

# Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of University Students' Experiences of National Identity among Indonesian University Students in the Digital Age: An IPA Approach

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## ABSTRACT

National identity formation has increasingly become crucial in Citizenship Education, particularly amidst rapid digital globalization affecting university students. Existing research often overlooks the subjective dimensions of students' experiences in negotiating identity within digital contexts. How Indonesian university students interpret and balance their national identities against global influences through digital interactions has not been thoroughly examined. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study explored students' subjective experiences, revealing their active engagement and nuanced negotiation processes in reconciling national and global values. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 university students (6 male and 6 female) aged 19–23 years from various academic disciplines at three public universities in Indonesia, and analyzed systematically to identify core experiential themes. Findings demonstrated that students critically select, interpret, and integrate global content, reshaping rather than weakening their national identity. This study enriches the understanding of national identity formation processes, highlighting the importance of subjective experiences in informing future citizenship education strategies and policy developments.



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## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized and digitally connected environment, understanding national identity among younger generations has become increasingly important. Digital globalization presents both opportunities and challenges for preserving and negotiating national values, cultural heritage, and personal identities. University students, who frequently engage with digital platforms, navigate complex intersections between local, national, and global identities. These platforms function simultaneously as spaces for cultural exchange and potential cultural dilution, making it crucial to examine how young individuals experience and interpret identity dynamics (Wijayanti et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2022).

Given the transformative influence of digital media on students' daily lives, culture, and values, their subjective experiences offer essential insights into national identity formation. Understanding how students perceive and respond to these influences is critical for educators, policymakers, and society, as it shapes how future generations preserve and reinterpret national identity in an increasingly globalized world (Pramono & Sari, 2020).

Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore deeply and interpret the lived experiences of these students. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on subjective experience and personal meaning-making, provides a valuable methodological framework for understanding this complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Through phenomenological inquiry, this study seeks to illuminate the nuanced, often hidden dimensions of students' experiences with national identity in digital contexts, thus contributing to both theoretical insights and practical implications for education and identity formation.

Exploring subjective experiences related to national identity among university students has emerged as an essential research area within the discipline of Citizenship Education. Recent studies underscore the complexity involved in capturing how students interpret and reconcile national and global identities amid intense digital interactions (Pramono & Sari, 2020; Wijayanti et al., 2021). Such explorations, however, face significant methodological challenges, especially regarding the limitations inherent in traditional quantitative methods, which are often insufficient for deeply capturing the subjective dimensions of individuals' lived experiences. Quantitative methodologies generally emphasize measurable, generalized data, neglecting the nuanced meanings and contextual depth essential for understanding identity formation processes (Saputra et al., 2022).

These methodological limitations underscore the need for approaches capable of revealing deeper subjective insights. Phenomenology, particularly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), has proven effective in addressing this gap by enabling researchers to explore and interpret the personal experiences and meanings individuals attribute to complex social phenomena. This qualitative approach facilitates comprehensive insights into how university students individually negotiate, interpret, and internalize their sense of national identity in an increasingly digitalized global environment. Nonetheless, phenomenological studies specifically addressing this intersection of digital globalization and national identity within the Indonesian university context remain sparse, highlighting the necessity and timeliness of this investigation.

Commonly, research on national identity within the context of digital globalization tends to rely heavily on conventional educational frameworks or quantitative assessments, emphasizing measurable outcomes such as attitudes, knowledge acquisition, or behavioral changes (Wijayanti et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2022). While these practical approaches are beneficial in identifying general trends or surface-level impacts, they inherently possess limitations, particularly their inability to delve deeply into the subjective dimensions and nuanced meanings individuals attribute to their experiences (Pramono & Sari, 2020). Consequently, such methods provide only partial insights and neglect the rich, contextual understanding required to fully grasp how university students navigate their national identities amid intense digital interactions.

To address these limitations, an alternative approach employing phenomenological methods becomes necessary. Phenomenology, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), provides a suitable methodological framework capable of capturing the deep-seated, subjective experiences and meanings individuals attach to complex phenomena. By adopting IPA, researchers can comprehensively explore how students experience and interpret the interplay between their national identity and the pervasive influences of digital globalization. Despite this potential, very few studies have explicitly employed phenomenological methods to investigate the lived experiences of Indonesian university students regarding their evolving sense of national identity in the digital era, highlighting a critical gap this research aims to bridge.

