

# Exploring Cultural Identity Through Profile Pictures: The Use of Cultural Symbols by Chinese Gen Z on Social Media

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## Abstract

**In the digital age, social media has become an essential platform for self-expression and cultural identity, particularly among Generation Z in China. This study explores how Chinese Gen Z individuals utilize cultural symbols in their social media profile pictures to convey their cultural identities. Through in-depth interviews with 48 participants aged 13 to 28, the research identifies a diverse range of cultural elements, including traditional motifs and modern pop culture symbols, that reflect their cultural heritage and contemporary influences. The findings reveal that profile pictures serve not only as personal representations but also as tools for social connection and cultural expression. Participants often blend traditional and modern elements, showcasing a dynamic understanding of their cultural identities shaped by globalization and digital interactions. This research contributes to the existing literature on social media and cultural identity by highlighting the significance of profile pictures in the identity construction process of Chinese Gen Z, emphasizing the interplay between cultural heritage and modernity in their self-presentation. The study concludes by suggesting avenues for future research on cultural identity in the context of rapidly evolving social media landscapes.**

## Keywords

**Cultural Identity, Chinese Gen Z, Social Media, Profile Pictures.**

## 1. Introduction

In the digital age, social media has become an indispensable part of daily life, especially among Generation Z. Social media serves not only as a platform for information exchange but also as an important venue for cultural identity and self-expression. Through social media, Generation Z users can showcase their personalities, interests, and cultural backgrounds, forming unique online identities. Profile pictures, as a key element of self-presentation on social media, carry individuals' cultural identities, sense of social belonging, and personal psychological states. Therefore, the choice of profile picture not only reflects users' personal preferences but also embodies their understanding and expression of cultural identity<sup>[1]</sup>.

Globally, the selection of social media profile pictures is influenced by various factors, including social and cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and a sense of group belonging. Research indicates that users often tend to choose symbols and elements that represent their cultural identities when selecting profile pictures. This choice is not only a means of personal expression but also reflects the importance of cultural identity in social environments<sup>[2]</sup>. However, despite existing studies exploring how social media affects the expression of cultural identity, research specifically examining the cultural symbols and elements used by Chinese Generation Z in their social media profile pictures remains relatively limited.

As a country with a rich cultural tradition and diverse social background, the cultural identity of Chinese Generation Z presents unique characteristics in the context of globalization and

digitization. With the widespread use of social media, Chinese Generation Z's choices of profile pictures are influenced not only by traditional culture but also by the impacts of modern pop culture and global culture. Therefore, understanding how they express cultural identity through profile pictures on social media is of significant importance for exploring the relationship between social media and cultural identity.

Based on this background, the study aims to investigate which cultural symbols and elements are most commonly used by Chinese Generation Z to express their cultural identities when selecting social media profile pictures. By identifying and analyzing the meanings of these symbols in cultural identity, the research will fill gaps in the current literature and provide new perspectives for understanding the cultural expressions of Chinese Generation Z in the digital age.

This study will be divided into five main parts. First, the literature review will explore the relationship between social media and cultural identity, analyzing the cultural significance of profile pictures and the characteristics of cultural identity among Generation Z in China. Secondly, the research methodology section will detail the interview method employed in this study, including participant selection, the implementation process of the interviews, and the methods for data collection and analysis. Next, the results section will present the cultural symbols and elements used by participants in their selection of social media profile pictures and analyze the practical significance of these choices in expressing cultural identity. Subsequently, the discussion section will relate the research findings to existing literature, exploring the role of social media profile pictures in cultural identity and their impact on the identity construction of Generation Z. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main findings of the study, emphasizing the importance of social media in contemporary cultural communication and suggesting directions for future research. Through this structured arrangement, this paper aims to delve deeply into how Chinese Generation Z expresses its cultural identity through social media profile pictures in the digital age.

## 2. Literature Review

In the context of digitization and globalization, social media has become an important platform for expressing cultural identity. Social media not only changes the way people communicate but also profoundly influences individual self-presentation and cultural identity, especially among Generation Z. Social media profile pictures, as a key component of users' online identities, carry rich cultural information and personal significance. The following literature review will discuss the relationship between social media and cultural identity, the cultural significance of profile pictures, and the cultural identity of Chinese Generation Z.

