



From Fixed Identity to Negotiated Identity: Cultural Transformation in Globalizing Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the transformation of cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam under conditions of globalization, migration, urbanization, digital communication, and transnational cultural interaction. Drawing upon interdisciplinary perspectives from cultural anthropology, globalization studies, cultural studies, and sociology of identity, the study argues that cultural identity in Vietnam is increasingly shifting from a fixed and territorially bounded form toward a negotiated and dynamic process shaped by interaction between local traditions and global cultural flows. Using qualitative document analysis and theoretical synthesis, the article explores how labor migration, urbanization, transnational media, social media platforms, and market integration reshape social relations, community structures, and symbolic practices in Vietnamese society. The findings indicate that globalization does not lead to complete cultural homogenization or the disappearance of local identities. Instead, Vietnamese communities actively reinterpret and localize global influences through selective adaptation, cultural hybridization, and symbolic negotiation. The study further demonstrates that contemporary identities in Vietnam increasingly reflect multidimensional forms of belonging associated with mobility, digital participation, and translocal interaction. By emphasizing the negotiated and context-dependent character of identity, the article contributes to broader debates on globalization, hybridity, and cultural transformation in rapidly changing societies.

KEYWORDS: Cultural identity, Cultural transformation, Globalization, Negotiated identity, Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Context

Since the implementation of the Đổi Mới (Renovation) reforms in 1986, Vietnam has undergone profound economic, social, and cultural transformation associated with globalization, market integration, urbanization, and transnational connectivity. The transition from a centrally planned economy toward a socialist-oriented market economy accelerated Vietnam's participation in global economic systems, labor mobility, digital communication, and international cultural exchange (Appadurai, 1996; Robertson, 1995). As globalization expanded beyond economic restructuring, it increasingly reshaped social interaction, cultural practices, and perceptions of identity throughout Vietnamese society.

The integration of Vietnam into global networks has intensified transnational cultural flows through migration, tourism, digital media, and online communication. Contemporary globalization operates not only through economic exchange but also through the circulation of images, lifestyles, symbolic practices, and mediated cultural experiences across national boundaries (Hannerz, 1996; Vertovec, 2009). The rapid expansion of internet infrastructure and social media platforms has significantly transformed communication practices and cultural consumption in Vietnam. According to Data Reportal (2023, 2024), digital participation and social media usage have become deeply embedded in everyday social life, particularly among younger generations living in urban and semi-urban areas.

These transformations have contributed to substantial changes in community structures, family relations, and forms of social belonging. Rural-to-urban migration and labor mobility increasingly connect local communities to broader transnational social fields (Coxhead et al., 2015; Cu, 2005). Migration no longer represents merely demographic movement but also generates new forms of cultural interaction and identity negotiation shaped by mobility, communication technologies, and market integration (Levitt, 2001;

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Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). At the same time, urbanization and industrial expansion have weakened the relative isolation of traditional communities and intensified exposure to global consumer culture and digital lifestyles.

The influence of globalization is particularly visible among urban youth and ethnic minority communities. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram increasingly function as spaces where identities are represented, negotiated, and reconstructed through online interaction and symbolic consumption (Boyd, 2014; Miller, 2011). Digital communication encourages new forms of self-expression shaped by transnational media environments, online communities, and global entertainment industries. Vietnamese youth increasingly participate in hybrid cultural practices influenced by Korean popular culture, global fashion trends, and digital aesthetics while simultaneously maintaining attachment to local cultural values and family expectations (Zhao et al., 2022).

Similarly, ethnic minority communities in upland Vietnam have experienced significant transformation under the influence of migration, tourism, market integration, and state-led modernization. Research on the Central Highlands demonstrates that traditional communal structures and cultural practices are increasingly reshaped through interaction with external economic and cultural systems (Michaud, 2012; Saleminck, 2003). Tourism development, labor mobility, and digital communication have altered ritual organization, livelihood systems, and community authority structures while simultaneously encouraging selective forms of cultural preservation and ethnic representation (Nguyen et al., 2023; Tran, 2025). These transformations illustrate how globalization contributes not to the disappearance of local identities but to their reinterpretation within changing social contexts.

The growing influence of transnational media and digital communication has also accelerated the emergence of hybrid and negotiated forms of identity in Vietnam. Contemporary Vietnamese society increasingly reflects interaction between local traditions and global symbolic systems rather than isolated or territorially bounded cultural structures. Traditional social values continue to coexist with individualized lifestyles, consumer culture, and digitally mediated forms of belonging. Communities are increasingly connected through migration networks, online interaction, and transnational communication rather than solely through localized social organization (Basch et al., 1994; Madianou & Miller, 2012).

Consequently, globalization in Vietnam should be understood not only as economic modernization but also as a broader process of cultural reorientation. It reshapes how individuals and communities construct identity, experience belonging, and negotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity within rapidly changing social environments. These developments challenge earlier assumptions that identity is stable, territorially fixed, and culturally homogeneous, suggesting instead that identity in contemporary Vietnam is increasingly fluid, multidimensional, and socially negotiated (Hall, 1990, 1996; Bhabha, 1994).

1.2. Research Problem

Traditional approaches to cultural identity often conceptualize identity as stable, territorially rooted, and closely associated with community traditions, kinship structures, ethnicity, and collective memory. Earlier understandings of Vietnamese society similarly emphasized the coherence of village-based social organization and the continuity of communal cultural practices grounded in locality and customary institutions (Anderson, 1983; Luong, 2010). Within this perspective, identity was generally understood as a relatively enduring cultural condition tied to stable social environments and territorially bounded communities.

However, globalization has increasingly complicated these assumptions. The expansion of migration, digital communication, transnational media, and global consumer culture has intensified interaction between diverse cultural systems and weakened rigid boundaries separating local communities from broader global influences (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996). Contemporary identities are increasingly shaped not only by local traditions but also by labor mobility, online interaction, digital participation, and mediated cultural experience. As Hall (1992, 1996) argued, identity should therefore be understood less as a fixed essence and more as an ongoing process of cultural positioning and social negotiation.

