indonesia's image in the global world. With a solid foundation of cultural values, Indonesia has a great opportunity to create a golden generation that is able to compete globally without being uprooted from its own cultural roots.

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