

Young Muslim Women's Digital Engagement with Cultural Heritage: Implications for Citizenship Education and National Sovereignty

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Abstract: The increasing influence of digital media has transformed the ways young people interact with cultural heritage, identity, and citizenship. While globalization and digital communication offer opportunities for cultural exchange, they also pose challenges to the preservation of local cultural values and national identity. Young Muslim women have emerged as active participants in digital spaces, using social media and other online platforms to express, reinterpret, and promote cultural heritage. However, limited research has explored how these digital practices contribute to citizenship education and support national sovereignty in the contemporary digital era. This study aims to examine how young Muslim women engage with cultural heritage through new media and to analyze the implications of this engagement for citizenship education and national sovereignty. The research employs a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences and meanings that participants attach to their digital cultural activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with young Muslim women and complemented by secondary data from academic literature, policy documents, and digital media content, including social media posts and online cultural campaigns. The findings indicate that young Muslim women utilize digital platforms as spaces for cultural preservation, identity formation, and civic participation. Their engagement with cultural heritage strengthens cultural awareness, promotes digital citizenship competencies, and encourages a sense of responsibility toward safeguarding national values in a globalized environment. Furthermore, digital cultural practices foster intercultural dialogue and contribute to strengthening national sovereignty through the preservation and dissemination of local cultural knowledge. These findings suggest that citizenship education should integrate digital literacy and cultural heritage engagement to empower young citizens as active contributors to society.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Young Muslim Women; Digital Citizenship; Citizenship Education; National Sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the ways individuals communicate, acquire knowledge, and participate in social and cultural life (Ismail et al., 2025; Regi Ginanjar, 2025; UN, 2026). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp have become integral parts of everyday life, particularly among young people, who increasingly rely on these platforms not only for entertainment but also for education, self-expression, and civic participation. Consequently, digital media has evolved into an influential public sphere where cultural values are interpreted, negotiated, and disseminated across geographical boundaries (Aulia Fariyah, 2025; Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022). This transformation presents new opportunities for preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously introducing challenges associated with globalization, algorithm-driven content, and the increasing dominance of global popular culture.

Indonesia, as one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, possesses an extensive cultural heritage comprising traditional arts, indigenous knowledge, local languages, customary practices, culinary traditions, historical sites, and religious values that have been transmitted across generations. These cultural assets represent more than historical legacies; they constitute essential components of national identity and social cohesion. However, the rapid expansion of digital communication has created a paradox. While digital platforms enable broader access to cultural information and facilitate the promotion of local traditions to global audiences, they also expose younger generations to an overwhelming flow of foreign cultural products that often dominate digital spaces. As a result, concerns have emerged regarding the declining interest of young people in local cultural traditions and the

potential erosion of cultural identity. Therefore, the issue of cultural preservation in the digital era extends beyond safeguarding historical artifacts and increasingly depends on how younger generations actively engage with cultural heritage through digital media.

This phenomenon becomes particularly important when viewed from the perspective of young Muslim women, who simultaneously negotiate multiple identities as members of religious communities, Indonesian citizens, participants in local cultural traditions, and active users of digital technology. Their everyday interactions within digital environments illustrate how religious identity, cultural identity, and citizenship intersect in contemporary society. Rather than merely consuming online content, young Muslim women increasingly participate in producing, sharing, and interpreting cultural narratives through social media. Their digital practices demonstrate that online engagement may function not only as cultural expression but also as a form of civic participation that contributes to preserving national identity. Nevertheless, despite the increasing visibility of young Muslim women within digital spaces, relatively limited research has examined how their digital experiences influence citizenship education and contribute to strengthening national sovereignty through cultural preservation.

The relationship between digital engagement, cultural heritage, and citizenship has been examined from several complementary theoretical perspectives. Ribble's concept of digital citizenship emphasizes that responsible participation in digital environments requires not only technological competence but also ethical communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, and active civic engagement (Choi, 2016; Mike Ribble, 2015). From another perspective, UNESCO conceptualizes cultural heritage as a living process that must be continuously recreated and transmitted across generations rather than merely preserved as historical objects (UNESCO, 2019). This perspective suggests that digital technology can function as an effective medium through which younger generations document, reinterpret, and disseminate cultural knowledge. Meanwhile, Castells' theory of the Network Society argues that identities are increasingly constructed through interactions occurring within digital communication networks, where individuals negotiate cultural meanings while simultaneously confronting the influence of global cultural flows. Although these theoretical perspectives originate from different scholarly traditions, they converge in suggesting that digital platforms have become significant arenas for identity formation, cultural participation, and civic engagement. Integrating these perspectives therefore provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital interaction with cultural heritage contributes to citizenship education in the digital era (Castells, 2009, 2015).