In Vietnam, these transformations are particularly visible among urban youth, migrant populations, and ethnic minority communities. Youth culture increasingly reflects globalized forms of self-expression shaped by social media, digital entertainment, and transnational aesthetics (Boyd, 2014; Miller, 2011). Migrant populations often develop translocal forms of belonging that connect rural hometowns with urban and digital social environments (Levitt, 2001; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Similarly, ethnic minority groups increasingly negotiate identity through interaction with tourism, migration, education, and digital communication while selectively preserving local traditions (Michaud, 2012; Saleminck, 2003).

Under these conditions, identity becomes increasingly fluid, hybrid, and context-dependent. Processes of urbanization, digital connectivity, and cultural circulation generate hybrid cultural forms combining local and transnational influences (Bhabha, 1994; Robertson, 1995). Rather than passively receiving globalization, individuals and communities actively reinterpret cultural meanings within changing social environments. Consequently, cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam can no longer be adequately explained through static or essentialist models but must instead be understood as relational, negotiated, and continuously reconstructed through interaction and mobility.

1.3. Research Gap

Although globalization has become an important topic within Vietnamese social science research, much existing scholarship primarily focuses on economic integration, industrialization, migration policy, and development processes. Studies on cultural

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transformation often examine media consumption, urban lifestyles, or youth culture in descriptive terms while paying less attention to identity as a dynamic process of negotiation and reconstruction.

Furthermore, many studies continue to treat identity as relatively stable and territorially bounded, even when discussing modernization and social change. Research frequently analyzes migration, digital communication, ethnic transformation, and globalization as separate phenomena rather than examining their interconnected influence on identity formation. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to how globalization reshapes cultural identity through transnational media circulation, online interaction, mobility, and hybrid forms of belonging (Vertovec, 2009; Basch et al., 1994).

This limitation is particularly evident in studies of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. Existing research has largely concentrated on poverty reduction, livelihood transformation, tourism development, and cultural preservation. While these studies provide important insights into social change, fewer have explored how globalization produces negotiated identities, translocal social relations, and hybrid cultural practices among ethnic minority populations (Nguyen et al., 2023; Tran, 2025). Similarly, research on digital culture in Vietnam often focuses on communication technology itself rather than its broader implications for identity reconstruction and symbolic belonging.

Another important limitation concerns the relative lack of interdisciplinary engagement between globalization studies, anthropology, migration studies, and digital culture research in the Vietnamese context. Theoretical discussions of identity negotiation developed by Hall (1990, 1996) and Bhabha (1994) remain underutilized in analyses of contemporary Vietnamese cultural transformation. Likewise, transnational and digital approaches emphasizing mobility, online interaction, and mediated belonging have not yet been fully integrated into discussions of identity in Vietnam (Marcus, 1995; Pink et al., 2016).

This article addresses these gaps by approaching cultural identity not as a fixed cultural attribute but as a negotiated and continuously reconstructed social process. It examines how globalization reshapes identity formation through the interconnected dynamics of migration, urbanization, digital communication, transnational media, and cultural interaction in contemporary Vietnam.

1.4. Research Objectives and Central Argument

The primary objective of this article is to analyze the transformation from “fixed identity” toward “negotiated identity” in contemporary Vietnam under conditions of globalization. More specifically, the study examines how migration, digital communication, transnational media, and market integration reshape cultural belonging and identity formation across different social groups and communities.

The article argues that globalization does not erase cultural identity in Vietnam. Instead, globalization intensifies processes of cultural negotiation, hybridization, and symbolic reconstruction within rapidly changing social environments. Contemporary Vietnamese identities increasingly emerge through interaction between local traditions and global cultural flows rather than through isolated or territorially bounded cultural systems (Appadurai, 1996; Hall, 1990).

Rather than disappearing under globalization, local identities are selectively adapted, reinterpreted, and continuously renegotiated. Urban youth combine global digital culture with local social values, migrant communities develop translocal forms of belonging, and ethnic minority groups strategically preserve cultural traditions while adapting to tourism, migration, and digital communication (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Salemin & Nguyen, 2019). These developments demonstrate that identity in contemporary Vietnam is increasingly dynamic, multidimensional, and context-dependent.

By conceptualizing identity as negotiated rather than fixed, this article contributes to broader debates on globalization, hybridity, and cultural transformation in transitional societies. It highlights how Vietnamese communities actively participate in reshaping the meanings and consequences of globalization through adaptation, reinterpretation, and cultural interaction within specific historical and social contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Globalization and Cultural Transformation

Globalization has become an important framework for understanding contemporary cultural and social transformation. Earlier studies mainly emphasized economic integration and political restructuring, whereas later scholarship increasingly focused on the circulation of media, symbols, lifestyles, and identities across national boundaries (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996). Contemporary perspectives therefore view globalization not simply as Westernization or cultural homogenization, but as a multidirectional process of interaction and adaptation in which local communities actively reinterpret global influences within specific historical and social contexts (Robertson, 1995; Vertovec, 2009).

One of the most influential approaches was developed by Arjun Appadurai, who conceptualized globalization through overlapping “scapes” shaping global cultural flows. Appadurai (1996) identified ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples as interconnected dimensions of contemporary globalization. In Vietnam, mediascaples and ethnoscaples are particularly important because migration, tourism, digital communication, and transnational media increasingly expose local communities to global symbolic systems and alternative forms of belonging.

The expansion of digital communication has accelerated these processes. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram facilitate the circulation of global entertainment, fashion trends, and online lifestyles that increasingly

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shape everyday interaction and cultural consumption (DataReportal, 2023, 2024). Younger generations now participate in digitally mediated environments connecting local experiences with transnational symbolic cultures and more flexible forms of identity (Boyd, 2014; Miller, 2011).

Roland Robertson's concept of "glocalization" further emphasizes the interaction between global processes and local cultural contexts (Robertson, 1995). In Vietnam, global influences are rarely adopted through direct imitation; instead, they are selectively localized and hybridized within existing cultural frameworks. Korean popular culture, online aesthetics, and global fashion trends are often adapted according to Vietnamese social norms and generational experiences.

Globalization also intensifies transnational connectivity by enabling individuals and communities to maintain social relationships across geographical distance (Basch et al., 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Migration networks, digital communication, and transnational media increasingly reshape patterns of social interaction and belonging in Vietnam. Communities are therefore no longer organized exclusively through territorially bounded structures but also through online communication, labor mobility, and translocal social relations.

