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INTERNET CULTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUTH IDENTITY, SOCIAL VALUES, AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of internet technologies has significantly transformed the cultural, social, and personal experiences of young people. Internet culture, including social media platforms, online communities, digital entertainment, influencers, and virtual communication, has become an important part of youth identity formation and everyday lifestyle practices. Young people increasingly use digital platforms to express their personalities, explore cultural interests, develop relationships, exchange information, and participate in global discussions. These online experiences influence their attitudes, beliefs, social values, fashion preferences, communication styles, educational interests, and consumer behavior. This study examines the impact of internet culture on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices, with particular attention to the positive and negative consequences of digital participation. It explores how online interactions contribute to self-expression, cultural awareness, social belonging, and individual development while also considering challenges such as social comparison, unrealistic lifestyle expectations, peer pressure, consumerism, and cultural identity confusion. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary academic literature published during 2025 and 2026. The reviewed literature is analyzed thematically to identify important patterns in youth digital experiences and cultural transformation. The findings suggest that internet culture provides young people with opportunities to develop identities, access diverse perspectives, and participate in global communities. However, excessive exposure to idealized online lifestyles and socially influential digital content may also affect personal values, self-perception, and everyday decisions. The study emphasizes the importance of digital literacy, responsible internet use, cultural awareness, and family and educational guidance in promoting healthy youth development within contemporary digital environments.

KEYWORDS:*Internet Culture, Youth Identity, Social Values, Lifestyle Choices, Digital Identity, Social Media, Online Communities, Youth Culture, Digital Communication, Cultural Transformation, Generation Z, Online Behavior, Digital Globalization, Peer Influence, Influencer Culture, Consumer Behavior, Cultural Identity, Digital Literacy, Social Interaction, and Internet Society.*

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become one of the most influential forces shaping contemporary society, particularly in the lives of young people. The widespread availability of smartphones, social networking platforms, digital communication technologies, and online entertainment has transformed how younger generations communicate, learn, develop relationships, and understand the world around them. Internet culture refers to the behaviors, values, communication patterns, social practices, trends, and cultural expressions that emerge through continuous interaction with digital technologies and online communities. It includes social media participation, online gaming, digital entertainment, internet trends, influencers, virtual communities, and the exchange of information across different cultural environments. Young people are among the most active participants in these digital spaces because the internet provides opportunities for self-expression, entertainment, education, social connection, and cultural exploration. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and other digital networks have become important environments where young individuals communicate their opinions, present their identities, follow social trends, and develop personal interests. These platforms expose users to different cultural lifestyles, fashion preferences, languages, traditions, social movements, and international perspectives.

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Consequently, internet culture has become closely connected with the development of youth identity and the transformation of social values.Youth identity is a complex process through which individuals develop an understanding of their personalities, beliefs, cultural backgrounds, social responsibilities, and positions within society.

During adolescence and young adulthood, individuals explore different interests, establish relationships, develop personal values, and make decisions that influence their future lifestyles. Internet culture provides additional opportunities for this process by allowing young people to interact with diverse communities, express their creativity, discover new ideas, and explore different forms of social participation. However, online environments also introduce new pressures related to appearance, popularity, social comparison, consumerism, and the desire for social acceptance. Young users may compare their personal achievements, physical appearance, financial conditions, and lifestyles with the carefully presented experiences of influencers and other online personalities. Such comparisons can influence self-confidence, personal satisfaction, and perceptions of success. Furthermore, repeated exposure to particular online trends may influence attitudes toward family relationships, education, cultural traditions, fashion, entertainment, and social responsibilities. Avci et al. (2025) explain that different forms of social media engagement are associated with identity exploration, self-concept clarity, and identity distress among adolescents. This demonstrates that the nature of online participation is important for understanding how digital environments relate to youth identity development.Internet culture also plays an important role in changing social values and lifestyle choices. Young people increasingly encounter global ideas about independence, personal freedom, equality, professional success, relationships, fashion, and consumer behavior through digital platforms. These interactions may encourage positive developments, including cultural awareness, tolerance, creativity, educational motivation, and participation in social causes.

4. Research Objective

1. To examine the impact of internet culture on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices, particularly regarding digital self-expression, cultural awareness, social interaction, and changing behavioral patterns.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does internet culture influence youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices in contemporary digital society?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet culture has become an important component of modern youth society, transforming how young people communicate, exchange information, develop relationships, and participate in cultural activities. Digital platforms have created spaces where individuals can express opinions, share experiences, discover new interests, and connect with people from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. Unlike traditional forms of communication, internet-based interaction allows young people to participate in multiple communities and cultural environments simultaneously. Social networking platforms, video-sharing

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applications, online discussion groups, and digital entertainment services have introduced new patterns of communication and social participation. These developments have influenced the ways young people understand their surroundings and establish relationships with others.Varadi (2025), in the study TikTok Isn't a Hobby, examines how contemporary Canadian high-school-aged youth use social media for social connection, identity expression, and leisure. The study emphasizes that social media is integrated into everyday youth experiences rather than functioning merely as an occasional entertainment activity. Young people use digital platforms to maintain friendships, discover interests, communicate cultural preferences, and participate in shared activities. This demonstrates that internet culture is closely connected with everyday social life. Similarly, Huma et al. (2026) investigate how social media features, peer interaction, and algorithmic content curation contribute to youth cultural identity. Their research highlights the importance of examining digital platforms as environments where identity and cultural meanings are continuously negotiated.Internet culture also contributes to the development of shared youth experiences. Viral challenges, online discussions, digital entertainment, music trends, and popular influencers create common cultural references among young users.