### 2.1. Social Media and Cultural Identity

The rise of social media has transformed the ways people communicate and express themselves. Social media serves not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a space for constructing cultural identity. According to Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, individuals build their self-concept through identification with specific groups<sup>[3]</sup>. On social media, Generation Z users showcase their cultural identities and sense of belonging by selecting specific profile pictures, backgrounds, and content. The characteristics of social media platforms (such as interactivity and visualization) allow users to express and reshape their cultural identities more freely. Research indicates that the interactivity of social media not only facilitates communication among users but also enhances their cognition and understanding of cultural identity<sup>[4]</sup>. For instance, Generation Z users actively participate in climate change movements on social media, sharing their views and personal experiences regarding ecological preservation. This interaction strengthens their social connections and reinforces their identification with environmental cultural identity<sup>[5]</sup>.

Moreover, the visual characteristics of social media make the expression of cultural identity more direct and vivid. Users can display their cultural backgrounds and personal stories through various forms, including images, videos, and text. This diverse mode of expression enriches and complicates the process of constructing cultural identity. As a core element of this expression, profile pictures become an important tool for users to showcase their selves and cultural identities. Studies have found that cultural identity on social media is not only an individual's self-expression but also a reflection of group culture. When Generation Z users choose profile pictures and other visual elements, they are often influenced by group norms and cultural trends<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2.2. The Cultural Significance of Profile Pictures

Profile pictures, as an important element of self-presentation for social media users, carry individuals' cultural symbols and social information. The choice of profile picture not only reflects personal aesthetic preferences but also embodies cultural backgrounds and social identities<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, many Generation Z users tend to use traditional cultural elements (such as ethnic costumes and traditional patterns) as their profile pictures to express their identification with their cultural roots. This choice is not only a sign of respect for traditional culture but also reinforces personal identity. At the same time, the influence of modern pop culture encourages Generation Z to use popular symbols and images to construct their online identities. This mixed use of cultural symbols reflects the complex understanding of cultural identity among contemporary youth in the context of globalization<sup>[8]</sup>.

The cultural significance of profile pictures is also reflected in the social information they convey. Research indicates that profile pictures are not only symbols of personal identity but also representations of social status and cultural capital. When Generation Z users choose profile pictures, they often consider their image and influence within social networks. For instance, using images of celebrities, popular cultural symbols, or socially meaningful visuals as profile pictures can enhance users' visibility and influence on social media. This phenomenon is particularly evident among Generation Z, who are more inclined to showcase their personalities and social identities through their profile pictures to attract the attention and recognition of their peers<sup>[9]</sup>. Therefore, profile pictures are not only tools for personal expression but also strategies for social interaction, reflecting users' pursuits of identity and status within social networks.

## 2.3. Cultural Identity of Chinese Generation Z

In China, the cultural identity of Generation Z is influenced by both traditional and modern cultures. With the widespread use of social media, Chinese Generation Z exhibits diverse cultural expressions in their choice of profile pictures. Many young people showcase their identification with traditional culture through their social media profile pictures while also incorporating elements of modern pop culture. For instance, using profile pictures that feature ethnic characteristics not only demonstrates respect for traditional culture but also reinforces personal identity. Additionally, the influence of globalization has made it easier for Chinese Generation Z to access external cultures, which is reflected in their choice of profile pictures. An increasing number of young people are using foreign cultural symbols in their profile pictures, reflecting their openness and diversity in cultural identity<sup>[10]</sup>.

Research has also found that Chinese Generation Z shows a high degree of acceptance of cultural hybridity in their social media profile pictures. They are not only willing to display elements of traditional culture but also actively integrate Western pop culture and other cultural symbols. This phenomenon of cultural mixing indicates that young people's cultural identities in the context of globalization are dynamic and fluid, rather than fixed and unchanging. Through social media, Generation Z can choose and combine different cultures, thereby forming unique cultural identities<sup>[11]</sup>. This fluidity and diversity of identity enable them

to better adapt to the rapidly changing social environment, while also providing a broader space for their cultural identity.

In summary, social media profile pictures play an important role in the expression of cultural identity. Although existing research has explored the relationship between social media and cultural identity, studies specifically examining the cultural symbols and elements used by Chinese Generation Z in their social media profile pictures remain relatively limited. Therefore, a deeper exploration of this topic will provide new perspectives for understanding the cultural expressions of Chinese Generation Z in the digital age and fill gaps in the existing literature.

### 3. Method

This study employs interviews for data collection to explore the cultural symbols and elements used by Chinese Generation Z when selecting social media profile pictures. Participants were recruited online to ensure diversity and representativeness in the sample. The specific research methods are as follows.