At the same time, globalization creates tensions concerning morality, cultural continuity, and social change. Consumer culture, individualized lifestyles, and digital participation may challenge traditional communal authority structures. Nevertheless, globalization should not be viewed simply as an external force imposed upon Vietnamese society. Rather, it operates as a dynamic process of cultural negotiation through which local actors reinterpret global influences within changing historical and social conditions.

2.2. Identity Theory and Negotiated Identity

The concept of identity has undergone major transformation within contemporary social and cultural theory. Earlier perspectives often viewed identity as stable and rooted in ethnicity, religion, language, locality, or collective tradition. More recent approaches, however, emphasize the socially constructed, relational, and dynamic character of identity formation (Hall, 1990, 1996).

Stuart Hall argued that cultural identity should be understood as a process of "becoming" rather than "being" (Hall, 1990). Identity is continuously reconstructed through discourse, memory, representation, and social interaction rather than existing as a fixed cultural essence. This perspective is especially relevant in contemporary Vietnam, where migration, urbanization, digital communication, and media circulation increasingly expose individuals to multiple cultural systems and competing forms of belonging.

Under globalization, identity becomes more fragmented, fluid, and situational. Individuals negotiate between local traditions and global influences while engaging simultaneously with national narratives, consumer culture, and online social environments. Identity formation therefore increasingly involves relational positioning within broader transnational cultural fields.

Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha emphasized the hybrid and negotiated nature of identity through the concept of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). According to Bhabha, cultural interaction creates "third spaces" in which new meanings and symbolic practices emerge through negotiation rather than cultural purity or isolation. This framework is particularly useful for understanding contemporary Vietnam because identities increasingly combine local cultural values, digital participation, transnational media influences, consumer lifestyles, and individualized self-expression.

Urban youth, migrant communities, and ethnic minority populations frequently navigate tensions between tradition and modernity, communal obligation and personal aspiration, and local belonging and global connectivity. Negotiated identity therefore refers to the ongoing process through which individuals selectively reinterpret cultural belonging within changing social environments.

This constructivist perspective challenges deterministic assumptions that globalization inevitably destroys local identity. Instead, globalization often intensifies identity negotiation by expanding opportunities for cultural adaptation, localization, and hybridization.

2.3. Modernization, Migration, and Identity in Vietnam

Post-Đổi Mới Vietnam has generated extensive scholarship on modernization, migration, digital culture, and community transformation. Rapid industrialization, labor mobility, urban expansion, and digital communication have significantly altered social structures and everyday cultural practices throughout the country (Luong, 2010).

One of the most significant dimensions of transformation concerns rural-to-urban migration and labor mobility. Economic restructuring and industrial development created large-scale migration flows from rural and upland areas toward urban centers and industrial zones (Coxhead et al., 2015; Cu, 2005). Beyond employment and poverty reduction, migration also reshapes family structures, social interaction, and cultural identity.

Migration increasingly produces translocal forms of belonging in which individuals maintain connections to multiple social environments simultaneously (Levitt, 2001). Migrants working in industrial zones often sustain relationships with hometown communities through remittances, digital communication, and periodic return migration, creating fragmented and multilayered forms of identity.

These transformations are especially visible among ethnic minority communities in upland Vietnam. Research in the Central Highlands demonstrates that migration, tourism, market integration, and infrastructure development increasingly reshape

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community life and cultural identity (Michaud, 2012; Salemin, 2003). Traditional structures based on communal authority and territorially bounded cultural practices are gradually transformed through interaction with market economies, state modernization programs, and digital communication.

The role of community leadership and ritual authority has also changed significantly. Younger generations increasingly engage with education systems, urban labor markets, and online social environments, reducing the influence of traditional authority structures and customary institutions (Tran, 2025). Tourism and digital representation likewise affect how ethnic identity is performed and publicly represented within changing economic and cultural contexts (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Digital communication technologies now play an increasingly important role in shaping identity and social interaction in Vietnam. Social media platforms expose users to global symbolic systems and transnational aesthetics while enabling geographically dispersed families and migrant communities to maintain relationships across physical distance (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Pink et al., 2016). Research on youth culture further demonstrates that online participation strongly influences self-representation, symbolic consumption, and lifestyle aspirations among younger generations (Boyd, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022).

Despite this growing scholarship, studies on migration, modernization, digital culture, and identity in Vietnam often remain analytically fragmented. Research rarely integrates globalization, media circulation, migration, and negotiated identity within a broader framework of cultural transformation. This article therefore contributes to the literature by examining how globalization reshapes identity through migration, media interaction, digital participation, and cultural adaptation in contemporary Vietnam.

2.4. Analytical Framework

This article develops the following analytical logic:

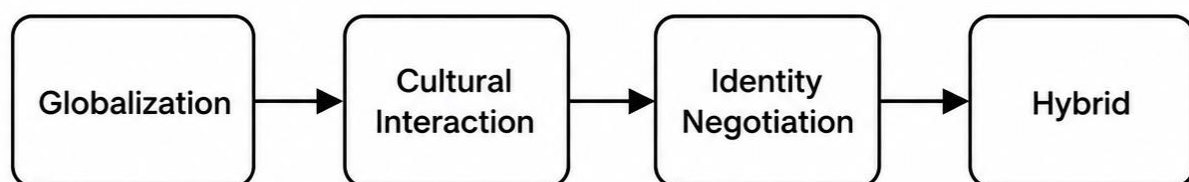


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Globalization, Cultural Interaction, and Hybrid Identity Formation

This framework conceptualizes globalization as a multidimensional process that intensifies cultural interaction through migration, media circulation, digital communication, tourism, and economic integration. As interaction between local and transnational cultural systems increases, territorially bounded and fixed forms of identity become increasingly unstable.

Exposure to multiple cultural influences encourages individuals and communities to reinterpret social values, symbolic practices, and forms of belonging within changing social environments. Identity negotiation emerges through selective adaptation, reinterpretation, resistance, and hybridization rather than through complete cultural replacement.