These experiences can strengthen social belonging by allowing individuals to participate in conversations and activities that are meaningful to their peer groups. However, the increasing influence of online environments may also create differences between young people who have access to digital technologies and those who experience limited connectivity or digital resources. Therefore, internet culture should be understood as a broad social phenomenon that influences communication, participation, cultural expression, and opportunities among younger generations.Identity formation is one of the most important developmental processes during adolescence and young adulthood. It involves discovering personal interests, developing beliefs, understanding cultural backgrounds, and establishing a sense of individuality. Internet culture provides additional spaces for this process because young people can experiment with different forms of self-expression and receive feedback from online communities. Through profile creation, photographs, videos, comments, online discussions, and shared interests, individuals develop digital representations of themselves. These representations may reflect their actual personalities, desired identities, cultural backgrounds, or aspirations.

Avci et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review of social media use and adolescent identity development. Their review included 32 studies involving 19,658 adolescents. The authors found that active participation in social media was associated with greater identity exploration, while authentic self-presentation was associated with higher self-concept clarity. They also identified relationships between social comparison and identity distress. These findings demonstrate that the quality and nature of online participation may be more important than simply measuring the amount of time spent online.Kühn and Riesmeyer (2025) examined adolescents' self-presentation practices on Snapchat through the use of Bitmojis. Their study, based on 53 interviews with adolescents aged 11–16, explored how young users represent themselves through digital avatars and how personal and social norms influence these representations. This research demonstrates that even virtual characters can become meaningful forms of identity expression. Similarly, Laffier and Westley (2025) discuss digital identity congruence and the importance of maintaining consistency between online self-presentation and an individual's authentic identity. They explain that differences

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between online and offline identities may create emotional and psychological challenges. Together, these studies suggest that internet culture provides opportunities for identity exploration but also introduces pressures associated with idealized self-presentation and social acceptance.

Social values refer to the beliefs and principles that influence how individuals understand relationships, responsibilities, social behavior, cultural expectations, and acceptable conduct. Internet culture has created new opportunities for young people to encounter different value systems and social perspectives. Through digital communication, users can participate in discussions about education, equality, human rights, environmental protection, cultural diversity, professional development, and social responsibility. These interactions may encourage critical thinking and greater awareness of social issues.Mann (2026) examines how young people engage with social media for news, political information, and identity formation. The study uses interviews and think-aloud data to explore how adolescents understand digital platforms as sources of information and spaces for negotiating identity. It demonstrates the importance of online information environments in shaping how young people interpret social and political issues.Uysal et al. (2026) investigate the relationship between social media adoption and changes in societal value orientations, particularly achievement and conformity. Their research uses a comparative difference-in-differences approach and reports an increase in these value orientations in countries with higher social media adoption relative to culturally similar comparison countries. This study suggests that social media may have implications beyond individual entertainment and communication, potentially influencing broader social values.However, internet culture does not influence all young people in the same way. Individual experiences depend on family backgrounds, educational environments, cultural traditions, peer relationships, and personal beliefs. Some young people use digital platforms to strengthen their existing values, while others use them to explore alternative perspectives. Consequently, internet culture should be examined as an environment in which social values are discussed, challenged, reinforced, and sometimes transformed.Digital globalization has increased the circulation of cultural ideas, entertainment, fashion, language, and social practices across national boundaries. Through internet platforms, young people can access international music, films, educational materials, fashion trends, and discussions about different cultural traditions. These interactions provide opportunities for cultural learning and intercultural communication.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate the impact of internet culture on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on understanding social experiences, cultural changes, personal attitudes, and behavioral patterns associated with digital participation. The study is based on secondary data collected from academic journal articles, systematic literature reviews, research publications, and scholarly studies published during 2025 and 2026. The selected literature addresses different dimensions of internet culture, including social media participation, digital identity, cultural globalization, peer influence, influencer culture, consumer behavior, communication patterns, and lifestyle development. Particular attention is given to studies examining how online interactions influence young people's perceptions of themselves, their relationships with others, and their understanding of cultural