#### 3.1. Selection of Participants

The participants in this study are members of Chinese Generation Z, specifically aged 13 to 28 (born between 1997 and 2012). To ensure a diverse sample, the researcher posted recruitment information on social media platforms (such as Weibo, WeChat, QQ), inviting participants from different geographical locations and cultural backgrounds to voluntarily sign up for the interviews. The recruitment information clearly stated that participants from both urban and rural areas were welcome, encouraging them to share their unique cultural perspectives. Ultimately, 48 participants were recruited, including 20 males and 28 females, from various provinces in China, including the eastern coastal regions (such as Shanghai and Guangdong), central regions (such as Henan and Hubei), and western regions (such as Sichuan and Yunnan), covering different urban and rural backgrounds. Additionally, the participants' educational levels varied, including both university students and young professionals, providing a more comprehensive perspective for the study. This sample structure enhances the representativeness of the research, making the findings more reflective of the cultural expressions of Chinese Generation Z in their choice of social media profile pictures.

#### 3.2. Implementation of Interviews

The interviews were conducted online using Tencent Meeting for real-time communication. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and focused on the following themes to directly address the research questions:

- The cultural symbols and elements participants use when selecting social media profile pictures
- Specific examples of how various cultural symbols and elements are expressed in participants' cultural identity
- Participants' personal understandings of these cultural symbols and elements and the cultural meanings they represent
- Participants' views on the role of social media profile pictures in cultural identity

Before starting the interviews, the researcher provided participants with detailed information about the study's purpose and content and obtained informed consent. To ensure the validity and relevance of the interview questions, the researcher referenced relevant literature while designing the questions, particularly focusing on research findings related to social media and cultural identity. Additionally, the researcher conducted pilot interviews to test the clarity and applicability of the questions, ensuring they could guide participants to think deeply and express their views. Feedback from the pilot interviews helped the researcher adjust the

wording of the questions to make them more targeted and understandable. All interviews were completed between February 10 and March 31, 2025, ensuring participants could express their views in a relaxed environment to collect more representative data.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

During the interviews, the researcher recorded participants' responses and subsequently transcribed them verbatim. The transcription texts were subjected to thematic analysis to identify the specific cultural symbols and elements participants used in selecting social media profile pictures and how these symbols and elements reflect their cultural identities. The researcher paid particular attention to the types of cultural symbols mentioned by participants and the cultural meanings behind them, providing in-depth insights into the cultural expressions of Generation Z in their choice of social media profile pictures.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, the researcher strictly adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure participants' privacy and the confidentiality of their data. All participants signed informed consent forms before the interviews, clearly informing them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Furthermore, the research findings will be published without revealing participants' identities to protect their personal information.

Through these methods, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the role of social media profile pictures in the cultural identity of Chinese Generation Z, exploring the underlying cultural and social factors. The study will next present the interview results and analyze the cultural symbols used by participants in selecting social media profile pictures and their impact on cultural identity.

## 4. Findings

This study conducted in-depth interviews with 48 participants from Chinese Generation Z (aged 13 to 28) to explore the cultural symbols and elements they use when selecting profile pictures on social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, as well as the actual significance of these choices in their cultural identity expression. Participants' feedback revealed that social media profile pictures are not merely a display of personal image but also an important reflection of cultural identity and social connections.

### 4.1. Use of Cultural Symbols and Elements

Participants exhibited a wide usage of diverse cultural symbols and elements when selecting their social media profile pictures. Among these, the use of traditional cultural elements was particularly prominent. Many participants preferred to use images of themselves in ethnic clothing or traditional cultural patterns as profile pictures to express their appreciation for their cultural roots. Participant 5 (23 years old) stated, "My profile picture is a photo of me wearing Hanfu, and it's really interesting. Every time I post this picture, my friends ask me about this Hanfu. Honestly, I don't think it's old-fashioned at all; I actually think it's cool. It represents my cultural foundation and makes me feel connected to Chinese traditions. We live in a fast-paced era, and being able to showcase culture in this way truly makes me proud."

At the same time, the traditional symbols and elements used in profile pictures often carry personal and familial history and memories. Participant 17 (25 years old) chose a profile picture featuring plum blossom elements, explaining, "The plum blossom symbolizes resilience and strength, and it reminds me of my parents' struggles during difficult times." This choice of profile picture reflects a close connection between personal emotional memories and cultural heritage, linking individual life experiences with traditional cultural meanings.