Hybrid cultural formation therefore represents the outcome of continuous interaction between local traditions and global cultural flows. In contemporary Vietnam, identities increasingly reflect multidimensional combinations of local heritage, national belonging, transnational media influences, digital participation, consumer culture, and individualized self-expression. This framework allows the article to analyze cultural transformation not as simple cultural loss but as a dynamic process of negotiation, adaptation, and symbolic reconstruction within globalizing social environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to examine the transformation of cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam under conditions of globalization. Rather than treating identity as a fixed cultural category, the article conceptualizes identity as a dynamic and socially negotiated process shaped by migration, digital communication, urbanization, and transnational cultural interaction (Hall, 1996; Bhabha, 1994). A qualitative orientation is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to interpret symbolic practices, changing forms of belonging, and the fluid character of identity formation within rapidly evolving social environments.

The article integrates perspectives from cultural anthropology, globalization studies, cultural studies, migration studies, and the sociology of identity. This interdisciplinary framework allows the analysis to connect structural processes of globalization with everyday cultural practices and mediated forms of social interaction. Anthropological perspectives are especially important because they emphasize how communities reinterpret cultural meanings and negotiate belonging within changing historical and social contexts (Marcus, 1995; Salemin, 2003). At the same time, globalization studies provide broader analytical tools for understanding transnational cultural flows, mobility, and expanding global connectivity (Appadurai, 1996; Robertson, 1995).

The study also draws upon cultural studies approaches that examine representation, media circulation, and digital communication in shaping contemporary identity. Online environments increasingly function as spaces where identities are performed and

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reconstructed through symbolic interaction and consumer culture (Boyd, 2014; Miller & Slater, 2000). In Vietnam, social media platforms and digital participation significantly influence youth culture, migration experiences, and translocal forms of belonging (DataReportal, 2023, 2024).

By combining these perspectives, the article approaches cultural transformation not as a simple process of cultural loss or homogenization but as an ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and hybridization. This framework is particularly useful for analyzing contemporary Vietnam, where globalization simultaneously reshapes communal relations, digital practices, migration patterns, and cultural identity.

3.2. Research Methods

3.2.1. Document Analysis

The primary method employed in this study is qualitative document analysis. This method enables the systematic interpretation of theoretical literature, migration studies, anthropological scholarship, digital culture research, and studies of globalization relevant to contemporary Vietnam. Document analysis is especially suitable for examining negotiated identity because it allows the integration of diverse forms of scholarship into a broader interpretive framework of cultural transformation.

The study draws upon international and Vietnamese scholarship on globalization, migration, media culture, ethnic minority transformation, and transnational communication. Theoretical works by scholars such as Appadurai (1996), Hall (1990, 1996), Bhabha (1994), Robertson (1995), and Hannerz (1996) provide the conceptual foundation for understanding globalization, hybridity, and negotiated identity. These perspectives help conceptualize identity as fluid, relational, and continuously reconstructed through interaction and mobility.

The article also incorporates empirical studies on Vietnam addressing migration, urbanization, digital communication, ethnic minority transformation, and youth culture (Coxhead et al., 2015; Cu, 2005; Michaud, 2012). Particular attention is given to scholarship on the Central Highlands and upland regions, where tourism, migration, market integration, and digital communication have significantly reshaped communal structures and cultural practices (Nguyen et al., 2023; Tran, 2025).

Research on digital media and online interaction is also central to the analysis. Studies on social media, transnational communication, and digital ethnography demonstrate how online environments increasingly shape symbolic participation and self-representation in contemporary societies (Boyd, 2014; Pink et al., 2016). In Vietnam, digital communication has become deeply integrated into everyday social interaction and cultural consumption, especially among younger generations.

Through document analysis, the article identifies recurring themes related to globalization, migration, media circulation, hybrid identity, and negotiated belonging. Rather than examining these themes separately, the study synthesizes them into a broader analytical interpretation of cultural transformation in contemporary Vietnam.

3.2.2. Theoretical Synthesis and Interpretive Analysis

In addition to document analysis, the article employs theoretical synthesis and interpretive analysis to connect globalization theory with Vietnamese social realities. This approach allows the study to move beyond descriptive discussion and develop a more analytical understanding of identity transformation under globalization.

Theoretical synthesis involves integrating insights from anthropology, globalization studies, migration theory, and cultural studies in order to explain how mobility, media interaction, and digital communication collectively reshape identity formation. Rather than applying a single theoretical framework, the article combines multiple perspectives to capture the complexity of cultural transformation in contemporary Vietnam.

Interpretive analysis is used to examine how individuals and communities negotiate cultural meaning within changing social environments. This perspective recognizes that globalization does not affect all communities uniformly. Different social groups respond to globalization differently depending on migration experience, generational position, socioeconomic conditions, and local cultural context (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009).

The analysis therefore focuses on processes of selective adaptation, symbolic negotiation, cultural hybridization, and identity reconstruction. This interpretive orientation is especially important because globalization in Vietnam rarely produces direct cultural replacement. Instead, local communities actively reinterpret global influences within existing cultural frameworks, generating hybrid forms of belonging and symbolic expression (Robertson, 1995; Hall, 1992).

The framework also allows the article to examine tensions associated with globalization. While transnational interaction and digital communication may create opportunities for social mobility and cultural creativity, they may simultaneously challenge communal cohesion, traditional authority structures, and localized systems of meaning. Such tensions are central to understanding the emergence of negotiated identities in contemporary Vietnamese society.

3.3. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Vietnam during the post-Đổi Mới period, particularly from the 1990s to the present. This period marks Vietnam's increasing integration into global economic, cultural, and communication networks through industrialization, migration, urbanization, and digital connectivity.

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The analysis concentrates on cultural transformation associated with globalization, migration, urban expansion, transnational media circulation, and digital communication. Rather than examining all dimensions of globalization, the article specifically focuses on how these processes reshape identity formation and social belonging within contemporary Vietnamese society.

The study examines several interconnected contexts, including rural-to-urban migration, urban youth culture, ethnic minority transformation, and digital communication environments. Particular attention is given to the interaction between local traditions and transnational cultural influences, especially within communities experiencing rapid social change and increasing exposure to global media and mobility.

Although the article draws upon examples from migration networks, urban transformation, and ethnic minority regions, it does not aim to provide a comprehensive ethnographic account of any single community. Instead, the study develops a broader theoretical interpretation of negotiated identity in contemporary Vietnam.