Previous studies on national identity among university students often focus on measurable outcomes, such as attitude changes or general knowledge about citizenship. Some researchers have highlighted the growing influence of digital globalization on young people's national identity but rarely explored deeply into the subjective meanings students assign to these experiences (Pramono & Sari, 2020; Wijayanti et al., 2021). Theories underlying national identity emphasize the critical role of individual perceptions and interpretations, yet empirical research capturing personal, lived experiences remains sparse. Methodologically, previous research typically employs quantitative surveys or superficial qualitative methods, limiting comprehensive understanding. Therefore, literature reveals a significant gap in grasping the essence of how students reconcile national and global identities in the digital age.

This research addresses the above limitation by utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to uncover the nuanced experiences of Indonesian university students regarding their national identity in the digital context. IPA was selected specifically due to its strength in capturing personal interpretations and meanings that students attribute to their lived experiences. Through this methodological choice, the study effectively answers the identified research gap, offering deeper insights into students' subjective experiences and interpretations. The phenomenological approach

enables a holistic and comprehensive exploration of the essential meanings students assign to their national identity amidst digital globalization. Consequently, this study contributes uniquely by emphasizing previously underexplored subjective dimensions.

Structurally, this article first introduces the phenomenon of national identity in the context of digital globalization among Indonesian university students. The subsequent section presents specific contextual issues, emphasizing why understanding subjective experience is essential. Next, the article clearly describes the methodological steps used, highlighting the choice and application of phenomenological approaches such as IPA. Data collection processes, involving in-depth interviews designed to capture rich personal narratives, are then thoroughly explained. Finally, the article discusses detailed analytical steps, presents the core findings through identified themes, and provides a meaningful conclusion about the phenomenon explored.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

A phenomenological approach was applied as the research design to explore deeply and systematically the subjective experiences of university students regarding the dynamics of their national identity within the context of digital globalization. Phenomenology is particularly suited to understanding how individuals interpret their lived experiences, making it ideal for uncovering the nuanced perceptions and meanings participants associate with their interactions in digital spaces. Specifically, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed, emphasizing interpretation and context, enabling detailed exploration of how students perceive, understand, and interpret their national identity in a digital global context.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of twenty university students selected through purposive sampling to ensure rich, relevant, and varied experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. Inclusion criteria included being enrolled in higher education institutions in Indonesia, aged between 18 to 25 years, actively engaged in digital platforms, and having explicit experiences related to navigating their national identity in the digital environment. Exclusion criteria involved students who did not regularly interact within digital spaces or who lacked meaningful reflective experiences related to national identity. The participants comprised 11 females and 9 males, with an average age of 21 years.

The decision to include 20 participants was based on the principle of information power and thematic saturation, where the sample size was sufficient to yield rich, in-depth data without redundancy. This number aligns with IPA's methodological emphasis on quality over quantity, allowing detailed idiographic analysis while accommodating diversity in digital engagement and identity negotiation experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed specifically to facilitate rich discussions and detailed reflections on personal experiences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet, private settings, each lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was developed and utilized, covering key aspects such as experiences, perceptions, and personal reflections regarding the influence of digital globalization on national identity. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and checked for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Initially, interview transcripts were thoroughly read multiple times to ensure an in-depth understanding of the data. Significant statements and quotations were identified, noted, and coded systematically. Themes were subsequently generated by grouping similar codes into broader categories, allowing identification of overarching thematic elements. This iterative analytic process was supported by the use of NVivo software, which was selected for its compatibility with IPA due to its robust capacity for organizing

large volumes of qualitative data, facilitating transparent coding trails, and enabling detailed annotation and thematic clustering. The final step involved interpretative synthesis, producing an essential structural understanding of students' experiences related to the phenomenon.

