Research Article

Urbanization and Cultural Identity of Generation Z in Vietnam: Family, Lifestyle, and Digital Expression

Pham Ngoc Thanh[1*], Thanh Van Hung[1], Duong Duc Diep[1], Phuong Minh Nguyen[1]

[1] *Faculty of Social sciences & Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.*

Abstract: Urbanization in Vietnam has accelerated significantly over the past decades, transforming social and cultural dynamics in major cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. This rapid urban growth has influenced the lifestyles, values, and cultural identity of Generation Z (born 1997–2012), who navigate a tension between traditional Vietnamese values and contemporary urban culture. This study aims to examine how urbanization shapes family values, urban lifestyle trends, and the role of social media in forming cultural identity among urban Vietnamese youth. A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on 40 respondents aged 18–26 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and social media content analysis, and then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and variations across the two urban contexts. Findings indicate a significant shift in family values, with 45% of respondents adopting individualistic orientations and 68% reporting decreased family involvement, while 55% continue to preserve traditional values. Urban lifestyle trends include frequent visits to cultural cafés (78%), co-living arrangements (38%), and engagement in startups (28%), reflecting collaborative and creative urban practices. Social media plays a crucial role in expressing hybrid cultural identities, with 88% of respondents following global trends, 83% watching and sharing entertainment videos, and 73% sharing cultural content. These findings highlight the complex interplay between urbanization, lifestyle, family values, and digital platforms in shaping adaptive, hybrid identities. Future research should include longitudinal studies, cross-country comparisons within Southeast Asia, and digital ethnography to examine algorithmic influences on cultural preferences, identity formation, and online community dynamics.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Generation Z, Traditional Values, Urban Lifestyle, Urbanization.

1. Introduction

Urbanization in Vietnam has accelerated rapidly in recent decades, resulting in significant social and cultural transformations in urban society. The growth of major cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City has accelerated migration from rural areas, reshaped spatial dynamics, and fueled the emergence of modern lifestyles that differ from traditional values [1]. This phenomenon not only changes the physical structure of the city but also affects family relationships, social interactions, and the cultural identity of the younger generation.

In this context, Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) occupies a special position as "digital natives" who grow up alongside modernization and urbanization. They face a dilemma between maintaining traditional Vietnamese values and adopting a contemporary urban lifestyle supported by digital technology [2]. As a generation highly connected to digital platforms and social media, their mindsets, aspirations, and cultural identities are particularly susceptible to the social changes brought about by urbanization.

Furthermore, the transformation of Generation Z's lifestyle in major cities is reflected in trends such as co-living, cultural cafés, start-ups, and greater global cultural consumption. These changes indicate a shift in values from traditional family structures toward more individualistic and collaborative orientations [3]. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube play an increasingly dominant role in shaping how young people understand and articulate their cultural identity [4].

Despite academic interest in urbanization and the younger generation, there is still limited empirical research examining how urbanization affects the cultural identity of Generation Z in Vietnam, particularly regarding family values, urban lifestyles, and social media use. Questions such as "How do young people in big cities redefine tradition?", "To what extent is urbanization eroding family values?", and "How does social media shape their cultural identity?" remain insufficiently addressed in contemporary socio-cultural literature.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and understand changes in family values among Generation Z in urban Vietnam, examine modern lifestyle trends (including cultural cafés, co-living, and start-up culture), and explore the influence of social media on the formation of their cultural identity. The study focuses on two major cities i.e., Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City as a case study of urbanization representing the dynamics of modern socio-culture in Vietnam.

The significance of this study is substantial from both academic and practical perspectives. Academically, the findings can enrich the literature on urban sociology and anthropology in Southeast Asia, particularly regarding a digitally connected young generation strongly influenced by urbanization. Practically, the results can inform policymakers, community organizations, and cultural practitioners in developing strategies to strengthen traditional cultural identities while providing space for inclusive and sustainable modern lifestyles among urban youth.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Theory of Urbanization and Modernization

Urbanization is sociologically understood as a demographic and spatial process in which populations move from rural to urban areas, leading to changes in the social and cultural structure of society. This process encompasses not only physical migration but also economic transformation, infrastructure development, and shifts in social institutions. Research by Mai et al. (2025) suggests that urbanization in Vietnamese cities triggers socio-economic and cultural changes alongside rapid modernization, thereby shaping new social identities [11].