The scope of the research is therefore analytical rather than purely descriptive. Its primary objective is to explain how globalization contributes to the transition from fixed and territorially bounded identities toward more fluid, hybrid, and negotiated forms of cultural belonging in contemporary Vietnamese society.

4. CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN GLOBALIZING VIETNAM

4.1. Urbanization and the Transformation of Social Identity

Urbanization has become one of the most transformative processes in post-Đổi Mới Vietnam. Since the 1990s, industrialization, market integration, and participation in global production networks have accelerated rural-to-urban migration and expanded industrial and peri-urban regions throughout the country (Coxhead et al., 2015; Cu, 2005). These developments have not only reshaped economic life but also transformed social relations, cultural practices, and identity formation.

Earlier forms of identity in Vietnam were strongly associated with territorially bounded communities characterized by stable kinship relations, collective rituals, and localized systems of belonging (Luong, 2010). However, migration and urbanization increasingly destabilize these structures by exposing individuals to heterogeneous social environments, labor mobility, and transnational cultural influences. As Appadurai (1996) and Hannerz (1996) suggested, globalization intensifies cultural interaction and weakens the relative isolation of local communities. The major drivers of cultural transformation in contemporary Vietnam are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Major Drivers of Cultural Transformation in Contemporary Vietnam

Driver of Transformation	Main Characteristics	Cultural Impact	Identity Implications
Urbanization	Expansion of cities and industrial zones	Changing lifestyles and weakening village-based cohesion	More individualized identities
Labor Migration	Rural-to-urban mobility and translocal livelihoods	Fragmented family and community structures	Hybrid rural-urban belonging
Digital Communication	Expansion of social media and online interaction	Exposure to global cultural symbols	Flexible and performative identities
Transnational Media	Global entertainment and consumer culture	Cultural hybridization and symbolic adaptation	Negotiated cultural identity
Market Integration	Commercialization and consumer-oriented lifestyles	Transformation of traditional social relations	Identity linked to aspiration and mobility

As shown in Table 1, cultural transformation in Vietnam is produced through the interaction of migration, media circulation, urbanization, and digital communication rather than by a single social force. Migration increasingly creates translocal social worlds in which migrants maintain connections to both hometown communities and urban workplaces (Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). These experiences contribute to fragmented and multilayered forms of belonging shaped by mobility and digital communication.

Urban youth culture further illustrates these transformations. Social media, online entertainment, and global consumer culture increasingly shape aspirations, lifestyles, and self-representation among younger generations (Boyd, 2014; Miller, 2011). Fashion, digital participation, and online visibility function as markers of identity and modernity, while market-oriented values encourage more individualized forms of social aspiration.

At the same time, urbanization contributes to the weakening of traditional communal cohesion. Earlier village-based communities relied heavily on face-to-face interaction, kinship obligations, and collective ritual participation. Industrial labor systems and geographic mobility increasingly fragment these social structures, producing more flexible and networked forms of social organization. The transformation of community relations can be summarized in Table 2.

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Table 2. Transformation of Community and Social Relations in Globalizing Vietnam

Traditional Community Characteristics	Emerging Social Transformation
Village-based social organization	Urban and translocal social networks
Strong kinship cohesion	Increasing individual mobility
Collective identity	Personalized self-expression
Stable territorial belonging	Flexible and multilayered belonging
Face-to-face interaction	Digitally mediated interaction
Extended family structure	Fragmented and mobile households

Table 2 demonstrates that globalization contributes to the transformation of community from territorially bounded structures toward more mobile and digitally mediated forms of belonging. Nevertheless, these changes should not be interpreted simply as social disintegration. Migrants and urban residents often maintain strong emotional and symbolic ties to hometown communities through remittances, online communication, and periodic return migration (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Consequently, community itself becomes increasingly translocal and networked.

These developments reflect a broader shift from fixed identities rooted in locality toward more fluid and negotiated forms of belonging shaped by migration, digital communication, and global cultural interaction.

4.2. Transnational Media and Cultural Consumption

The expansion of transnational media and digital communication has profoundly transformed cultural consumption and identity formation in contemporary Vietnam. Internet access and social media participation increasingly connect Vietnamese society to global flows of entertainment, symbolic representation, and digital interaction (DataReportal, 2023, 2024). As Appadurai (1996) argued, mediascapes shape social imagination by exposing individuals to alternative lifestyles and cultural aspirations beyond local territorial boundaries.

Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become central spaces of cultural participation, especially among younger generations. Online environments encourage more flexible and performative forms of identity shaped by symbolic consumption, digital visibility, and mediated interaction (Boyd, 2014; Miller & Slater, 2000). Vietnamese youth increasingly consume and reinterpret global cultural products through digitally connected social environments rather than exclusively through localized forms of socialization.

The influence of Korean popular culture provides a clear example of transnational cultural interaction in Vietnam. K-pop music, Korean television dramas, fashion aesthetics, and online fandoms significantly shape youth lifestyles and symbolic practices. However, these influences are not passively reproduced. Instead, Vietnamese users selectively localize global cultural forms within existing social and cultural frameworks, illustrating Robertson's (1995) concept of glocalization. This process of hybridization can be observed across multiple dimensions of youth culture, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Forms of Hybrid Cultural Practices among Vietnamese Youth

Cultural Domain	Local Elements	Global Influences	Hybrid Outcomes
Fashion	Traditional aesthetic preferences	K-pop and global fashion trends	Hybrid urban youth styles
Language	Vietnamese communication patterns	English slang and online expressions	Mixed digital language practices
Entertainment	Domestic popular culture	Streaming platforms and global media	Transnational media consumption
Social Interaction	Community-oriented communication	Social media self-presentation	Individualized online identities
Lifestyle Aspirations	Family-centered values	Consumer culture and global lifestyles	Negotiated modern identities

As shown in Table 3, globalization increasingly produces hybrid cultural practices rather than simple cultural replacement. Online communication among Vietnamese youth increasingly incorporates English slang, internet abbreviations, and hybrid linguistic forms associated with global digital culture. These language practices function not only as communication tools but also as markers of generational identity and digital participation.

TikTok culture further accelerates the circulation of transnational aesthetics and symbolic trends. Vietnamese users actively participate in global online trends while adapting content to local humor, social norms, and cultural references. This dynamic reinforces the increasingly performative and negotiated character of identity in digital environments (Pink et al., 2016).

