

Title: Cultural Identity Renewal in the Era of Digital Transformation: Challenges and Opportunities - A Descriptive and Analytical Study on a Sample of University Youth

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Abstract

This article explores the topic of cultural identity among young people, examining its various elements and components in the context of digital transformation. To achieve this, the study employed a descriptive methodology using a survey approach, with a Likert-scale attitude questionnaire designed to collect relevant data. The results indicated that young people are both aware of and committed to their cultural identity. Moreover, despite the associated risks, digital spaces offer opportunities for expressing identity and individuality. The study concluded that digital transformation presents numerous challenges and opportunities, and it is essential to recognize these challenges in order to harness them in ways that contribute to societal development and enhance quality of life.

The concept of cultural identity is considered one of the most significant contemporary issues, as it raises numerous scientific and intellectual questions and discussions. Although it has been widely studied, cultural identity continues to attract scholarly attention, especially when new developments emerge that may impact it. One such development is the ongoing digital transformation, which has influenced individuals and societies alike. As local cultures come into increasing contact with global influences, the boundaries between societies have become blurred, and the distinct elements of cultural identity—such as belonging, language, religion, and customs—are increasingly under threat.

Keywords: Media, Cultural identity, Society, Media jobs, Digital transformation, Youth.

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Introduction

Cultural identity is experiencing erosion among individuals, particularly due to unprecedented exposure to other cultures and societies. A crisis of identity and belonging is especially noticeable among youth, who are more open to reform and more receptive to new ideas and changes. This openness can lead to alienation from their own cultural identity, particularly in the absence of effective social upbringing and intergenerational cultural transmission. The situation is exacerbated by the retreat of many from their social roles and by the superficial content often presented in local media, which fails to uphold its social responsibility to reinforce cultural values.

Renewing and preserving cultural identity—with all its core elements such as language, religion, values, and customs—has become an urgent and unavoidable necessity. This research paper seeks to address this issue from the perspective that digital transformation, despite its challenges, offers tools and opportunities to engage with and revitalize cultural identity. By leveraging these digital tools, it is possible to enhance awareness of cultural identity and reinforce its presence among young people.

Research Questions:

This study seeks to answer the following overarching question:

How does digital transformation impact the renewal of cultural identity among university students, and what are the associated challenges and opportunities?

To explore this topic in depth, the study is guided by the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent are university students aware of the concept of cultural identity?
2. How can digital transformation serve as an opportunity to enhance and renew the cultural identity of young people?
3. What are the most prominent challenges and opportunities facing young people in preserving their cultural identity in the context of digital transformation and technological development?

Importance of the Study:

The significance of this research lies in multiple dimensions related to the renewal of cultural identity in the digital era. From an academic perspective, the study contributes to enriching the body of research on cultural and social issues. It also enhances our understanding of the relationship between digital transformation and its impact on university students—who represent the most informed and engaged group in terms of communication technologies and digital tools.

This research helps to identify the changes affecting cultural identity as a result of digitalization, and examines the capacity of youth to utilize digital innovations while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness amidst global cultural exposure. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of raising youth awareness about the optimal use of digital tools to preserve their cultural identity. It also emphasizes the need to invest in digital transformation as a means of renewing and revitalizing the core elements of cultural identity among the younger generation.

Study Objectives:

In addition to the main goal of investigating the renewal of cultural identity through digital transformation, this study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To assess the level of youth awareness regarding the elements of cultural identity, such as language, customs, and traditions.
- To explore the extent to which young people use digital platforms to strengthen and express their cultural identity.
- To highlight the role of digital transformation as an opportunity for enhancing and renewing cultural identity among youth.
- To identify the key challenges facing young people in preserving their cultural identity amidst digital transformation and globalization, and to reveal the broader threats to cultural specificity.
- To shed light on the opportunities provided by digital transformation for reviving and disseminating cultural identity and its components.

Definition of Concepts:

Operational definitions specify the procedures used to test and measure a concept (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 40). Despite their great importance, operational definitions provide only a limited understanding. No operational definition can fully capture the complete scientific meaning of a concept or variable (Abu Al-Am, 2014, p. 51).

1. **Renewing Cultural Identity:**

This refers to the conscious revitalization of the elements and components of cultural identity. Renewal involves values, customs, language, and more—implying an intentional effort to raise awareness and reconnect with these cultural components.

2. **Cultural Identity:**

Cultural identity is the framework encompassing all the shared elements that signify an individual's or group's sense of belonging. This includes language, traditions, customs, religion, values, and other cultural markers.

