

Crisis and Strategy: National Identity Education for Teenagers in the Digital Age

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In the digital age of complex information and numerous temptations, how to effectively guide young people to establish a correct view of national identity and profound patriotism has become an urgent concern. As the future and hope of the country, young people shoulder the lofty mission of carrying forward patriotic feelings, casting the soul of the nation, inheriting the root of culture, and remembering the weight of history. However, the road of national identity education for young people is facing multiple difficulties, such as global culture shock, complex influence of the Internet, shackles of traditional educational thinking, and mixed environment of Internet education. Therefore, in order to solve this dilemma, we should strengthen patriotic education, guided by core values, and shape the patriotic spirit of young people; Innovate the education model, dig deep and inherit the excellent Chinese culture, so that young people can grow up with the nourishment of culture; Work with schools, families, society, and other diverse subjects to broaden the path of national identity education; To enhance the connotation of education, enrich interactive experience activities, and stimulate young people's interest in learning and patriotic feelings; At the same time, purify the network ecology, cultivate the digital literacy of young people, so that they can distinguish right from wrong in the digital world, so as to build a solid foundation for young people's national identity, and effectively improve the practical effectiveness of national identity education.

Keywords: digital age, teenagers, national identity education, realistic dilemma, practical path

The digital age, characterized by transformative advancements in information technology and internet evolution, marks a pivotal phase in human civilization where 5G networks, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and blockchain technologies have accelerated China's rapid transition into an era of ubiquitous connectivity. As digital natives inherently adept with emerging technologies, contemporary youth emerge as both pioneers shaping digital lifestyles and primary adopters of innovative digital platforms. This critical developmental phase coinciding with adolescence—a formative period for identity construction and value system formation—positions young citizens as crucial contributors to realizing China's Second Centenary Goals and National Rejuvenation (Liu, 2024). However, their cognitive development faces dual challenges: the global convergence of cultural ideologies and the overwhelming influx of hypermediated information (Zhu & Ren, 2020). The digital

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ecosystem exposes them to competing value paradigms through algorithmically amplified content, symbolic representations in virtual environments, and complex online social dynamics, potentially influencing their self-conceptualization through media-driven narratives (Fang, Chang, & Yu, 2023). Within this context, targeted national identity education serves as vital infrastructure to cultivate critical digital citizenship—empowering youth to navigate cross-cultural information flows while developing resilient patriotic convictions (Zhao, 2018). By fostering conscious resistance to value-distorting media influences and enhancing ideological discernment, such educational initiatives ensure the maintenance of cultural sovereignty and the preservation of core socialist values amidst globalized digital interactions.

At present, the academic research on national identity education for adolescents mainly focuses on topics such as educational content research and ideological education, but the research on national identity education for adolescents in the digital age is still relatively lacking. In the digital age of complex information and numerous temptations, how to effectively guide teenagers to form a correct view of national identity and patriotic feelings is a key topic that needs urgent attention and research. Therefore, based on the background of the digital era, this research comprehensively interprets The Times values of the teenagers' national identity education, deeply analyzes the current dilemmas and causes, and explores practical paths applicable to our teenagers' national identity education in the digital era, in order to provide theoretical references and practical guidance for digital teenagers' national identity education.

Related Concepts

Digital Age

The digital age refers to a new transformation of the form of social development in the current Internet era, refers to a new model of social, economic, and cultural development, and is the core empowerment of “Internet Plus”. In the digital era, digital technology has revolutionized the way people connect with each other and built a digital network that can be expanded almost infinitely. With the development of digitalization, Web 2.0, and other new technologies, the communication environment has undergone great changes, and we have entered a new media era (Gao, 2019).

Teenagers

There are two stages of adolescence: the junior stage and the youth stage. The junior stage refers to the growth stage from about 10 to 15 or 16 years old; The youth stage refers to the period from 15, 16 to about 30 years old. The World Health Organization defines the age range of adolescents as 10-24 years, youth as 15-24 years, and adolescents as 10-19 years (Xu & Qian, 2013). In China's Medium and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025), young people are 14-35 years old.