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and social expectations. The collected information is examined through thematic analysis to identify common findings, emerging patterns, and differences in existing research. The methodology also considers the positive and negative dimensions of internet culture, including opportunities for self-expression, education, cultural awareness, and social participation, alongside challenges involving social comparison, conformity, consumerism, and cultural identity confusion. Academic relevance, publication dates, research quality, and the relationship of each source to the research question are considered during the selection and interpretation of the literature.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory research design based on a structured review of secondary academic literature. The descriptive component explains the major characteristics of internet culture and its relationship with contemporary youth experiences. The exploratory component investigates how digital environments influence identity formation, social values, cultural participation, and everyday lifestyle decisions. The research design is organized around the central research question concerning the impact of internet culture on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices. Academic studies published in 2025 and 2026 are examined to identify important developments in digital communication and youth culture. The selected literature is organized into three major analytical dimensions: identity development, social values, and lifestyle choices. Additional themes, including digital globalization, peer influence, social conformity, consumer behavior, and digital literacy, are considered to understand the relationships between these dimensions. The study compares findings from different research contexts to identify common conclusions and variations across cultural environments. Particular attention is given to research involving adolescents, university students, and Generation Z. The design also recognizes that online behavior is influenced by several factors, including family background, educational opportunities, cultural traditions, economic conditions, and individual preferences. Rather than assuming that internet culture determines young people's decisions, the research considers the interaction between digital influences and personal agency.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected secondary literature is analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis. Initially, relevant academic publications are reviewed to identify information related to internet culture, youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices. The selected information is then classified into major themes according to its relevance to the research question. The first theme focuses on digital identity and examines how young people use online platforms for self-expression, personal presentation, and identity exploration. The second theme addresses social values and investigates how internet culture influences attitudes toward cultural traditions, relationships, social responsibilities, and individual beliefs. The third theme explores lifestyle choices, including fashion, entertainment, consumer behavior, physical appearance, leisure activities, and personal preferences. The fourth theme examines digital globalization and the relationship between international cultural influences and local traditions. The fifth theme focuses on peer influence, social conformity, and online social relationships. Finally, the sixth theme considers digital literacy and responsible internet use as important factors in understanding the opportunities and challenges of digital

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participation.The findings of individual studies are compared to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns. For example, Avci et al. (2025) provide evidence concerning the relationship between social media engagement and adolescent identity development, while Hafeez (2026) examines the relationship between digital globalization and Pakistani cultural identity. Similarly, research by Fortunato et al. (2026) and Zhou et al. (2026) provides insight into the relationship between social media content, body image, and lifestyle-related behavior. These findings are interpreted within the broader framework of internet culture and youth development. The analysis distinguishes between established empirical findings and broader interpretations drawn from the literature. This process provides an integrated understanding of how digital participation may influence identity, values, and lifestyle decisions while recognizing differences in individual experiences and cultural environments.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature identifies several important findings concerning the impact of internet culture on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices.First, internet culture plays an important role in youth identity development. Digital platforms provide opportunities for self-expression, identity exploration, and social participation. Young people use online profiles, photographs, videos, and digital communities to communicate their interests and personalities. Avci et al. (2025) demonstrate that the quality of social media engagement is associated with different dimensions of adolescent identity development.Second, internet culture contributes to changing social values and attitudes. Young people encounter different cultural perspectives, social movements, and international ideas through digital communication. These experiences may encourage awareness, tolerance, independence, and participation in social issues. However, they may also create tensions between traditional values and emerging digital expectations.Third, global digital culture influences local cultural identities. Research by Hafeez (2026) highlights how Pakistani university students experience digital globalization while maintaining connections with traditional cultural practices. This indicates that young people frequently negotiate between global influences and local identities.Fourth, internet culture influences lifestyle preferences and consumer behavior. Influencers, online advertisements, fashion trends, and digital entertainment can affect young people's purchasing decisions, appearance preferences, and leisure activities. Repeated exposure to idealized lifestyles may encourage unrealistic expectations and unnecessary consumption.Fifth, online peer relationships influence social belonging and conformity. Digital communities provide opportunities for friendship, communication, and emotional support. However, visible popularity indicators and social comparison may also encourage young people to follow trends and seek social approval.Sixth, internet culture influences self-image and body perception. Appearance-related content, beauty filters, and idealized photographs may influence how young people evaluate their physical appearance.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that internet culture has become a significant influence on youth identity, social values, and lifestyle choices in contemporary society. The expansion of social media platforms, online communities, digital entertainment, and global communication has

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transformed how young people understand themselves, interact with others, and participate in cultural activities. Internet culture provides valuable opportunities for self-expression, education, creativity, cultural exchange, and social connection. Through digital platforms, young individuals can explore different identities, develop interests, discover professional opportunities, and engage with diverse cultural perspectives. However, the increasing influence of online environments also creates challenges involving social comparison, peer pressure, consumerism, unrealistic lifestyle expectations, and cultural identity confusion. The reviewed literature suggests that digital participation may influence personal values and lifestyle preferences, but its effects vary according to individual choices, cultural backgrounds, family environments, and educational experiences. Therefore, internet culture should not be considered entirely beneficial or harmful; rather, its influence depends on how young people engage with digital content and interpret their online experiences. Families, educational institutions, policymakers, and digital platforms should work together to promote responsible internet use, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Young people should be encouraged to benefit from global digital opportunities while maintaining meaningful connections with their cultural traditions, personal beliefs, and social responsibilities. Future research should investigate these relationships through empirical studies involving university students and young people from different cultural and geographical backgrounds. Ultimately, a balanced relationship between digital participation and cultural identity is essential for supporting confident, responsible, and socially aware young generations.

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