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee prior to conducting the study. Participants provided written informed consent before participation, ensuring voluntary involvement, confidentiality, and anonymity of data. Ethical procedures adhered strictly to both local and international ethical standards for qualitative research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Navigating National Identity in the Digital Sphere**

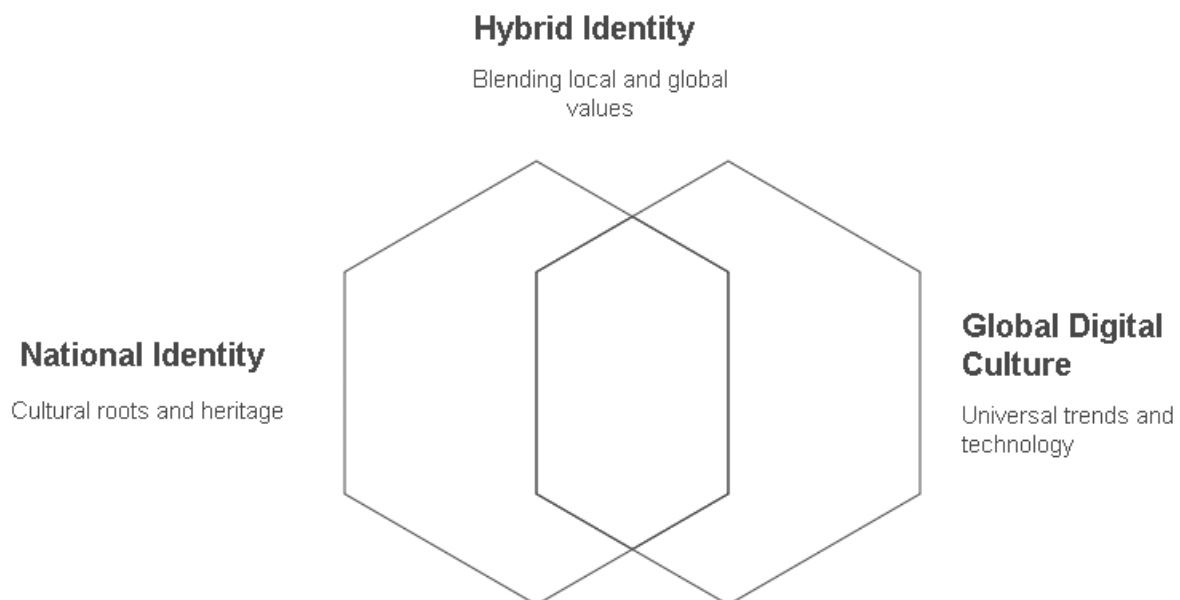
Participants vividly described the complexity of maintaining their national identity amidst pervasive global digital influences. Many students expressed experiencing internal conflicts between preserving traditional national values and embracing global culture facilitated by digital technology. One student shared:

"I find myself constantly balancing between my Indonesian identity and the global digital culture. Sometimes I feel proud sharing my national heritage online, but at other moments, I feel I need to adapt to global trends to remain relevant" (Participant 4).

Another participant highlighted the struggle between local and global identities:

"It's challenging to hold on to our cultural roots when everything digital pushes us towards a universal culture. But I think it's important to consciously reflect on what makes us uniquely Indonesian" (Participant 7).

### **Navigating Identity in the Digital Age**



### **Digital Platforms as a Catalyst for Identity Exploration**

The digital environment emerged prominently as a space that enabled students to explore, redefine, and express their national identity. Students articulated that social media provided opportunities to actively participate in cultural dialogue and learn about diverse perspectives, fostering a deeper reflection on their identity. As one participant noted:

"Social media platforms allowed me to see and understand my national identity differently. Seeing others share their culture made me want to embrace mine more openly, making me feel connected yet distinct in the global community" (Participant 12).

Similarly, another participant mentioned the interactive role of digital spaces:

"Online interactions have shown me the value of my cultural background. Digital forums, blogs, and conversations encouraged me to express my identity more confidently" (Participant 15).

### **Challenges of Digital Globalization on National Values**

Participants underscored that digital globalization posed significant challenges to preserving national values, often resulting in feelings of cultural dilution. Many expressed concerns about losing distinctive national practices due to overwhelming exposure to global cultures:

"I worry that younger generations may slowly lose touch with our core national values because global trends on digital platforms seem more appealing and dominant" (Participant 20).

A similar apprehension was shared by another student:

"Global digital culture sometimes overshadows local practices, and it's becoming harder for us to differentiate and prioritize our cultural values" (Participant 9).