Existing empirical studies have generally demonstrated that digital media enhances cultural awareness, civic participation, and digital literacy among young people (Agus et al., 2025; Huang, 2025; Sheik Mohamed S.H & Sam Hermansyah, 2024). Research conducted in Indonesia reports that social media campaigns promoting traditional cuisine, regional tourism, cultural festivals, and local languages encourage public participation in preserving cultural heritage (Aditiya Faturahman et al., 2026; Hariyati et al., 2024). Likewise, international studies have shown that digital storytelling, online communities, and participatory cultural platforms strengthen young people's attachment to local identity while facilitating intercultural dialogue. However, these studies predominantly focus on general youth populations or institutional digital campaigns and often employ quantitative approaches that measure patterns of digital participation rather than exploring participants' lived experiences. Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to understanding how young Muslim women experience cultural engagement through digital media and how these experiences shape their understanding of citizenship, cultural identity, and national responsibility.

The empirical evidence of this study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of four young Muslim women who actively utilize digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Google to access, share, and interact with Indonesian cultural heritage. Their responses demonstrate that digital media functions as an accessible learning environment where they explore traditional cuisine, regional arts, traditional clothing, local customs, and cultural history while simultaneously expressing pride in Indonesia's cultural diversity. At the same time, participants recognize significant challenges, including the overwhelming popularity of foreign entertainment, limited access to reliable cultural information, and the need for stronger digital literacy to distinguish credible cultural content from misinformation. These experiences illustrate that digital engagement is neither a purely technological activity nor simply cultural consumption; rather, it represents an ongoing process

through which cultural identity, civic values, and national consciousness are continuously negotiated within digital spaces.

Against this background, this study conceptualizes digital engagement as a multidimensional practice encompassing cultural participation, digital citizenship, and identity construction. Cultural heritage is understood not merely as tangible artifacts but also as the intangible values, traditions, knowledge, languages, artistic expressions, and collective memories that define Indonesian society. Likewise, citizenship education is viewed as a dynamic process through which individuals develop civic knowledge, democratic values, ethical responsibility, and digital competence necessary for participating in contemporary society. Within this conceptual framework, national sovereignty extends beyond territorial and political dimensions to include the capacity of citizens to preserve, promote, and reproduce their cultural identity amid increasingly globalized digital environments.

Accordingly, this study argues that the digital engagement of young Muslim women with Indonesian cultural heritage represents an important form of digital citizenship that simultaneously strengthens cultural identity, enhances citizenship education, and contributes to safeguarding national sovereignty. By adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research explores participants' lived experiences to explain how digital media serves not merely as a communication technology but as a civic and cultural space where identity formation, cultural preservation, and responsible citizenship converge. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on digital citizenship by integrating perspectives from cultural heritage studies, citizenship education, and digital media research, while providing practical implications for developing citizenship education that is responsive to the realities of the digital age.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to examine how young Muslim women experience digital engagement with Indonesian cultural heritage and how these experiences contribute to citizenship education and national sovereignty. A qualitative design was selected because the study seeks to understand participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings regarding their interactions with cultural heritage through digital media rather than to measure variables quantitatively. The phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate because it enables the researchers to explore the subjective meanings participants attribute to their digital activities and to understand how these experiences shape cultural identity, civic values, and perceptions of national responsibility within the context of contemporary digital society.