The classical theory of modernization assumes that traditional societies transition to modernity through industrialization, urbanization, education, and social rationalization. This process drives a shift from collective traditional values to individualistic and pragmatic values. Azizah, Budiwirman, and Akbar (2024) argue that modernization alters social norms, behavioral patterns, and technological systems in urban societies, making social interactions more rational and structured [12].

However, the relationship between urbanization and modernization is not always linear or homogeneous. In Vietnam, Duchère (2022) shows that modern urbanization has entered a "post-modern" phase, where urban structures and local politics shape the assimilation of modernity. This transformation involves negotiation between local traditional values and the demands of global modernity rather than full adoption of modernity without residual traditional influence [13].

Modernization often entails cultural shifts, including erosion of traditional values. Angkasawati (2024) observes that modernization increases individualism and materialism while altering community

cohesion. Traditional socio-cultural values, such as communal solidarity and customary rituals, are declining under the influence of technology, urbanization, and globalization [14].

In Vietnam, modernization also affects trust and the persistence of folk beliefs. Duc (2024) reports that while modernity encourages rationalization and education, folk practices are maintained in forms adapted to contemporary social and technological contexts. Local values are not entirely lost but reconstructed to align with modern urban conditions [15].

The political dimension adds further complexity. Nguyen, Vo, and Wei (2025) highlight that Vietnam's modernization agenda frames rural communities as "backward" and encourages migration. Nevertheless, rural populations adapt by creating new values that maintain local roots while leveraging modern opportunities [16].

2.2. Cultural Identity and Generation Z

Cultural identity refers to an individual's awareness of psychological and social attachment to traditional and modern heritage, norms, symbols, and community values. It is not static; rather, it forms through continuous interaction with the social environment and through processes of adaptation, resistance, and reconstruction. Younger generations, particularly Generation Z, navigate the intersection of local and global cultures, making their cultural identity a key focus of socio-cultural analysis.

In Vietnam, Generation Z exhibits a distinctive cultural identity. According to Cimigo, Vietnamese Gen Z is highly digitally connected and emphasizes self-identification over traditional family values [17]. They seek role models reflecting global aspirations while retaining local roots in lifestyle and self-expression. This indicates that Gen Z's cultural identity reinterprets rather than abandons traditional values.

Le Thi Hoai and Pham Thi Du (2025) show that personal values, social influences, and cultural media content strongly shape Gen Z's online behaviors, including e-commerce engagement. Trust in brands and self-expression promote positive consumer attitudes, while content reflecting Vietnamese culture fosters emotional connections [18]. Similarly, Choo, Lee, and Xie (2023) find that Vietnamese Gen Z integrates national and global identities, influencing their consumption of Korean lifestyle products [19].

Thi Huyen Duong Nguyen (2024) demonstrates that Vietnamese Gen Z harmonizes traditional values (e.g., patriotism, solidarity, compassion) with technology-driven contemporary norms, reflecting a hybrid cultural identity. Trends such as "flex di sản" ("showing off heritage") highlight how social media allows Gen Z to actively showcase and reinterpret cultural heritage [21]. Projects like "Nét Việt Nam" illustrate young people creatively preserving and promoting traditional cultural values through crafts, culinary arts, and folk performances in ways relevant to modern lifestyles [22].

Nevertheless, challenges exist. Thi Nguyen (2025) notes that digital engagement can disorient traditional cultural heritage, requiring urban youth to negotiate constantly between modern demands and cultural roots [23]. Overall, Generation Z's cultural identity in Vietnam is dynamic and hybrid, balancing global aspirations with local pride, using digital media for expression, and creatively maintaining traditional values.

2.3. Social Media and Cultural Transformation

Social media serves as a key platform for Vietnamese youth to express and reconstruct cultural identity. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Zalo provide spaces where traditional and modern values interact. For instance, Hanoi youth disseminate cultural content in accessible, viral formats that reinforce cultural awareness and pride [25].

Social media is strongly linked to psychological well-being and social identity. Nguyen, Cao Nguyen, and Vu (2025) report that adolescents use social media to maintain friendships and engage with communities, but overuse correlates with anxiety and stress [26]. Social media also functions as a creative medium, allowing young artists to merge traditional folk elements with modern musical styles, sustaining cultural roots while appealing to youth [27].