Moreover, modern pop culture symbols also play a significant role in profile picture selection. Participant 12 (14 years old) shared, "I like to use my idol as my profile picture. She is a pop singer, and every time I see her picture, it brightens my mood! This kind of profile picture gives me a sense of belonging and makes me feel like I'm 'with her.' Plus, when everyone sees this picture, we can talk about her new album and performances, which easily sparks conversations. I think it's a great way to express myself!"

In this regard, some participants also mentioned their use of popular emojis, internet memes, or distinctive illustrations in their profile pictures to showcase their awareness of current social trends. Participant 28 (18 years old) revealed, "My profile picture is a funny internet meme, which not only represents my humorous personality but also brings laughter to my friends. When they see it, they comment, and we interact more frequently." This choice helps to foster lighthearted communication in the digital environment, reflecting young people's understanding and adaptation to social interaction patterns.

When discussing personalization and emotional expression, a considerable number of participants chose to use selfies or pictures of their pets as profile pictures. Participant 40 (21 years old) stated, "My profile picture is a photo of me with my dog, which makes me feel more authentic and resonates with my friends." This not only showcases personal life status but also reflects the importance of contemporary youth's pursuit of authentic selves and emotional connections. Through such choices of profile pictures, participants can display their genuine feelings and lifestyles on social media, enhancing their relatability.

#### **4.2. The Cultural Identity Function of Social Media Profile Pictures**

Participants generally believe that the role of social media profile pictures in cultural identity should not be underestimated. First and foremost, profile pictures are viewed as an important tool for identity presentation. Participant 15 (24 years old) noted, "On social media, a profile picture is like a business card that allows others to gain a preliminary understanding of me in just a few seconds." This intuitive identity presentation function enables users to quickly establish social connections, and the choice of profile picture becomes an effective way for them to express their cultural backgrounds in digital spaces.

The uniqueness of profile pictures allows participants to stand out in a crowded environment. Many expressed that the visual impact of their profile pictures often serves as the first step in sparking conversations. Participant 3 (20 years old) mentioned, "I use bright colors and unique designs in my profile picture, which makes me stand out among my friends. My friends often joke that my profile picture sparks light around me!" Such distinctive profile pictures not only catch friends' attention but also showcase his personality of pursuing innovation and uniqueness.

Secondly, social media profile pictures significantly represent a sense of group belonging. Many Generation Z participants believe that profile pictures are not only for personal display but also reflect an identification with specific communities. Participant 24 (19 years old) stated, "My profile picture is a popular cartoon character, which makes it easier for me to resonate with my peers. Everyone uses profile pictures like this, which indicates we share cultural commonalities." This highlights the power of shared cultural symbols; the choice of profile picture helps participants form a stable sense of community and belonging in digital social contexts.

This sense of community is built upon shared interests and lifestyles. Participants often strengthen their interactions with friends by uploading and sharing these profile pictures, forming a consensus on a certain "cultural trend." For instance, Participant 36 (22 years old) pointed out, "My friends and I frequently discuss the latest anime profile pictures, debating whose is the most interesting, and we recommend them to each other. This makes our

connections not only based on real life but also on our shared digital lives." This formation of social atmosphere further deepens friendships and understanding between individuals.

Additionally, the choice of profile picture plays an important role in fostering emotional connections. Participant 48 (23 years old) mentioned, "When I use a funny meme as my profile picture, many friends comment, 'This profile picture is so cute,' which gives us a lighthearted opening for conversation and makes communication easier." Through this sense of humor, profile pictures enrich the layers of social interaction, making exchanges more relaxed and natural, further promoting connections among friends.

### 4.3. The Dynamics and Diversity of Cultural Identity

A closer analysis of the motivations behind participants' choices of profile pictures reveals the complex dynamics of cultural identity among Chinese Generation Z. Members of Generation Z navigate between traditional and modern cultures, and their identity recognition is often fluid and blended, reflecting a profound connection to the context of globalization. This generation not only inherits thousands of years of traditional culture but also actively embraces and absorbs cultural elements from around the world in the fast-paced development of the information age.

Many participants skillfully integrated traditional and modern elements in their profile pictures. Participant 38 (27 years old) chose an image that combines classical art with modern design, explaining, "I like to merge traditional blue-and-white porcelain patterns with modern vector designs. This approach allows me to express respect for my culture while also showing that I am someone who keeps up with the times." This choice reflects not only personal aesthetics but also an acknowledgment of the dynamic characteristics of culture. Her decision showcases the intertwining of history and modernity in her life, reflecting her understanding and acceptance of a multicultural identity.

