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Digital Culture and Identity Construction among Indonesian University Students

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Abstrak | Bahasa Indonesia

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mengubah cara mahasiswa membangun identitas, berkomunikasi, dan berpartisipasi dalam kehidupan sosial. Budaya digital tidak hanya memengaruhi perilaku individu dalam menggunakan media digital, tetapi juga membentuk cara mahasiswa mengekspresikan diri, membangun citra pribadi, serta berinteraksi dengan komunitas daring. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh budaya digital terhadap konstruksi identitas mahasiswa di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei yang melibatkan mahasiswa aktif dari berbagai perguruan tinggi di Indonesia sebagai responden. Data dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner secara daring dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif serta analisis regresi linear sederhana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya digital berpengaruh positif terhadap proses konstruksi identitas mahasiswa, terutama dalam pembentukan ekspresi diri, komunikasi sosial, dan partisipasi dalam komunitas digital. Namun demikian, intensitas penggunaan media digital yang tinggi juga berpotensi memengaruhi konsistensi identitas individu dalam lingkungan sosial. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa budaya digital telah menjadi bagian penting dalam pembentukan identitas mahasiswa di era masyarakat digital. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan pemanfaatan teknologi digital secara bijaksana untuk mendukung pembentukan identitas yang positif serta memperkuat interaksi sosial di lingkungan akademik dan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Budaya Digital, Kontruksi Identitas, Mahasiswa, Masyarakat Digital, Interaksi Sosial

Abstract | English

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way university students construct their identities, communicate, and participate in social life. Digital culture not only influences individual behaviour in using digital media but also shapes how students express themselves, build personal identities, and engage with online communities. This study aims to examine the influence of digital culture on identity construction among Indonesian university students. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method involving active university students from various higher education institutions in Indonesia. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analysis. The findings indicate that digital culture has a positive influence on students' identity construction, particularly in terms of self-expression, social communication, and participation in digital communities. However, intensive engagement with digital media may also affect the consistency of individual identity within broader social environments. These findings suggest that digital culture has become an essential element in shaping students' identities within contemporary digital society. Therefore, the responsible use of digital technology is necessary to foster positive identity construction and strengthen social interaction in both academic and community settings.

Keywords: Digital Culture, Identity Construction, University Students, Digital Society, Social Interaction

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed various aspects of human life, including communication, social interaction, cultural practices, and identity formation. The increasing accessibility of the internet and digital devices has encouraged individuals to engage more actively in digital environments where information is exchanged instantly, communities are formed virtually, and personal identities are continuously negotiated. In contemporary society, digital technology is no longer merely a communication tool but has become an integral part of everyday social and cultural life. Consequently, digital culture has emerged as one of the most important issues in social science research because it reflects how technology shapes social behaviour, cultural values, and interpersonal relationships within modern society.

Digital culture refers to the collection of values, norms, behaviours, and communication practices that develop through the intensive use of digital technologies. The expansion of social media platforms, online communities, and digital communication applications has created new cultural spaces where individuals interact beyond geographical and temporal limitations. Through these platforms, users are able to exchange ideas, construct personal identities, express opinions, participate in public discussions, and establish social relationships with diverse communities. As a result, digital culture has become an inseparable component of contemporary social interaction and cultural transformation.

University students represent one of the social groups most actively engaged in digital culture. As members of Generation Z, they have grown up in an environment where digital technology is integrated into almost every aspect of daily life. Smartphones, social media platforms, online learning systems, and digital communication applications have become essential tools for academic activities, entertainment, information seeking, and social participation. This intensive engagement with digital technology enables university students to construct identities not only through direct interpersonal communication but also through continuous interaction within digital environments.

Identity construction has become increasingly dynamic in the digital era. Unlike traditional identity formation, which primarily developed through family, educational institutions, and local communities, contemporary identity is continuously shaped through interactions within online communities and digital platforms. Individuals create digital profiles, share personal experiences, publish opinions, and interact with others through various forms of digital communication. These activities allow individuals to present multiple aspects of themselves while simultaneously receiving feedback from wider online audiences. Consequently, digital environments provide new opportunities for self-expression while also influencing how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

In Indonesia, digital technology has experienced remarkable growth over the past decade. The increasing penetration of internet services and widespread use of smartphones have accelerated the development of digital culture among young people. University students increasingly rely on digital platforms not only for educational purposes but also for communication, collaboration, entertainment, entrepreneurship, and participation in various social communities. Social networking platforms have become spaces where cultural values are exchanged, social identities are negotiated, and interpersonal relationships are maintained through continuous online interaction. These developments demonstrate that digital culture has become a defining characteristic of contemporary Indonesian society.