However, social media can have negative effects. Le Van Kien (2025) highlights that constant exposure to digital content can shift values toward materialism or globalized norms [28]. Echesony (2024) cautions that global exposure may lead to cultural homogenization, while still enabling youth to form online cultural communities that transcend local boundaries [29].

Moreover, social media supports formal cultural education and communication. Hanoi youth share cultural stories, traditions, and heritage through TikTok and Instagram, broadening engagement and reinforcing collective cultural understanding [30]. Vietnamese authorities and youth institutions

increasingly promote responsible online behavior to mitigate negative impacts and strengthen local cultural values [31]. Social media also facilitates the preservation of ethnic culture; for example, youth in Hoa Binh province use digital platforms to promote traditional dances, culinary practices, and local crafts [32]. These activities demonstrate that social media actively transforms, revives, and preserves cultural identity among Vietnamese youth.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research was to deeply understand the changes in family values, lifestyles, and cultural identities of Generation Z influenced by urbanization and social media in Vietnam's major cities. Case studies allow researchers to explore respondents' personal experiences and perspectives in their social and cultural contexts.

The research location was selected based on the characteristics of rapid urbanization and the concentration of the younger generation. The research was conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, two major cities with high economic growth, significant population migration, and the development of modern lifestyles seen in cultural cafes, co-living, and startup culture. Field observation and data collection will take place in early 2025.

The research subjects consisted of Generation Z who were 18–26 years old and lived in the urban areas of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The number of respondents totaled 40 people, consisting of:
1) 20 respondents in Hanoi: university students, young workers at startups, and participants of the city's cultural community.
2) 20 respondents in Ho Chi Minh City: creative workers, students, and managers of cultural or co-living cafes.

The selection of respondents used purposive sampling to ensure that each participant had first-hand experience related to urbanization, modern lifestyles, and the use of social media as a means of cultural expression.

Data is collected through several methods:
1) In-depth interviews with each respondent to explore their views on family values, lifestyle, and cultural identity.
2) Participatory observations, including observations of daily activities, social interactions in cultural cafes, co-living, and creative communities, to capture changes in behavior and social patterns.
3) Analyze social media content, specifically respondents' or their community's Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook accounts, to examine their representations of cultural identity, lifestyle expressions, and values.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This process includes:
1) Transcription of interviews and observation notes.
2) Initial coding to discover key themes related to family values, urban lifestyle trends, and expressions of cultural identity.
3) Identify patterns, relationships, and differences between respondents in two major cities.
4) Narrative preparation and interpretation

4. Finding and Discussion
4.1. Shifting Family Values

The results of the study showed that urbanization in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City has affected the family values of Generation Z. Among the 40 respondents, most reported changes in traditional family roles, such as a shift in economic responsibilities from parents to young people and reduced family involvement in personal decision-making. Additionally, relationships among family members have become more independent, while emotional bonds are still maintained.

Table 1 illustrates the dynamics of family values in Vietnam's two major cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The activity of "maintaining family traditions" remains dominant, with 55% of respondents indicating that, despite increased modernization, many urban individuals continue to value and nurture traditional practices passed down through generations. However, the data also show that 45% of

respondents are beginning to adopt individualistic values, signaling a shift toward personal freedom, individual achievement, and self-expression. The differences between the two cities are relatively small, reflecting a similar trend across Vietnam's urban society, where tradition and modernity coexist and influence one another.

Notably, the indicator "decreased family involvement" was reported by 68% of respondents, indicating a significant reduction in daily interaction and active engagement among family members. This trend reflects the impact of urbanization, high mobility, and professional pressures, which lead individuals to focus more on personal or social activities outside the nuclear family. The tension between maintaining tradition and declining family involvement highlights a transformation in family values from a collective structure to a more flexible and individualistic pattern, characteristic of modern urban society.

Table 1. Respondents' Perception of Shifting Family Values

Family Value Aspects	Hanoi (20)	Ho Chi Minh (20)	Total (%)
Maintaining family traditions	12	10	55%
Adopt individualistic values	8	10	45%
Family involvement decreased	14	13	68%

This shift aligns with the urbanization literature, which emphasizes the transition of values from collective to individualistic orientations. Big cities create a need for Generation Z to develop independence, while emotional bonds are still maintained as part of Vietnam's cultural identity.