3. **Digital Transformation:**

Digital transformation refers to the extensive integration and use of digital technologies in various aspects of human life. This includes tools such as artificial intelligence, social media platforms, and other forms of new digital media.

4. **Opportunities:**

These are the positive possibilities presented by digital transformation that can be leveraged to renew and enhance awareness of the components of cultural identity. The term also implies the importance of not missing these chances for cultural engagement.

5. **Challenges:**

Challenges refer to the difficulties and obstacles that hinder the renewal of cultural identity among youth in the digital era. These may include a weakened sense of belonging, erosion of privacy, and the dilution of local cultural elements within globalized digital environments.

1. **An Attempt to Approach the Essence of Cultural Identity**

Attempting to approach the concept of cultural identity does not imply providing a final, universally agreed-upon definition. Rather, it is an effort to understand the complexities of the concept, given the theoretical diversity and variety of scholarly perspectives addressing it. These differences are further amplified by the multidimensional nature of the concept and the numerous political, historical, and economic factors that influence it. As a result, there is no consensus on a single essence or definition of cultural identity; it remains a concept that is, by nature, "difficult to enumerate and define" due to its dynamic and multifaceted characteristics. This complexity, however, also gives the concept its richness and flexibility (Howayda, 2007, p. 89).

The issue of identity and the associated conflicts are among the most contentious topics throughout history, especially given their entanglement with cultural variables over time. In recent decades, global economic, political, cultural, and social transformations—often described as radical—have intensified and deepened debates around identity (Kons, 2007, p. 107).

Identity is always constructed in relation to the "self" versus the "other." It represents the specific and distinct self, or society's consciousness of itself—its sense of unity, similarity, distinction, and difference (Muhammad Talib, 1999, p. 27). Identity is what distinguishes one group from another.

It encompasses qualities, feelings, and lifestyles. Identity is present in everything—clothing, food, music, art, and culture. It also symbolizes freedom, resistance, and resilience. Crucially, it represents a way of life that interacts with surrounding variables without dissolving into them. Hence, identity is a key component of a nation's character (Ahmed Hegazy, 2001, p. 75). It expresses the shared characteristics that distinguish a group, foster pride, and reinforce a sense of belonging. These common traits form a coherent system that:

- Differentiates the group from others.
- Serves as a source of pride and identity for its members (Tawil, 2007, p. 72).

Some scholars have defined identity at three distinct levels (Darwish, 2006, p. 52):

- **The personal level**, which refers to individual traits and experiences unique to each person.
- **The collective level**, which pertains to identities shaped by group membership, such as ethnicity or gender.
- **The universal level**, which refers to the shared human identity grounded in common human traits.

Identity is often linked to culture. Thus, when we speak of "cultural identity," we are essentially referring to the relationship between the "self" and the "other"—or more broadly, between "us" and "them." The ego and self are intertwined with all cultural components in society, and this highlights cultural differences and the boundaries of identity.

One of the earliest definitions of culture comes from the English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), who, in his seminal work *Primitive Culture* (1871), described culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Amin Saeed, 2003, p. 12).

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, culture is regarded as all that contributes to the development and refinement of the soul. Education refines the individual, while culture refines humanity through ideas, beliefs, values, literature, and the arts (Amar, 1999, p. 5).

Bouali (2005, p. 28) defines culture as everything a society produces and carries—both morally and materially—within its interaction with time and place, grounded in foundational values that define a nation's identity.

Culture is also seen as the set of shared activities, values, and goals that form the foundation for communal life among people and nations. This shared heritage, both material and spiritual, becomes ingrained over time in individual and collective memory. It is the cultural legacy that fosters

feelings of belonging, solidarity, and a shared destiny (Al-Khawli, 2002, p. 69).

Amin Saeed describes culture as "the thought that shapes the life of a human community, forming its customs and traditions, determining its values and beliefs, creating its literature, arts, and sciences, and drawing the features of its material life" (p. 12).

From this perspective, **cultural identity** can be defined as the collective cultural values, lifestyle, practices, and characteristics shared by a group, in which individuals recognize themselves and through which they are recognized by others (Abdul Rahman Darwish, p. 52). It serves as the symbolic system through which individuals identify as members of a specific cultural group. It is the essential and enduring core that differentiates one civilization or nation from another, giving the national character its distinctive traits (Hijab, 2004, p. 604).

Cultural identity encompasses both visible and invisible elements:

- The **visible elements** include religion, language, values, and cultural norms.
- The **invisible elements** are reflected in daily behaviors such as speech, thought, walking style, and interpersonal communication (Al-Abed, 2004, pp. 26-27).