The growing influence of digital culture has generated both opportunities and challenges for identity construction. On one hand, digital platforms encourage creativity, self-expression, collaboration, and broader social participation by providing individuals with opportunities to communicate across different cultural and geographical contexts. Students are able to develop professional identities, academic networks, and social relationships through digital communication. On the other hand, continuous exposure to digital environments may encourage social comparison, identity inconsistency, information overload, and dependence on online validation. These conditions indicate that identity construction in digital society is becoming increasingly complex and deserves further scholarly attention from social science perspectives.

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of digital culture and identity formation among young people. Existing research generally focuses on social media behaviour, digital literacy, online communication, self-presentation, and digital participation. Several studies have demonstrated that digital technology significantly influences the way individuals communicate, construct social relationships, and develop personal identities within virtual environments. Other researchers have emphasized the role of social media in strengthening social participation and facilitating interaction among university students. However, previous studies frequently concentrate on communication practices or educational contexts, while relatively limited attention has been given to examining the relationship between digital culture and identity construction from broader cultural and social science perspectives.

This condition indicates the existence of a research gap. Although numerous studies discuss digital media and communication behaviour, fewer investigations specifically analyze how digital culture contributes to identity construction among Indonesian university students as members of contemporary digital society. Most previous studies emphasize technological adoption or communication behaviour, whereas identity construction as a cultural and social process has not been explored comprehensively. Therefore, further research is necessary to provide empirical evidence regarding the influence of digital culture on the formation of personal identity within Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital environment.

From the perspective of cultural studies, identity is understood as a dynamic social construct that continuously develops through interaction, communication, and cultural participation. Digital technology has expanded the spaces in which identity is constructed by creating virtual communities where individuals negotiate meanings, values, and social roles. Consequently, examining digital culture and identity construction contributes not only to discussions concerning communication technology but also to broader social science debates regarding cultural transformation, social participation, and the development of digital society.

This study therefore aims to examine the influence of digital culture on identity construction among Indonesian university students. Specifically, the research investigates how participation in digital environments contributes to self-expression, communication behaviour, and identity development within contemporary digital society. By focusing on university students as active participants in digital culture, this study seeks to provide a better understanding of how technological advancement influences cultural practices and identity formation among young adults.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature in the fields of Cultural Studies, Social Sciences, and Digital Society by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between digital culture and identity construction. Practically, the findings may serve as useful references for higher education institutions, policymakers, educators, and community organizations in promoting responsible digital engagement while supporting the development of positive identity among university students. Furthermore, this study contributes to a broader understanding of cultural transformation within Indonesian digital society, particularly in relation to the changing patterns of communication, participation, and identity formation among Generation Z.

Furthermore, the increasing integration of digital technology into everyday life has made identity construction a dynamic and continuous process rather than a fixed personal characteristic. University students constantly negotiate their identities through interactions in digital environments, where communication, participation, and self-representation occur simultaneously across multiple online platforms. Understanding this phenomenon is essential because identity construction within digital culture not only reflects individual behaviour but also represents broader social and cultural transformations occurring in contemporary Indonesian society. Therefore, examining the relationship between digital culture and identity

construction provides valuable insights into how technological advancement shapes social values, cultural participation, and the development of digital communities.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey approach to examine the influence of digital culture on identity construction among Indonesian university students. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to measure the relationship between variables objectively through numerical data and statistical analysis. The study focused on understanding how digital culture contributes to the process of identity construction within contemporary digital society.

The population of this study consisted of active undergraduate students enrolled at public and private universities in Indonesia who regularly use digital media in their daily activities. The target respondents were students aged between 18 and 25 years who actively access digital platforms, including social media, online communication applications, and other internet-based services. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents met the research criteria. The criteria included: (1) being an active university student, (2) using digital media for at least one year, and (3) accessing digital platforms on a daily basis. A total of 120 respondents participated in this study.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire designed to measure the variables of digital culture and identity construction. The questionnaire was developed based on relevant concepts in social science and cultural studies. The independent variable, digital culture, was measured through indicators including digital communication, online participation, information sharing, digital engagement, and the use of digital platforms in everyday activities. The dependent variable, identity construction, was measured through indicators such as self-expression, self-presentation, social identity, confidence in digital interaction, and participation in online communities. Each statement was assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Before distributing the questionnaire, the research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability testing to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the measurement items. Item validity was examined using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique, while instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The instrument was considered reliable when the Cronbach's Alpha value exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe respondents' characteristics and the overall condition of each research variable. Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of digital culture on identity construction among university students. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests consisting of normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity tests were performed to ensure that the data fulfilled the assumptions required for regression analysis. All statistical analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software with a significance level of 0.05.