National Identity

National identity is a complex psychological phenomenon, which is the special cognition and emotional belonging to the country generated by the citizens' heartfelt recognition of the national value. First, national identity from the perspective of attribution, “refers to the country as a common culture, customs, language and memory of the historical community” (Li & Cao, 2016, p. 3). It is a kind of psychological recognition, support, and belonging to the object of identification, as well as the recognition by citizens of a country to the historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, and beliefs of their motherland, as well as national sovereignty. Second, national identity from the perspective of political sociology emphasizes that a country is an imagined community

composed of political, historical, cultural, ethnic, and other factors. Some scholars point out that from the perspective of political society, “national identity is that citizens identify with the constitutional system of a nation-state, and on this basis are loyal to the nation-state, while the nation-state undertakes the mission of protecting the life, security and basic rights of its citizens” (Xu, 2008, p. 4). Thirdly, national identity from the perspective of education, that is, national identity education, is a social activity (Zhou, 2021) in which schools purposefully and consciously cultivate students’ motherland identity, road identity, theoretical identity, and system identity through knowledge imparting, emotional cultivation, and behavior cultivation, and build a sense of identity, belonging, and sense of identity of the Chinese nation.

The Times Value of National Identity Education for Teenagers

Patriotic Casting Soul, Determined to Strengthen the Country

In the context of intensifying transnational ideological, political, and cultural exchanges within globalized information ecosystems, contemporary youth face unprecedented exposure to competing value systems that fundamentally challenge traditional paradigms of national identity formation. This dynamic necessitates urgent implementation of systematic patriotic pedagogy as both a protective mechanism and proactive strategy for cultivating multidimensional national consciousness. Modern patriotism education transcends simplistic emotional attachment, constituting instead a multidimensional construct encompassing four interconnected dimensions: cognitive understanding of civilizational heritage, emotional resonance with collective memory, volitional commitment to national development, and behavioral alignment with socialist core values (Liu, 2019). Through structured educational interventions, youth develop critical consciousness to deconstruct transnational ideological ecosystems while strengthening cultural rootedness—progressing from basic national awareness to profound identification with China’s developmental path. Such cultivation transforms abstract patriotism into concrete historical agency, enabling youth to cognitively map personal aspirations onto national rejuvenation narratives. Crucially, this framework elucidates the dialectical unity between patriotic sentiment, allegiance to the Party’s leadership, and commitment to socialist modernization—three mutually reinforcing pillars that collectively redefine patriotism as an evolving praxis. By anchoring youth identity construction in China’s revolutionary legacy and civilizational continuum, these educational paradigms foster resilient ideological immunity against cultural fragmentation while nurturing generationally resonant expressions of patriotism aligned with contemporary governance requirements.

Rejuvenating the Nation and Helping the Dream of the Times

The Chinese nation is a compound word composed of “Zhonghua” and “nationality”. Since modern times, along with the integration of modern western culture and traditional Chinese culture, the concept of modern nation-state that originated from the West was rapidly introduced into China. This concept was mixed with the concept of “differentiation of Huayi and Yi” of China itself, and underwent collision, conflict, and fusion, and gradually formed the title (Fu & Yan, 2016) of “Chinese nation”. First of all, from the perspective of national identity, all nationalities should adhere to their own national identity, and actively promote mutual identity between each other, and jointly build a unified identity with the “Chinese nation” as the core, to achieve the consensus and unity of “one”. Secondly, the report of the 19th National Congress of the Party also put forward:

Comprehensively implement the Party’s ethnic policies, deepen the education of ethnic unity and progress, cast a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, strengthen exchanges and integration of all ethnic groups, and promote all ethnic

groups to hold together like a pomegranate seed, work together, prosper and develop together. (Gao, 2019, p. 6)

Finally, the consciousness of the Chinese nation community has the effect of cohesion and solidarity for the members of the Chinese nation community. It promotes the mutual identification, affinity, and attraction among the members by building common emotions, norms, and goals, so as to spontaneously and consciously gather into a powerful force and promote the unity and development of the nation. Therefore, the contemporary value of youth national identity education for the Chinese nation lies in inheriting and carrying forward the national culture, maintaining national unity, and enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese nation.