2. Algerian Cultural Identity

Algerian society is characterized by a unique cultural identity shaped by rich diversity and a variety of ethnic and racial affiliations. This diversity fosters a dynamic blend and harmony within the framework of national cultural identity. The distinctiveness of Algerian cultural identity is rooted in several core components:

- **The Arabic language**, which serves as the foundational means of transmitting thoughts, emotions, and cultural expressions across generations.
- **Arab-Islamic culture**, which represents a significant historical and spiritual connection between Arab heritage and the Islamic faith (Mahfouz Mustafa, 2006, p. 7).

- **The Islamic religion**, which is both a fundamental component and a cornerstone of the Algerian cultural system.
- **Customs and traditions**, which function as inherited social practices, transmitted from one generation to the next.

While these elements are prominent, they do not encompass the full scope of Algerian cultural identity. In fact, the identity of Algerian society is multidimensional—it is Arab, Islamic, Amazigh (Berber), Mediterranean, African, and global (Azi, 2009, p. 42). These components contribute to a distinctive cultural character that not only reflects national specificity but also transcends geographic boundaries.

This cultural specificity, or "privacy," reflects the unique intimacy between the individual and society, the intrinsic value of intellectual and social production, and the quality of life experienced. Cultural specificity affirms every society's right to be different and to pursue its own cultural trajectory (Boujlal, 2004, p. 206). As Gharbi (1999, p. 42) also notes, Algerian culture manifests a diversity of dimensions that represent deep-rooted affiliations and identities.

These cultural dimensions—whether inherited or acquired, material or spiritual, value-based or life-style-related—play a crucial role in maintaining social and familial cohesion. They shape individual behavior, regulate social and economic relationships, and inform the civilizational and developmental aspirations of the Algerian people, both in the present and for the future (Boujlal, p. 266).

Importantly, cultural specificity does not contradict universality. On the contrary, universality is viewed as the outcome of free and voluntary interaction among distinct civilizations. It represents the shared human essence that unites civilizations while respecting their particularities (Amara, p. 13). In this context, cultural specificity enables openness and mutual understanding, and universality does not erase local uniqueness.

At the individual level, cultural identity becomes a core part of the person's experience. The individ-

ual is the fundamental unit of social interaction, and their attitudes are influenced by two primary factors: the drive to meet immediate needs and the cultural background they inherit through belonging to a specific environment. This background shapes their adaptation to societal norms and adherence to inherited value systems (Gharib, 2004, p. 47). Through this process, individuals come to recognize and internalize their cultural identity, appreciating its distinctiveness and uniqueness.

Thus, cultural identity can be understood as a **clear and positive sense of belonging**, where the individual embraces and values their cultural roots and specificity (Wafra, 2009, p. 37).

4. Traditional Media and the Renewal of Cultural Identity

For scientific accuracy, we cannot disregard the role of traditional media in relation to cultural identity. One of its distinguishing characteristics is its ability to "deliver messages to a wide audience with diverse orientations and educational levels, including individuals unknown to the communicator. The message reaches them simultaneously and with remarkable speed" (Aboufingher, 2010, p. 26).

The process of transmitting messages is fundamental to media practice. Media's core functions—socialization, cultural transmission, advertising, news dissemination, and more—have been recognized by numerous scholars and communication researchers. At its origin, media is not about profit or partisan interests. Rather, it must function within the framework of societal benefit. From the perspective of **social responsibility**, media can only serve its own purpose by contributing to the broader public interest. This understanding reinforces the importance of each phase of the media process—from sender to receiver—where the recipient's needs and desires should be central.

Cultural renewal refers to the modernization and revitalization of the components of cultural identity, preventing stagnation and cultural disconnection among individuals and communities. This concept points to a troubling gap—a diminishing

awareness of and engagement with cultural identity. Various factors have contributed to this, including **the colonial legacy**, which deliberately sought to erase Algerian cultural identity and disrupt practices of cultural transmission and social upbringing. The post-colonial challenge, therefore, is one of reconstruction—both materially and culturally—to **revive and renew** what was lost.

Further exacerbating this challenge is the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies. These advancements have changed media usage patterns, leading to more individualistic consumption of media content. The younger generation, especially adolescents, have grown up amid these transformations without experiencing the earlier stages of media innovation, which has widened the cultural disconnect and created what can be described as a **cultural identity crisis**. This crisis calls for **urgent, coordinated efforts** to address and manage it in ways aligned with the reality of today's communication environment.