Digital communication also reshapes traditional understandings of community. Earlier forms of belonging in Vietnam were strongly connected to locality and kinship. In contrast, online communities increasingly organize social interaction around shared interests,

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fandoms, gaming networks, and digital participation. These networked forms of belonging transcend territorial boundaries and contribute to more flexible and individualized identities.

At the same time, global media exposure generates tensions regarding morality, consumerism, and cultural continuity. Public debates in Vietnam frequently express concern about the influence of transnational entertainment and social media on traditional values. However, these concerns often overlook the active role Vietnamese users play in negotiating and localizing global influences. Rather than producing cultural homogenization, transnational media contributes to increasing symbolic flexibility and hybrid identity formation in contemporary Vietnam.

4.3. Ethnic Minority Communities and the Reconfiguration of Identity

Ethnic minority communities in Vietnam have undergone significant transformation under the influence of globalization, tourism, migration, market integration, and digital communication. Historically, many upland communities maintained relatively stable social structures based on communal land use, ritual organization, and territorially bounded cultural practices (Salemink, 2003). However, post-Đổi Mới modernization and expanding integration into national and global economic systems have significantly altered these arrangements.

Research on the Central Highlands and other upland regions demonstrates that ethnic minority communities are increasingly embedded within broader networks of mobility, communication, and market interaction (Michaud, 2012). Tourism development, infrastructure expansion, educational mobility, and labor migration expose local communities to new cultural influences and alternative forms of belonging.

Tourism plays a particularly important role in reshaping ethnic identity. Cultural festivals, ritual performances, handicrafts, and traditional clothing increasingly become connected to heritage industries and tourism economies. In many communities, cultural traditions are selectively preserved and publicly represented as symbols of ethnic identity and authenticity (Nguyen et al., 2023). However, these practices often undergo reinterpretation as they become integrated into commercial and tourism-oriented contexts. Migration and market integration also contribute to changing authority structures within ethnic minority communities. Younger generations increasingly migrate to urban centers and industrial zones, reducing dependence on traditional agricultural systems and localized communal hierarchies. These transformations reshape intergenerational relations and weaken the authority of traditional leadership systems (Tran, 2025).

The role of village elders and customary institutions has consequently changed in many communities. Traditional authority structures based on ritual knowledge increasingly coexist with state administration, formal education, market-oriented values, and digital communication. Younger community members often engage more actively with urban lifestyles and online environments than with traditional ritual systems.

Digital communication further accelerates identity transformation among ethnic minority populations. Social media platforms allow ethnic minority youth to participate in transnational digital culture while simultaneously representing local identity online. Ethnic identity increasingly becomes visible through digital photography, online performances, tourism promotion, and social media representation. Identity therefore becomes increasingly performative and negotiable within digital public spaces.

At the same time, ethnic minority communities continue to maintain strong attachment to language, ritual, kinship, and collective memory. Rather than disappearing under globalization, ethnic identity increasingly becomes selective, adaptive, and multidimensional. Communities strategically preserve certain cultural elements while adapting others to changing economic and social conditions.

These developments suggest that ethnic identity in contemporary Vietnam should not be understood as fixed or culturally isolated. Instead, identity increasingly emerges through interaction between local traditions, migration, tourism, digital communication, and market integration.

4.4. Negotiating Between Tradition and Modernity

The relationship between tradition and modernity represents one of the central dynamics of cultural transformation in contemporary Vietnam. Globalization intensifies interaction between localized cultural traditions and transnational systems of communication, consumer culture, and symbolic representation. Consequently, individuals and communities increasingly negotiate tensions between continuity and change, preservation and adaptation, collective belonging and individual aspiration.

Earlier social structures in Vietnam emphasized collective identity, communal obligation, and territorially rooted forms of belonging (Luong, 2010). However, globalization introduces alternative cultural frameworks associated with mobility, digital participation, consumer lifestyles, and individualized self-expression. Identity therefore becomes increasingly fluid and multilayered rather than singular or fixed.

This process is especially visible among younger generations. Vietnamese youth increasingly participate in globalized digital environments shaped by social media, online entertainment, and transnational aesthetics while simultaneously remaining connected to family expectations, local traditions, and national identity (Boyd, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). These overlapping influences contribute to negotiated and context-dependent forms of belonging. The relationship between tradition and modernity can be summarized in Table 4.

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Table 4. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Vietnam

Dimension	Traditional Orientation	Globalizing Influence	Negotiated Outcome
Identity	Collective and territorially rooted	Individualized and mobile	Flexible and contextual identity
Community	Localized belonging	Networked sociality	Translocal communities
Cultural Practice	Ritual continuity	Selective adaptation	Hybrid cultural performance
Authority	Elder-centered structures	Youth digital participation	Shared and shifting authority
Social Values	Communal obligation	Personal aspiration	Negotiated moral frameworks

As Table 4 illustrates, globalization in Vietnam does not produce complete replacement of tradition by modernity. Instead, contemporary Vietnamese society increasingly reflects negotiated coexistence between multiple cultural systems and symbolic frameworks. Traditional communal values continue to influence family relations and ritual participation even as individualized lifestyles and digital participation become more prominent.

This negotiated character of cultural transformation helps explain why globalization in Vietnam does not lead to total cultural homogenization. Vietnamese communities actively reinterpret global influences within local historical and cultural contexts, producing hybrid identities that combine continuity and adaptation (Bhabha, 1994; Robertson, 1995).

Consequently, cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam is increasingly negotiated rather than fixed. Identity emerges through ongoing interaction between local and global cultural systems, tradition and modernity, collective belonging and personal aspiration. Rather than disappearing under globalization, Vietnamese cultural identity is being reconstructed into more flexible, hybrid, and context-dependent forms shaped by contemporary social realities.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. From Fixed Identity to Negotiated Identity

The findings of this study suggest that cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam can no longer be adequately understood through essentialist or territorially bounded frameworks. Processes of globalization, migration, urbanization, digital communication, and transnational cultural interaction increasingly destabilize earlier forms of belonging rooted primarily in locality, kinship, and communal tradition. Instead, identity emerges as a dynamic and socially negotiated process shaped by interaction between local cultural systems and global influences (Hall, 1990, 1996).