4.2. New Lifestyle Trends

In-depth observations and interviews reveal emerging lifestyle trends among Generation Z, including co-living, cultural cafes, and participation in startup culture. These activities promote horizontal and collaborative social interactions, in contrast to the more hierarchical patterns of traditional communities.

This trend supports the idea that urbanization encourages collaborative and creative lifestyles, consistent with literature indicating that urban modernization shapes Generation Z's social behavior and career aspirations.

Table 1 presents urban lifestyle trends in Vietnam's two major cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, with 20 respondents from each city. The activity "visiting cultural cafes" shows the highest percentage, at 78%, with 16 respondents in Hanoi and 15 in Ho Chi Minh City. This indicates that cultural cafes are not merely places for relaxation, but also serve as social and creative spaces for urban communities. The high engagement in cultural cafes reflects both a strong interest in cultural experiences and a preference among the urban youth for environments that support social interaction and self-expression.

Table 2. Respondents' Participation in Urban Lifestyle Trends

Urban Lifestyle	Hanoi (20)	Ho Chi Minh (20)	Total (%)
Visit cultural cafes	16	15	78%
Living in co-living	7	8	38%
Get involved in startups	5	6	28%

The percentage of respondents participating in "co-living" activities is 38%, lower than that of cultural cafes. Although relatively low, this figure indicates a modern trend in urban housing, particularly among young professionals seeking flexibility, social networking, and cost efficiency. The difference between Hanoi (7 respondents) and Ho Chi Minh City (8 respondents) is relatively small, suggesting that the concept of co-living is beginning to gain acceptance in both cities, although it remains less popular than other lifestyles such as visiting cultural cafes.

Engagement in startups showed the lowest participation rate, at 28%, with 5 respondents in Hanoi and 6 in Ho Chi Minh City. This indicates that, while the entrepreneurial ecosystem is growing, it is still limited to certain segments of urban society. Factors contributing to this low participation may include financial risk, access to capital, experience, and individuals' readiness to engage in the dynamic startup environment. It also reflects that most urban youth currently prefer social or leisure activities over entrepreneurial risk-taking.

A comparison among the three categories reveals a hierarchy of interests in urban lifestyles. "Visiting cultural cafes" dominates as the primary activity, while "living in co-living" and "engaging in startups" are secondary activities, appealing to more specific segments of the population. This pattern reflects urbanization trends in Vietnam, where social interaction, cultural engagement, and community experiences are top priorities, while innovation and entrepreneurship are still gradually developing.

Overall, the data describe an urban lifestyle that emphasizes social and cultural experiences, with emerging modern trends in housing and growing entrepreneurial interests. Although the differences between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are relatively minor, they suggest a degree of homogeneity in urban trends: young people prioritize creative and social engagement, while opportunities for alternative lifestyles, such as co-living and entrepreneurship, remain open for further development.

4.3. Social Media Influence

Data from social media content analysis (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook) and in-depth interviews indicate that social media shapes the cultural identity, tastes, and opinions of Generation Z. Digital platforms serve as the main medium for expressing lifestyles, sharing experiences, and adopting global trends.

Social media acts as a tool for expressing hybrid cultural identities, allowing Generation Z to integrate local values with global influences. This aligns with literature emphasizing the role of social media in the cultural transformation of the younger generation.

Table 3 shows that the most common social media activity among respondents was following global trends (88%), followed by watching and sharing entertainment videos (83%) and participating in online communities (78%). These findings indicate that Generation Z in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is highly exposed to digital globalization, actively engaging with both local and international content. This demonstrates a broad cultural orientation and strong adaptability to digital change, highlighting the key role of social media in shaping their identities and preferences.

Table 3. Respondents' Social Media Activities

Social Media Activity	Hanoi (20)	Ho Chi Minh (20)	Total (%)
Share cultural content	14	15	73%
Keeping up with global trends	17	18	88%
Online community interaction	15	16	78%
Watch and share entertainment videos	16	17	83%
Create your own creative content	12	14	65%

The activity of sharing cultural content reached 73%, while creating original content was relatively lower, at 65%. This difference suggests that although younger generations are interested in both local and global cultures, they are more likely to act as curators of content than creators of original material. This highlights a tendency toward consumption on social media, where interaction and dissemination of information dominate over creative production. Additionally, the small differences between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City indicate a relatively uniform pattern of digital behavior across the two major cities, although Ho Chi Minh shows a slight advantage in creative activities.