Wafra (2009, p. 37) reminds us that:

"Identity is a clear sense of belonging and a positive acceptance of that belonging."

Compounding the issue is **cultural infiltration**. The abundance and speed of modern media have enabled powerful nations, armed with advanced tools and cultural dominance, to influence societies lacking cultural resilience, confidence, and creative autonomy. As Salem (2003, p. 84) points out, these societies often dissolve into the dominant culture. Today, our interaction with reality increasingly occurs through **electronic, symbolic, and semi-material products**—images, numbers, symbols, and signs that travel swiftly through media. These flows erode national and cultural boundaries and weaken ideological and linguistic barriers, undermining the structures that preserve cultural identity (Harb, 2000, p. 172).

This may appear to contradict the argument that media can support cultural identity. However, the emphasis here is on **local media**—including print, radio, and television, both public and private. These platforms must recognize their responsibility toward cultural identity as a matter of public

service. They must contribute to the renewal of cultural identity through thoughtful and targeted programming.

Possible roles of the media in renewing cultural identity include:

- Introducing traditions and customs from various Algerian regions.
- Showcasing Algeria's diverse dialects.
- Highlighting Algerian societal values and cultural distinctiveness.
- Renewing and contextualizing belief systems, distinguishing them from foreign ideologies.
- Clarifying the relationship between Islam and Algerian cultural identity.
- Promoting the Arabic language as a key identity component.
- Presenting Algerian literature, arts, and cultural achievements.
- Facilitating intergenerational cultural transmission.
- Raising awareness of invasive, unethical behaviors rejected by society.
- Performing social monitoring functions.
- Emphasizing cultural identity as a foundation for social cohesion.
- Ensuring cultural heritage is passed down generationally.
- Rebuilding cultural identity in social contexts.
- Guiding and educating about cultural identity elements.
- Shaping public opinion around identity and culture.
- Activating public consciousness when cultural identity is threatened.
- Reaffirming the roles of social institutions in building a generation committed to its identity.

This process should begin with **the younger generations**, through a **comprehensive socialization**

process involving media, families, schools, and other educational institutions. Socialization is an educational process through which values, traditions, and appropriate behaviors are transmitted and reinforced within the group or society (Shaaban, p. 53). Cultural upbringing plays a vital role here. It is fundamentally:

“A social process by which individuals acquire the beliefs, customs, morals, and characteristics of the culture into which they are born—everything that makes them part of their culture and society” (Shaaban, p. 53).

Accordingly, **mass media can play a central role in this cultural upbringing and in the renewal of cultural identity**, as people today are deeply intertwined with media in their daily lives. With the increasing complexity of social life, individuals rely on media to build knowledge about their society, including its cultural identity—a topic that may otherwise become **“forgotten knowledge.”**

Culture is indispensable; it is the environment in which individuals live and which they pass from generation to generation. It includes both visible and invisible patterns of behavior acquired through symbols. The culture of any society comprises its ideology, beliefs, religion, language, arts, values, customs, laws, behaviors, and all other facets of life and human activity (Abdel Kafi, 2004, p. 67).

5. Digital Transformation and the Challenges and Opportunities of Renewing Cultural Identity

Many sectors have undergone a significant shift from traditional approaches to modern methods enabled by technological advancements—hallmarks of this era. These transformations have permeated nearly every aspect of life, affecting individuals, societies, and institutions alike. As a result, digital transformation has taken on various dimensions: economic, social, cultural, and educational.

This transformation was not a matter of choice but rather a necessity, especially after the global health crisis forced the world into lockdown. In response, digital tools and platforms became indis-

pensable, streamlining human activity across many fields.

On a social level, digital transformation has profoundly influenced human interactions, reshaping social behaviors and relationships through the widespread use of social media platforms. It has also contributed to the rise of a new concept: **digital identity**.

Key Opportunities of Digital Transformation for Cultural Identity

1. **Enabling personal content creation** that reflects societal identity and culture through videos, blogs, and other digital formats.
2. **Providing applications** that facilitate learning different languages and exploring diverse cultures.
3. **Creating platforms for minorities** to express and preserve their cultural identity.
4. **Enhancing communication and cultural exchange** between communities with similar cultural backgrounds, thereby strengthening identity.
5. **Archiving and digitizing cultural heritage**, including manuscripts, traditional attire, and other cultural artifacts.
6. **Developing virtual museums**, accessible without the constraints of time, effort, or cost.
7. **Forming digital cultural communities** that engage in discussions and initiatives related to cultural identity.