The research was conducted with four young Muslim women who were selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen because they met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study: they were active users of digital media, regularly accessed social networking platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube, and had previous experience engaging with information related to Indonesian cultural heritage in digital environments. In qualitative phenomenological research, participants are selected not to represent a statistical population but because they possess direct experience with the phenomenon being investigated. Consequently, each participant provided rich experiential narratives that allowed the researchers to examine the relationship between digital media, cultural heritage, citizenship education, and national sovereignty in depth. The primary data were collected using semi-structured interview questionnaires consisting of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe their experiences comprehensively. The interview instrument was developed based on the conceptual framework presented in the introduction and explored four interrelated dimensions of the study: (1) participants' digital interaction with Indonesian cultural heritage; (2) the influence of digital engagement on cultural identity and citizenship identity; (3) the contribution of digital participation to citizenship education; and (4) participants' perceptions regarding the role of digital cultural engagement in strengthening national sovereignty. The semi-structured format enabled participants to answer freely while ensuring that the discussion remained aligned with the research objectives. To strengthen the interpretation of the findings, primary interview data were complemented by secondary data obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and previous studies concerning digital citizenship, cultural heritage

preservation, citizenship education, and digital society. These secondary sources were used to construct the theoretical framework and to compare the empirical findings with existing academic discussions.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the analytical procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with repeated reading of all interview responses to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. During this familiarization stage, meaningful statements relevant to the research questions were identified and recorded. Subsequently, the researchers conducted open coding by assigning conceptual labels to significant statements concerning digital interaction, cultural identity, citizenship learning, digital literacy, and national sovereignty. Codes sharing similar meanings were then systematically grouped into broader categories, which were refined into overarching themes representing recurring patterns across participants' narratives. The final themes corresponded to the four research objectives and became the basis for interpreting the relationship between empirical findings and the theoretical perspectives discussed in the introduction, particularly Digital Citizenship Theory, UNESCO's concept of cultural heritage, and Castells' Network Society theory. This analytical mechanism enabled the researchers to move beyond descriptive reporting toward analytical interpretation by explaining how participants' lived experiences reflected broader social and educational processes.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several verification strategies were employed throughout the research process. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing participants' responses with relevant theoretical literature and previous empirical studies. Cross-participant comparison was also performed to identify consistent patterns as well as variations among participants' experiences, thereby strengthening the validity of the emerging themes. Throughout the analysis, the researchers continuously reviewed the coding process to ensure consistency between participants' original narratives, thematic categories, and theoretical interpretation. This iterative analytical process minimized researcher bias while maintaining close correspondence between empirical evidence and the conclusions drawn.

Through this methodological procedure, the study systematically explains how qualitative phenomenological inquiry can reveal the complex relationship between digital media use, cultural heritage engagement, citizenship education, and national sovereignty. The integration of purposive participant selection, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and triangulation provides a rigorous methodological foundation for interpreting how young Muslim women construct cultural identity and civic responsibility through their everyday engagement with Indonesian cultural heritage in digital spaces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Young Muslim Women's Digital Interaction with Indonesian Cultural Heritage

The analysis indicates that digital media has become the primary environment through which young Muslim women access, interpret, and participate in Indonesian cultural heritage. Although the participants differed in the intensity of their digital activities, all five respondents described digital platforms as important sources for learning about traditional culture. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google were identified as the platforms most frequently used to obtain information regarding traditional cuisine, regional arts, local languages, traditional clothing, customs, and cultural tourism. Rather than depending solely on formal educational institutions, participants increasingly relied on digital environments to broaden their cultural knowledge.

The interviews further reveal that participants conceptualized cultural heritage not merely as historical artifacts but as living traditions inherited from previous generations and forming an essential part of Indonesian national identity. One participant explained that *"Indonesian cultural heritage is everything inherited from generation to generation and forms part of the nation's identity."* Another participant similarly emphasized that cultural heritage represents *"the identity of the nation that reflects history, values, and traditions passed down by previous generations."*

These statements demonstrate that participants understood cultural heritage as both a historical legacy and a contemporary social responsibility. The findings also demonstrate varying forms of digital participation. Several participants had actively shared cultural content, including videos of traditional

dances, photographs of regional food, and information about traditional clothing, while others preferred to participate by commenting on, liking, or following cultural accounts on social media. One respondent explained that she had uploaded cultural content because she wanted *"to introduce Indonesian culture to more people and increase public knowledge of Indonesia's cultural diversity."* Another participant stated that although she had never produced cultural content herself, she regularly enjoyed culinary and cultural posts because they attracted her attention and increased her knowledge. Traditional culinary culture emerged as the most frequently mentioned type of cultural content. Participants consistently expressed enthusiasm for learning about regional foods because culinary content was considered visually attractive, educational, and closely connected with everyday life. Several respondents also reported interest in traditional clothing, local languages, regional arts, and indigenous traditions. This finding suggests that digital media presents cultural heritage in accessible and engaging formats that encourage voluntary participation among young audiences.