Overall, these findings illustrate the nuanced experiences of university students as they navigate the intersection between national identity and digital globalization. Participants consistently highlighted the digital environment's dual role as both an enabler and a challenge, shaping their ongoing exploration and negotiation of identity in contemporary Indonesia.

This study revealed that Indonesian university students experience complex tensions between maintaining national identity and adapting to global values through digital interactions. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, the research identified students' continuous negotiation processes and their nuanced understanding of national identity amid digital globalization.

The research findings significantly address the central question raised in the Introduction, namely, how students experience and interpret their national identity within the context of digital globalization. Uniquely, this study demonstrates that the students do not merely absorb global values passively; rather, they actively engage in a reflective, interpretative process, selectively integrating global perspectives with national values. The core contribution of this study lies in uncovering the dynamic processes students undertake in balancing and negotiating their identities, highlighting the subjective depth often overlooked in previous quantitative studies. Moreover, this research expands existing understandings by illustrating how digital globalization does not simply diminish national identity but instead prompts students to redefine and reaffirm their sense of nationality through critical engagement with global cultural content.

The current findings align with previous research emphasizing the transformative impact of digital globalization on identity construction among youth, as discussed by Wijayanti et al. (2021). However, contrary to earlier studies that suggest globalization primarily erodes national identities (Pramono & Sari, 2020), this research highlights students' active reinterpretation and reinforcement of national values as a response to global influences. This distinction underscores the role of subjective agency in identity construction processes, complementing theoretical assertions by Saputra et al. (2022), who propose that digital spaces serve not just as channels for global influence but also as sites of identity negotiation and reaffirmation. Thus, this study not only supports but extends existing literature by providing richer, context-specific insights into how digital experiences facilitate the reconstruction and deeper internalization of national identity among Indonesian university students.

The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into educational practice, specifically within the context of citizenship education programs at Indonesian universities. By highlighting how students actively negotiate their national identity within digital environments, educators and policymakers can develop curricula that reflect and accommodate these complex processes. Furthermore, this phenomenological exploration underscores the importance of fostering critical media literacy among students, empowering them to constructively integrate global and local identities. On a

broader social and cultural level, these findings emphasize the potential of digital spaces to strengthen rather than erode national cohesion when individuals engage actively and critically with global influences. Thus, educators, scholars, and policymakers are encouraged to acknowledge students' subjective experiences to effectively nurture resilient national identities in a digitally interconnected world.

Despite its valuable insights, this research is not without limitations. The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis inherently limits the scope of generalization, given its focus on deep exploration of individual subjective experiences rather than generating widely applicable findings. Additionally, the relatively small sample size drawn from a limited number of universities means that the experiences reported here may not reflect the broader population of Indonesian university students. Moreover, cultural and regional diversity within Indonesia could influence identity negotiation differently, suggesting that future studies should encompass varied geographic and cultural contexts. Acknowledging these limitations invites further research to validate, deepen, and extend the understanding generated by this study.

Future research can expand the present study by examining the experiences of students across diverse Indonesian regions to capture broader variations in identity negotiation processes. Comparative studies involving international contexts could further enrich understandings of how different cultural settings shape students' national identity construction in the digital age. Additionally, future investigations might integrate longitudinal approaches to explore changes and developments in students' identity negotiations over time. Such expansions would significantly enhance scholarly understanding of identity formation processes under continuous global digital transformations, offering both theoretical and practical contributions. Ultimately, these potential studies can inform more inclusive and contextually responsive educational strategies and policies to support students navigating identity tensions in increasingly interconnected environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined how Indonesian university students negotiate their national identity in the context of digital globalization using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings revealed that students actively construct and reconcile national and global values, highlighting a dynamic process rather than passive absorption of global influences. By foregrounding students' lived experiences, this study offers a qualitative complement to prior research that predominantly relied on quantitative approaches. It contributes to both theoretical discourse and practical strategies in citizenship education. Future research could explore how identity negotiation unfolds across different educational levels or cultural settings, using methodologies such as longitudinal tracking or cross-cultural comparative studies. These approaches would provide deeper insight into the evolving nature of national identity in increasingly global and digital environments.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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