Challenges of Digital Transformation to Cultural Identity

Despite its opportunities, digital transformation poses several challenges to cultural identity, including:

1. **Language marginalization**, where local or minority languages are overshadowed by dominant global languages, leading to their gradual erosion.
2. **Limited production of compelling digital content** that authentically represents cultural identity in engaging formats.

3. **A widening digital divide**, both within and between societies, resulting in the underrepresentation of local and minority cultures.

4. **Increased and often misguided attachment to foreign cultures**, driven by the dominance of global digital content.

5. **The cultural impact of foreign industrial and media production**, which often promotes superficial and consumerist values.

6. **The difficulty of digitizing certain professions, crafts, and traditional social or religious practices**, which resist adaptation to digital formats due to their inherently physical or experiential nature.

6. Methodological Procedures of the Study

This study adopts a **descriptive research approach**, which aims to describe the phenomenon or problem under investigation by collecting data and understanding reality as it exists. The **survey method** was employed as the primary approach, widely considered suitable for this type of research. It allows for the collection of comprehensive data regarding the phenomenon and supports the implementation of methodologically sound procedures aligned with this research type.

To collect data, a **questionnaire** was used incorporating a **Likert scale** to assess participants' attitudes toward the study's central topic—cultural identity. The scale included a series of statements designed to measure students' perceptions and beliefs related to this theme.

The research population consisted of **university students**, with the questionnaire distributed to a **random sample** of students from **Khemis Miliana University**. The final sample included **297** male and female students from various academic disciplines.

7. Study Results

The study is rooted in the current reality concerning the adoption of new digital tools and technologies. Some of these technologies have reached advanced levels of implementation, while others are still in early stages. Therefore, the selected sample was expected to reflect these characteris-

tics. As such, the study targeted university students using the **random sampling** technique. After distributing the attitude scale to 297 students, the following results were observed:

1. The sample included **146 male students** (49.16%) and **151 female students** (50.84%), indicating an even gender distribution due to the randomness of the sampling process.

2. In terms of academic specialization, **153 students** were enrolled in scientific and technological disciplines, while **144 students** belonged to humanities disciplines.

Awareness of the Elements and Components of Cultural Identity

When asked about the key elements that define an individual's attachment to their cultural identity:

- **261 students (23.99%)** selected "adherence to religion" as the most important element.
- This was followed by **adherence to moral and social values** (17.55%), and **customs and traditions** (16.63%).
- The element of **loyalty and love for one's country and society** came next at 15.80%.

These findings reflect a **high level of awareness** among the student sample regarding the elements of cultural identity. The relatively even distribution of responses across different elements indicates a balanced and well-informed perception of cultural identity among youth. The data suggest that the use of digital technologies has **not significantly diminished their awareness** of cultural identity components.

Degree of Adherence to Cultural Identity

Participants responded to 13 statements related to cultural identity using a **five-point Likert scale**. The results showed:

- **261 participants (87.88%)** strongly agreed with the statement "**It is an honor for me to be a Muslim.**"
- **196 students** strongly agreed with "**I am proud of my language and the dialects of my country.**"

- 186 students expressed strong agreement with **"I am proud of the values and traditions of my country."**

- 60.60% of respondents strongly agreed with **"I boast of my Arab and Algerian identity."**

Conversely, participants strongly **rejected negatively worded statements**:

- 229 students (77.10%) strongly disagreed with the statement **"Islam is not suitable in this era."**

- 109 students strongly disagreed with **"I wish I were not bound by these customs and traditions."**

These responses indicate a **defensive attitude** toward any content or discourse that threatens cultural identity. Despite being exposed to various potentially harmful messages through digital platforms, the sample displayed **strong commitment** to preserving their linguistic, religious, and social values.

Furthermore, respondents expressed a **clear vision** for safeguarding cultural identity, suggesting that **awareness campaigns**, alongside the **active roles of**

families, schools, and other social institutions, are essential in this endeavor.

Conclusion

This study addresses a complex and evolving issue: the renewal of cultural identity in the face of rapid technological change. Cultural identity remains a topic worthy of continued attention, especially given the transformative shifts occurring due to digitalization.

The findings indicate that **cultural identity is resilient**, even amid profound technological developments. The results suggest that young people remain committed to their cultural identity, showing both awareness and resistance to external influences that may undermine it.

Digital transformation presents numerous opportunities to **reinvigorate and preserve cultural identity**, particularly among youth. Far from replacing traditional values, digital platforms can serve as **vehicles for their renewal**, enabling younger generations to reaffirm their connection to cultural identity when they perceive it to be at risk.

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