The Vietnamese case strongly supports constructivist perspectives on identity developed within cultural studies and anthropology. As Hall (1990) argued, identity should be understood as a process of “becoming” rather than a stable cultural essence. In contemporary Vietnam, individuals increasingly move between multiple social environments and symbolic systems shaped by migration, digital participation, consumer culture, and transnational communication. Identity therefore becomes relational, situational, and context-dependent rather than singular or fixed.

Migration and urbanization illustrate this transformation particularly clearly. Migrant workers and urban youth frequently maintain connections to hometown communities while simultaneously participating in industrial labor systems, online social environments, and globalized consumer culture (Levitt, 2001; Coxhead et al., 2015). These translocal experiences weaken territorially rooted forms of belonging and encourage more flexible identities shaped by mobility and mediated communication.

Digital media further intensifies this process. Social media platforms increasingly function as spaces where identities are performed, negotiated, and reconstructed through visual representation and symbolic interaction (Boyd, 2014; Miller & Slater, 2000). Younger generations in Vietnam increasingly construct selfhood through online participation, digital aesthetics, and engagement with transnational cultural trends. Identity thus becomes increasingly performative and mediated within networked communication environments.

The experiences of ethnic minority communities similarly demonstrate the negotiated nature of identity. Tourism, migration, market integration, and digital communication expose local communities to new cultural influences while simultaneously encouraging selective forms of cultural preservation (Michaud, 2012; Saleminck, 2003). Ritual practices, ethnic symbols, and communal traditions are increasingly reinterpreted within changing economic and social contexts rather than maintained in static forms.

These transformations suggest that identity in contemporary Vietnam is increasingly shaped by generation, migration experience, digital participation, and social context. Rather than inheriting fixed identities rooted exclusively in tradition or locality, individuals actively negotiate belonging through interaction with multiple cultural systems and symbolic environments. Globalization therefore contributes not to the disappearance of identity but to the emergence of more layered, hybrid, and adaptive forms of cultural self-understanding.

5.2. Globalization and Cultural Restructuring in Vietnam

The findings also demonstrate that globalization in Vietnam does not produce simple cultural homogenization or complete Westernization. Instead, Vietnamese society reflects complex processes of selective adaptation, cultural hybridization, and

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negotiated transformation. Global influences are continuously localized and reinterpreted within existing cultural frameworks rather than passively absorbed (Robertson, 1995).

This pattern strongly supports the concept of glocalization, which emphasizes the interaction between global cultural flows and local social contexts. In Vietnam, globalization reshapes how identity is experienced and represented without erasing local cultural attachment. Communities selectively integrate external influences according to local social values, historical experiences, and symbolic traditions.

The expansion of digital culture clearly illustrates this dynamic. Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube circulate transnational cultural trends throughout Vietnamese society, yet Vietnamese users frequently adapt these trends to local humor, language practices, and cultural expectations (DataReportal, 2023, 2024). Korean popular culture, global fashion, and online aesthetics increasingly influence youth lifestyles while simultaneously being localized within Vietnamese social contexts. As Bhabha (1994) suggested, globalization therefore produces hybrid cultural forms rather than cultural uniformity.

Youth culture in Vietnam increasingly reflects multidimensional forms of belonging shaped by local traditions, national identity, global consumer culture, and digital communication networks. Young people may participate in global fandoms and online communities while still maintaining attachment to family obligations, communal expectations, and Vietnamese cultural values (Zhao et al., 2022). Identity consequently becomes layered rather than replaced.

Ethnic minority communities similarly demonstrate selective adaptation rather than cultural disappearance. Market integration, tourism, migration, and media exposure transform ritual practices and authority structures, yet communities strategically preserve important cultural markers as symbols of ethnic identity and collective memory (Nguyen et al., 2023; Tran, 2025). Cultural continuity increasingly operates through reinterpretation and adaptation rather than rigid preservation of tradition.

These findings challenge deterministic perspectives that portray globalization either as total cultural domination or complete cultural resistance. Instead, globalization in Vietnam generates negotiated cultural restructuring characterized by symbolic localization, hybridity, and multidimensional identity formation. Contemporary Vietnamese identity increasingly reflects interaction between multiple cultural systems rather than exclusive attachment to singular or territorially bounded identities.

The coexistence of continuity and transformation is therefore central to understanding contemporary Vietnamese society. Traditional values related to family, kinship, ritual participation, and communal obligation continue to shape social life even as digital participation, individualized aspirations, and transnational interaction become increasingly prominent. Globalization thus produces coexistence and negotiation rather than simple replacement of tradition by modernity.

5.3. Contribution of the Study

This article contributes to the growing literature on globalization and cultural transformation in Vietnam in several important ways. First, the study expands existing research on identity by moving beyond essentialist and territorially bounded understandings of culture. Rather than conceptualizing identity as a stable attribute associated with ethnicity or locality, the article approaches identity as fluid, relational, and socially negotiated within changing global contexts (Hall, 1996; Bhabha, 1994). This perspective provides a more dynamic framework for understanding cultural transformation in contemporary Vietnam.

Second, the study contributes to bridging globalization studies and anthropology within the Vietnamese context. Research on globalization in Vietnam has often focused on economic integration and development policy, while anthropological scholarship has frequently emphasized localized community analysis. By connecting migration, digital communication, transnational media, and symbolic interaction, this article demonstrates how global cultural flows reshape everyday social practices and forms of belonging across multiple social contexts.

Third, the article contributes to broader debates on hybridity and negotiated identity by demonstrating that globalization in Vietnam produces selective adaptation and multidimensional belonging rather than uniform cultural homogenization. Vietnamese communities actively reinterpret global influences within local historical and cultural frameworks, generating hybrid forms of identity shaped by both continuity and transformation.

Fourth, the study highlights the growing importance of digital communication and mediated interaction in shaping identity formation in Southeast Asia. Social media platforms and online communication increasingly function as spaces where identities are constructed and negotiated through symbolic participation and transnational interaction (Pink et al., 2016). This contributes to emerging scholarship on digital anthropology and networked forms of belonging in rapidly globalizing societies.