Additionally, many participants expressed their recognition of the phenomenon of "mixed culture." Participant 1 (24 years old) mentioned that he chose a profile picture featuring popular elements with ethnic characteristics. This profile picture incorporates inspirations drawn from various cultures: "The profile picture I use combines traditional embroidery with modern expressions, which not only reflects my ethnic background but also represents my love for contemporary trends." This choice highlights his construction of personal identity in a globalized environment, emphasizing that cultural mixing is not only acceptable but also something to be actively pursued.

At the same time, Generation Z young people are aware that their cultural identities are influenced by social environments and personal experiences. Participant 42 (26 years old) remarked, "I come from a multi-ethnic region, so I use traditional cultural patterns from my ethnic group on social media. However, as I have been exposed to more external cultures, I've found resonance in these cultural elements. This has made me realize that my identity is not limited to one culture but is part of a larger cultural context." This indicates that the dynamic nature of cultural identity is closely related to personal experiences and social environments. The collision and fusion of multiple cultures mean that Generation Z normalizes the acceptance of diversity in constructing their self-recognition.

Moreover, the digital age's social media provides new platforms for expressing Generation Z's cultural identities. Participant 14 (21 years old) stated, "On Douyin, I see many young people using profile pictures to showcase their acceptance and integration of different cultures. Some combine Hanfu with modern fashion in short videos, which makes me feel that culture is alive and continuously evolving in its display." This attitude not only demonstrates the new generation's respect for traditional culture but also shows their openness and innovative spirit. With the popularity of social media, the forms of cultural identity expression have become more

diverse, allowing everyone to find their place within a broad cultural network through personalized profile pictures and content.

This cultural phenomenon of Generation Z is not only occurring in China but is also evident globally. Under the impact of globalization, young people interact with the cultures of other countries through social media, deepening their understanding and recognition of their own cultural identities. This dynamism and diversity are reflected not only in their choice of profile pictures but also in their lifestyles, values, and perspectives on society. For example, some young people choose to pair international brand clothing with traditional accessories, creating a unique cross-cultural identity that further highlights the importance of global culture in individual identity construction<sup>[12]</sup>.

In summary, the construction of cultural identity among Chinese Generation Z is a dynamic and continuously evolving process. The cultural recognition system of this generation is influenced not only by the various cultural elements they embrace but also by profound social changes and personal experiences. Research focused on profile pictures indicates that Generation Z's recognition of cultural mixing is an attempt to redefine identity in the context of globalization. This shaping of self-identity encourages young people to explore, integrate, and innovate continuously in the digital age, injecting new vitality and possibilities into the diversity of global culture.

This study reveals the significance of social media profile pictures in the cultural identity of Chinese Generation Z. Profile pictures not only reflect individual cultural identities but also illustrate the complexities of social interaction. Through the selection and expression of cultural symbols, participants demonstrate their recognition and integration of both traditional and modern cultures. These findings provide important insights for understanding the cultural expressions of Chinese youth in today's digital age and enrich the literature on the relationship between social media and cultural identity. This research lays a foundation for future studies, especially in the context of rapid changes in cross-cultural communication and identity recognition, offering valuable insights.

## 5. Discussion

This study aims to explore the cultural symbols and elements used by Chinese Generation Z when selecting social media profile pictures, as well as the connection between these symbols and identity recognition. Through interviews with 48 young participants, we found that profile pictures are not only a means of personal expression but also an important tool for cultural identity, social connection, and self-presentation. This finding resonates with relevant literature, emphasizing the significance of the digital age in the construction of identity<sup>[13]</sup>.

### 5.1. Diversity of Cultural Identity

This study demonstrates the trend among participants to blend traditional and modern elements in their choice of profile pictures, reflecting Generation Z's dynamic understanding of cultural identity. In the face of globalization, Generation Z's use of traditional cultural elements such as Hanfu alongside modern pop symbols indicates their efforts to seek a harmonious coexistence between physical and spiritual aspects of cultural identity. This phenomenon parallels Appadurai's concept of "the fragmentation of ethnic identity" and shows that young people are increasingly inclined toward diversity and personalization in shaping their identities<sup>[13][15]</sup>.