Nevertheless, participants also identified several challenges limiting digital cultural participation. The most common obstacles included limited access to reliable cultural information, insufficient knowledge regarding specific traditions, and competition with entertainment-oriented content that receives greater algorithmic visibility. Some participants additionally noted that the popularity of global popular culture often overshadows local cultural content, making cultural promotion more difficult. These findings support UNESCO's perspective that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage requires continuous adaptation to contemporary communication technologies while simultaneously ensuring the authenticity of cultural knowledge. The findings likewise support Castells' argument that digital networks function simultaneously as opportunities for identity construction and arenas where local cultures compete with dominant global cultural flows.

Digital Engagement, Cultural Identity, and Citizenship Identity

The second major finding demonstrates that digital engagement significantly contributes to strengthening participants' cultural identity and their understanding of citizenship. Across all interviews, participants consistently reported that exposure to Indonesian cultural content increased their appreciation of both Indonesian culture and their identity as Muslim Indonesian women.

One participant explained, *"I feel that being a Muslim woman in Indonesia is unique because I can practice Islamic values while preserving the nation's traditions."* Another respondent stated that digital media had made her *"more proud of Indonesian culture because many people from other countries appreciate its uniqueness."* Similarly, another participant emphasized that digital engagement strengthened her understanding of the relationship between religious values and cultural identity, enabling both identities to coexist harmoniously rather than contradict one another. Participants also reported that digital media reduced geographical barriers separating them from diverse regional cultures. Students living in Jakarta explained that they could observe local traditions, regional dialects, culinary practices, and cultural festivals from distant provinces through digital platforms. Consequently, digital engagement expanded their understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity beyond their immediate social environments. Rather than creating cultural fragmentation, digital media facilitated a stronger sense of belonging to Indonesia's multicultural society.

At the same time, participants acknowledged the influence of foreign popular culture. Most respondents indicated that they frequently encountered Korean popular culture, Western entertainment, and other international cultural products online. However, instead of rejecting foreign cultures, participants emphasized the importance of appreciating international diversity while maintaining Indonesian culture as the foundation of their identity. This balanced perspective reflects an understanding of cultural openness without cultural displacement.

These findings reinforce Castells' Network Society theory, which argues that identities are increasingly negotiated through digital communication networks. Rather than weakening cultural identity, participants demonstrated that responsible digital engagement can strengthen both religious identity and national identity when cultural content is actively consumed, interpreted, and shared. The findings also extend Ribble's concept of digital citizenship by illustrating that identity formation constitutes an important dimension of responsible participation in digital society.

Digital Cultural Engagement and Citizenship Education

The third theme illustrates how participants perceived digital media as an important environment for citizenship learning. All participants agreed that digital platforms provide opportunities not only to acquire cultural knowledge but also to develop civic competencies essential for democratic participation in contemporary society.

Participants consistently identified several citizenship values learned through their digital experiences, including tolerance, mutual respect, appreciation of diversity, social responsibility, nationalism, digital ethics, and critical thinking. One participant explained that digital media functions as *"a new public space where respectful communication and educational content represent good citizenship."* Another respondent argued that digital activities taught her to appreciate Indonesia's cultural diversity because she could observe traditions from regions that she had never visited directly. Digital literacy emerged as one of the strongest themes across all interviews. Participants repeatedly emphasized that responsible digital citizenship requires verifying information before sharing it online. Several respondents explained that they normally compared information using trusted sources, official government websites, scholarly publications, or reliable educational platforms before accepting cultural information as accurate. When encountering misinformation, participants reported refusing to redistribute false information and, where possible, correcting inaccurate claims politely in online discussions.