Overall, these data suggest that social media functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as a platform for social interaction and cultural learning. The high engagement in following global trends and watching entertainment videos indicates that the primary motivations for social media use are social-psychological—seeking information, entertainment, and recognition from the online community. Meanwhile, the lower proportion of creative content creation reveals untapped potential

for developing expressive and innovative skills. Thus, digital education strategies or creativity development programs could be implemented to enhance active participation in producing culturally valuable content.

4.4. Discussion

Thematic analysis demonstrates a close relationship between urbanization, lifestyle trends, family values, and cultural identity. Urbanization affects not only infrastructure and urban planning but also the mindsets and behaviors of individuals, particularly Generation Z. Life in large cities presents both challenges and opportunities, encouraging independence, flexibility, and the adoption of modern lifestyles that are open to new social and cultural experiences. This is reflected in their preferences for cultural cafes, co-living, and participation in creative communities, which have become symbols of urban lifestyle.

Changing family values represent an important dimension of this social transformation. While traditional values remain important, the data indicate an increase in individualistic orientations and a decrease in family involvement in daily life. This trend suggests that urban pressures and high mobility compel Generation Z to balance family responsibilities with personal needs. This shift does not imply a complete abandonment of tradition but rather an adaptation to urban realities and modern demands.

Urban lifestyles and the adoption of individualistic values are also expressed through social media. Digital platforms serve as primary spaces for interaction, self-expression, and cultural identity formation. Social media allows young people to maintain social connections while expressing personal aspirations and creativity, reflecting hybrid values that integrate modernity with tradition. In other words, social media amplifies the impact of urbanization on cultural identity and acts as a catalyst for lifestyle transformation.

The integration of shifting values, lifestyles, and social media reflects a complex synergistic pattern. Urbanization fosters self-reliance and collaborative lifestyles, which are then expressed through digital activities and online community engagement. This process produces flexible cultural identities, enabling individuals to navigate local traditions and global trends simultaneously. Generation Z serves as a bridge between traditional values and modernity, blending local elements with global influences through digital interaction.

From a social and cultural perspective, urbanization is not merely a physical phenomenon but also a driver of changes in values and behaviors. Generation Z adapts to global pressures, personal aspirations, and social interactions in a dynamic urban context. They develop adaptive strategies, use social media as a medium of expression, and maintain ties to tradition through flexible means. This phenomenon illustrates the complexity of urban lifestyles and the role of digital technology in shaping the identities of the younger generation.

In conclusion, these findings underscore how urbanization, lifestyle, family values, and social media collectively shape a hybrid cultural identity for Generation Z: simultaneously local and modern. This transformation demonstrates that urban youth can balance tradition with modernity, use digital media for self-expression, and navigate the challenges of city life. Consequently, the cultural identity of this generation is adaptive, dynamic, and open to social and cultural innovation, marking an evolution in urban values and lifestyles in contemporary Vietnamese society.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that urbanization significantly impacts family values, lifestyle patterns, and cultural expression among Generation Z in Vietnam. Although some respondents continue to uphold family traditions (55%), there is a strong trend toward individualistic values (45%) and decreased family involvement (68%). This shift confirms that the fast pace of urban life, professional demands, and increasing independence are transforming family structures from collective models to more flexible, individualized forms. Nevertheless, emotional bonds and core family values are maintained, reflecting the adaptation of traditions to modern contexts.

Regarding lifestyle, Generation Z in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is embracing new practices such as cultural cafes, co-living, and startup activities, reflecting orientations toward creativity, collaboration, and self-expression. Social media functions as a central medium connecting these changes in values and lifestyle trends. High engagement in following global trends (88%), interacting in online communities (78%), and sharing cultural content (73%) indicates that Generation Z's cultural identity is now hybrid, integrating both local and global elements. Urbanization and digitalization work synergistically to shape

the identities of this generation, enabling them to navigate tradition and modernity through urban and digital experiences.

These findings provide avenues for further research. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how shifting family values and lifestyle patterns evolve as Generation Z ages and faces increasing urban pressures. Second, comparative studies across Southeast Asia could reveal whether the patterns of cultural hybridization observed in Vietnam are unique or part of broader regional trends. Third, in-depth digital ethnography could examine how social media algorithms shape cultural preferences, self-identity, and online community dynamics among younger generations. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of cultural identity in the era of urbanization and digitalization.

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