Finally, the article contributes to broader discussions of post-socialist transformation by illustrating how globalization, migration, urbanization, and digital communication intersect simultaneously within contemporary Vietnam. The findings suggest that cultural transformation in transitional societies should be understood not as linear modernization but as a multidimensional process involving negotiation, adaptation, hybridity, and symbolic reconstruction.

Taken together, these contributions support the broader argument that identity in contemporary Vietnam is increasingly negotiated rather than fixed. Cultural transformation under globalization is therefore best understood as an ongoing process of interaction between local traditions and global cultural flows rather than as the simple erosion of local culture.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of the Argument

This article has examined the transformation of cultural identity in contemporary Vietnam under conditions of globalization, migration, urbanization, digital communication, and transnational cultural interaction. The analysis argued that cultural identity in Vietnam is increasingly shifting from a fixed and territorially bounded form toward a negotiated and dynamic process shaped by continuous interaction between local traditions and global cultural flows (Hall, 1990; Appadurai, 1996).

Earlier forms of identity in Vietnam were closely associated with village-based social organization, kinship systems, communal rituals, and territorially rooted structures of belonging (Luong, 2010). However, migration, market integration, digital communication, and transnational media have significantly transformed these traditional frameworks. Contemporary Vietnamese identities increasingly emerge through mobility, mediated interaction, symbolic consumption, and selective adaptation within rapidly changing social environments.

The study demonstrated that identity should not be understood as a stable cultural essence inherited unchanged from the past. Instead, identity in contemporary Vietnam increasingly functions as a fluid, relational, and context-dependent process of negotiation shaped by migration, online participation, consumer culture, and transnational connectivity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996). This transition from fixed identity toward negotiated identity does not imply the disappearance of local culture. Rather, globalization intensifies interaction between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, locality and global connectivity.

6.2. Main Findings

The findings indicate that globalization has significantly contributed to cultural restructuring, hybrid identity formation, and increasing flexibility in social belonging within contemporary Vietnam. Urbanization and labor migration have transformed family organization, community structures, and social interaction by weakening territorially bounded forms of communal cohesion and encouraging translocal forms of belonging (Coxhead et al., 2015; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Migrants increasingly navigate between multiple social environments shaped by rural origins, urban labor systems, and digital communication networks.

The expansion of digital communication and transnational media has further intensified cultural transformation. Social media platforms and global entertainment industries increasingly shape symbolic practices, self-representation, and lifestyle aspirations, particularly among younger generations (Boyd, 2014; DataReportal, 2024). Vietnamese users actively localize and reinterpret global cultural trends, producing hybrid cultural expressions rather than simple cultural imitation. This process strongly reflects Robertson's (1995) concept of glocalization and Bhabha's (1994) notion of cultural hybridity.

The transformation of ethnic minority communities also illustrates the negotiated character of identity in globalizing Vietnam. Tourism, migration, market integration, and digital communication reshape ritual practices, authority structures, and cultural representation while simultaneously encouraging selective forms of cultural preservation (Michaud, 2012; Tran, 2025). Ethnic identities increasingly persist through adaptation and reinterpretation rather than through static preservation of tradition.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that globalization in Vietnam produces multidimensional and negotiated forms of identity shaped by interaction between local traditions, national narratives, global cultural flows, digital participation, and individualized aspirations.

6.3. Broader Implications

The findings of this study contribute to broader discussions on globalization and cultural transformation in contemporary societies. First, globalization should not be understood simply as a force that erases local culture or imposes uniform global identities. The Vietnamese case demonstrates that communities actively reinterpret and negotiate global influences within specific historical and cultural contexts. Globalization therefore functions less as cultural replacement and more as a process of symbolic interaction and negotiated adaptation (Robertson, 1995; Vertovec, 2009).

Second, cultural identity in globalizing societies increasingly becomes fluid, hybrid, and multidimensional. Individuals no longer belong exclusively to singular cultural systems but instead move between multiple symbolic environments shaped by migration, media exposure, online communication, and social mobility. Identity formation consequently becomes more situational and relational than earlier territorially bounded models of belonging would suggest.

Third, the study highlights the growing importance of digital communication in reshaping cultural experience and social interaction. Online platforms increasingly function as spaces where identities are constructed, performed, and negotiated through mediated participation and symbolic representation (Pink et al., 2016). Contemporary cultural transformation therefore cannot be fully understood without considering the role of digital environments and transnational media networks.

Finally, the Vietnamese experience contributes to broader debates within anthropology and globalization studies concerning the relationship between continuity and change. Rather than disappearing under globalization, local traditions often survive through adaptation, reinterpretation, and hybridization. Cultural continuity increasingly operates through negotiation rather than rigid preservation of fixed social forms. In this sense, globalization transforms not only what identities people possess but also how identities are constructed, experienced, and negotiated within everyday social life.

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6.4. Directions for Future Research

Although this article has examined important dimensions of negotiated identity in contemporary Vietnam, several areas require further research. Future studies could explore the growing significance of digital identity and online self-representation among younger generations. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, algorithmic media systems, and platform-based communication may further transform identity formation in ways that remain insufficiently understood.

Research on online communities and networked sociality in Vietnam would also provide important insights into how digital communication reshapes symbolic participation and communal belonging beyond territorially bounded environments. Online fandoms, gaming communities, influencer culture, and digital activism increasingly function as important spaces of identity negotiation.

Further scholarship should additionally examine youth culture and generational transformation in contemporary Vietnam. Younger generations experience globalization differently from older populations due to greater exposure to digital media, transnational communication, and global consumer culture (Boyd, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). Comparative generational analysis may therefore reveal important differences in perceptions of tradition, modernity, and cultural belonging.

Finally, future research could extend the analysis toward transnational Vietnamese communities and overseas migration networks. Vietnamese diasporic populations increasingly maintain complex relationships with homeland culture through digital communication, symbolic exchange, and return migration (Basch et al., 1994; Vu & Satzewich, 2022). Examining these transnational forms of belonging would contribute to broader understanding of globalization, mobility, and negotiated identity in contemporary Vietnamese society.

Overall, continued research on identity transformation in Vietnam remains important because globalization is an ongoing and evolving process. As migration, digital communication, and transnational interaction continue to expand, the negotiation of identity will likely remain one of the defining characteristics of contemporary Vietnamese social and cultural life.

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