The phenomenon of "mixed culture" among participants not only fosters their recognition and sense of belonging to their own culture but also allows them to showcase unique identities on digital platforms. This indicates that modern youth are not only carriers of traditional culture but also its innovators. Many young people breathe new life into traditional culture by

integrating traditional elements with modern lifestyles through social media. As cultural scholar Joseph Nye states, "Cultural diffusion and innovation are not one-way; they are interactive and dynamic processes"<sup>[14]</sup>. In this way, modern youth actively participate in cultural creation at the intersection of globalization and local culture, redefining their cultural identities.

## 5.2. Social Media and Identity Construction

The research findings indicate that social media profile pictures serve as tools for identity presentation, establishing emotional connections and community recognition among participants. When choosing profile pictures, participants often view them as a way to showcase their personalities and enhance social interactions. This phenomenon aligns with Sherry Turkle's viewpoint, which asserts that self-presentation in digital spaces has become an essential component of modern interpersonal interactions<sup>[15]</sup>.

Social media platforms provide Generation Z with a new social space that allows them to absorb and disseminate culture within their social circles. This dissemination is not limited to individual levels; it also promotes broader cultural exchange and interaction. For example, many participants form a shared cultural context by using popular anime characters or internet celebrities as their profile pictures, further strengthening connections among peers. This sense of community established through profile picture choices also reflects Tönnies' theory of "Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft," which posits that interpersonal relationships in modern society are gradually transitioning toward more complex social structures<sup>[16]</sup>.

## 5.3. Profile Picture Choices and Emotional Expression

In the interviews, most participants highlighted the importance of profile pictures in emotional expression. People use specific profile pictures to convey emotions, personalities, and life statuses. This finding resonates with Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation in "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," where Goffman emphasizes the "front-stage behavior" individuals exhibit in social interactions, namely the images and performances displayed in public settings<sup>[17]</sup>. Participants created a relaxed and enjoyable social atmosphere through humorous profile pictures and photos with pets, which not only enhanced their connections but also made individuals appear more authentic and approachable on social media.

Moreover, the role of profile pictures in emotional communication is also reflected in interactions with friends. Many participants found that using personalized profile pictures made it easier to attract friends with similar interests, thereby increasing the frequency and quality of social interactions. In this way, profile pictures become a medium for emotional connections, highlighting the need for people to maintain and strengthen their social networks through digital tools<sup>[16]</sup>.

## 5.4. Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

Although this study provides an in-depth analysis of cultural identity among Chinese Generation Z, limitations still exist. While this research focuses on the cultural symbolic significance of social media profile pictures, comparing the differences in profile picture expressions across different social media platforms remains an area for further exploration. Additionally, considering the rapid development of social media platforms, future research should also examine the impact of emerging platforms on cultural expression and identity construction.

In summary, the choice of profile pictures by Generation Z on social media reflects deeper complexities of cultural recognition and self-presentation. Profile pictures not only embody personal identities but also serve as important carriers of cultural exchange and emotional expression. Through this study, we gain a better understanding of how contemporary youth

shape their identities in the digital age, while also providing new perspectives and insights for future research.

## 6. Conclusion

This study delves into how Chinese Generation Z expresses cultural identity through profile pictures on social media, revealing the complex and dynamic relationship this generation has with its cultural identity. The findings indicate that social media profile pictures are not only essential tools for individual self-expression but also key carriers of cultural exchange and social connections. Through the selection of symbols and elements in their profile pictures, Generation Z continuously explores, reshapes, and showcases their cultural identities, demonstrating their diverse understanding and acceptance of cultural identity in the context of globalization.

The main findings of this study include: firstly, participants widely use traditional cultural symbols and modern elements in their profile pictures, reflecting an emphasis on cultural roots and an acceptance of emerging cultural trends. Secondly, the choice of profile pictures significantly influences participants' social interactions, enhancing their identity recognition and sense of belonging within social networks. Additionally, the research shows that social media platforms provide Generation Z in China with a flexible space to choose, innovate, and blend between traditional and modern cultures, thereby forming unique cultural identities.

Future research could further explore the differences in profile picture expression across different social media platforms and how these differences impact the formation of cultural identity. Moreover, while this study focuses on Chinese Generation Z, similar research could be expanded to other cultures and regions to investigate the commonalities and diversities of global cultural identity. Through these studies, academia can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the younger generation expresses culture in the digital age and its impact on society. Overall, this research provides new perspectives for understanding the construction of cultural identity among Chinese Generation Z and emphasizes the importance of social media in contemporary cultural exchange.

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