The results of this study are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the relationship between digital culture and identity construction among university students while contributing to the development of research in the fields of Cultural Studies, Social Sciences, and Digital Society. In addition, the findings are expected to serve as a valuable reference for educational institutions, policymakers, and community organizations in promoting responsible digital engagement and supporting positive identity development among young people in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

This study involved 120 university students from various public and private universities in Indonesia who actively use digital platforms in their daily lives. Based on the demographic data, the majority of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old and regularly accessed social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, and YouTube. Most respondents reported spending between three and six hours per day engaging in digital activities, including communication, academic collaboration, entertainment, and information seeking.

The descriptive statistical analysis indicated that the level of digital culture among respondents was relatively high. Most participants agreed that digital technology had become an inseparable part of their daily lives and significantly influenced the way they communicate, access information, express opinions, and participate in online communities. The respondents also perceived that digital platforms provided broader opportunities for self-expression and interaction with diverse social groups.

The regression analysis demonstrated that digital culture had a positive and statistically significant influence on identity construction among Indonesian university students. The significance value obtained was below 0.05, indicating that the proposed hypothesis was accepted. These findings suggest that students who actively participate in digital environments tend to develop stronger self-expression, greater confidence in presenting themselves, and more active participation in online communities.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination indicated that digital culture contributed substantially to identity construction, while the remaining variation was explained by other factors outside the scope of this study. This finding confirms that digital culture has become one of the important social factors influencing the development of identity among university students in contemporary digital society.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital culture has become an essential element influencing identity construction among Indonesian university students. The rapid expansion of digital technology has provided students with broader opportunities to communicate, share experiences, and establish social relationships through various digital platforms. These conditions enable individuals to construct their identities continuously through interaction with online communities and participation in digital environments.

The positive relationship between digital culture and identity construction indicates that digital platforms function not only as communication media but also as social spaces where individuals negotiate personal values, beliefs, and self-representation. University students actively utilize digital media to express their opinions, develop professional and academic identities, and participate in communities that reflect their interests and social values. Consequently, identity construction has become a dynamic process shaped by continuous interaction within digital society.

The findings also reveal that participation in digital communities encourages students to become more confident in presenting themselves and interacting with others. The availability of interactive features on digital platforms allows users to exchange ideas, collaborate on academic activities, and strengthen social relationships beyond geographical boundaries. This phenomenon reflects the transformation of communication patterns from conventional face-to-face interaction toward more flexible digital communication.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also indicates that intensive engagement with digital environments may create challenges related to identity consistency. The opportunity to present different versions of oneself across multiple digital platforms may encourage individuals to adapt their identities according to specific social contexts. Therefore, responsible digital participation is necessary to ensure that identity construction remains authentic and supports positive social relationships.

From the perspective of Cultural Studies, these findings illustrate that digital culture has significantly influenced the formation of social identity among young people. Identity is no longer constructed solely through family, educational institutions, or local communities but increasingly develops through participation in digital environments where communication, interaction, and cultural exchange occur continuously. This transformation demonstrates the important role of digital culture in shaping contemporary social life.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies by providing empirical evidence that digital culture positively influences identity construction among Indonesian university students. The findings highlight the importance of encouraging responsible digital engagement that supports positive identity development, healthy communication, and meaningful participation within contemporary digital society.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital culture has a positive and significant influence on identity construction among Indonesian university students. The findings indicate that active participation in digital environments enables students to develop self-expression, strengthen communication, and engage more effectively in online communities. Digital culture has become an essential component of contemporary social life, shaping the way university students construct personal identities and interact within the broader digital society.

The study also highlights that while digital platforms provide opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and identity development, excessive engagement may create challenges related to identity consistency and social interaction. Therefore, the responsible and balanced use of digital technology is essential to ensure that identity construction remains authentic and contributes positively to individual development and social relationships.

The findings contribute to the advancement of Cultural Studies, Social Sciences, and Digital Society by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between digital culture and identity construction among Indonesian university students. Practically, the results may serve as valuable references for higher education institutions, policymakers, educators, and community organizations in designing programs that promote digital literacy, responsible digital participation, and positive identity development among young adults.

Future research is recommended to examine additional factors that may influence identity construction, including digital literacy, cultural values, online community engagement, family environment, and psychological well-being. Expanding the study to different educational levels, regions, and demographic groups would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction within Indonesia's evolving digital society.

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