Participants further argued that future generations require several competencies to participate responsibly in digital society, including critical thinking, digital literacy, ethical communication, empathy, and the ability to distinguish reliable information from misinformation. These competencies correspond closely with Ribble's Digital Citizenship framework, particularly its emphasis on responsible online behavior, information literacy, and ethical participation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital engagement contributes to citizenship education not only by increasing civic knowledge but also by fostering democratic attitudes, responsible communication, and ethical participation within digital public spaces.

Digital Cultural Participation and National Sovereignty

The final theme demonstrates that participants perceived digital engagement with cultural heritage as contributing directly to national sovereignty. Rather than understanding sovereignty solely in political or territorial terms, respondents associated national sovereignty with the preservation, promotion, and international recognition of Indonesian cultural identity.

All participants agreed that introducing Indonesian culture through digital media strengthens Indonesia's international image because social media enables local traditions to reach global audiences rapidly. One participant explained that *"a single viral cultural post can reach millions of people around the world and improve Indonesia's international reputation."* Another respondent argued that digital documentation creates a permanent cultural archive that protects Indonesian traditions from being forgotten or claimed by other countries.

Despite these opportunities, participants also expressed concern regarding globalization. They observed that many young people increasingly consume foreign entertainment while paying less attention to local traditions. According to several respondents, local culture risks being perceived as outdated unless it is presented creatively through digital media. Consequently, participants argued that young people should become active content creators rather than passive consumers by producing innovative digital content that promotes Indonesian traditions, languages, cuisine, arts, and cultural values.

Participants further emphasized that preserving cultural sovereignty requires collaboration among government institutions, educational institutions, and civil society. Schools were expected to integrate cultural heritage with digital literacy and citizenship education, governments were expected to provide digital infrastructure and cultural preservation programs, and communities were encouraged to actively support digital campaigns promoting Indonesian culture. These recommendations indicate that cultural preservation should be viewed as a shared civic responsibility rather than solely a governmental obligation.

Taken together, these findings support UNESCO's conception of living cultural heritage while extending contemporary discussions on digital citizenship. The participants' experiences demonstrate that digital engagement simultaneously functions as cultural preservation, civic participation, identity construction, and nation-building. Consequently, citizenship education in Indonesia should move beyond conventional classroom instruction by integrating digital literacy, cultural heritage engagement, and participatory digital practices that prepare young citizens to preserve Indonesia's cultural sovereignty within an increasingly interconnected global society.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how young Muslim women engage with Indonesian cultural heritage through digital media and explored the implications of this engagement for citizenship education and national sovereignty. Drawing on a qualitative phenomenological approach, the findings demonstrate that digital media has become an important civic and cultural space in which participants access, interpret, and disseminate knowledge about Indonesian cultural heritage. Rather than functioning solely as consumers of online information, the participants actively utilized digital platforms to learn about traditional culture, share cultural content, and interact with diverse cultural communities, thereby strengthening their awareness of Indonesia's cultural diversity.

The findings further reveal that digital engagement contributes significantly to the construction of cultural identity and citizenship identity. Participants perceived their interactions with cultural content as reinforcing their identity as Muslim Indonesian women while encouraging greater appreciation of Indonesia's multicultural heritage. Digital media also facilitated connections with cultures from different regions, enabling participants to develop a stronger sense of national belonging despite geographical distance and the influence of globalization.

In terms of citizenship education, the study demonstrates that digital engagement promotes important civic competencies, including digital literacy, critical thinking, ethical communication, tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, and responsible participation in digital public spaces. These competencies indicate that citizenship education in the digital era should extend beyond conventional classroom instruction by integrating cultural heritage engagement with digital citizenship practices. Such an approach enables young citizens not only to understand democratic values but also to practice them through meaningful participation in digital environments.

Finally, the study shows that digital cultural engagement contributes to strengthening national sovereignty by supporting cultural preservation, enhancing Indonesia's international cultural visibility, and encouraging young people to become active promoters of local cultural heritage. Although participants recognized challenges arising from globalization, misinformation, and the dominance of foreign popular culture, they also viewed digital media as an effective instrument for safeguarding Indonesia's cultural identity when supported by digital literacy and collaborative efforts among government institutions, educational institutions, and society. Therefore, this study argues that integrating digital citizenship, cultural heritage education, and participatory digital practices provides an important strategy for preparing future generations to preserve Indonesia's cultural identity and strengthen national sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected digital world.

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