Absorbing Culture and Inheriting the Spirit of Civilization

The splendid, extensive, and profound Chinese culture, with its common historical experience and memory, has become the psychosocial foundation and spiritual support system for the Chinese nation as a whole. However, when the modern Chinese people were dealing with the increasingly serious national crisis, their cultural self-confidence and cultural identity gradually faded. It was not until the end of the 20th century that China began to rebuild its entire cultural system, which consisted of road confidence, institutional confidence, theoretical confidence, and cultural confidence. In this historical process, cultural identity has increasingly become the basis of expanding national identity, and as the most important and core value of national identity, the axis of peacekeeping function, at the same time, cultural community often resides in the carrier of national community. First of all, the excellent traditional Chinese culture is the root and soul of the nation, which can provide profound cultural soil for the youth's national identity. Secondly, cultural community enhances youth's sense of social belonging and national identity by sharing cultural memory, cultural life, and cultural spirit. In addition, red culture is a historical entity that embodies the values (Shen & Lian, 2018) of a particular era through distinct themes and historical inheritance. In today's era of economic globalization and diversified values, red culture is of indispensable practical value in cultivating national identity and curbing the spread of historical nihilism.

Remembering the History and Sticking to the Original Mission

Memory is the premise and basis of identity. Without memory, there is no identity. Historical memory is a collective construction product of the past based on the present, "a systematic representation of past events retained in the minds of most members of a society" (Wu & Gu, 2018, p. 4). For citizens, historical memory is the key to collective identity, helping to identify national identity, and explaining and absorbing group emotions and values. Therefore, young people should remember modern history, starting from the Opium War, when foreign powers invaded China and insulted national dignity; To the Revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement to awaken the national consciousness; At the critical moment of the Anti-Japanese War, the whole people fought bloody battles and the War of Liberation to overthrow the old government and establish a new China; To the socialist revolution and Reform and Opening Up in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China; And since entering a new era, the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics has made great new achievements and gone through great changes over the past 100 years. As readers and listeners of history, young people look at history from a specific perspective and with specific values. In the process, they can feel the idiosyncrasies of the country and discern the difference between the Chinese people and other ethnic groups; They can understand the glory of their ancestors, but also know the pain and shame they have endured; They can appreciate the support and help of some nations, and the great wounds that others have inflicted on their country.

The Practical Crisis of National Identity Education for Teenagers in the Digital Age

Limited Thinking and Still Shallow Cognition

The digital ecosystem's information superabundance presents adolescents with a paradoxical developmental landscape: while benefiting from unprecedented informational accessibility, they simultaneously confront cognitive overload that generates distinct psychosociological pressures. This digital stress syndrome, mirroring traditional stressors in its neurocognitive impacts, operates through a tripartite mechanism of attentional fragmentation, evaluative dissonance, and decision paralysis. Adolescent cognitive development's transitional nature—marked by psychosocial metamorphosis from concrete operational thinking to formal abstract reasoning—creates critical vulnerabilities during value system crystallization (Huang et al., 2024). As digital natives navigate this liminal phase, their emergent axiological frameworks (encompassing worldview formation, existential orientation, and ethical prioritization) become susceptible to algorithmic mediation. The adolescent propensity for epistemic rebellion against traditional authority structures often manifests as preferential engagement with digital platforms, yet this quest for autonomy collides with social media ecosystems engineered for engagement optimization rather than developmental appropriateness. Immersed in confirmation bias-amplifying filter bubbles and exposed to ideologically polarized content streams, adolescents' nascent critical faculties struggle to reconcile fragmentary information shards into coherent national narratives. This cognitive dissonance escalates when autochthonous cultural paradigms conflict with algorithmically promoted counter-narratives, potentially triggering ontological insecurity and axiological disorientation. Particularly concerning are instances where exposure to decontextualized historical interpretations or hyperbolic comparative civilizational analyses undermines cultural self-assurance, creating epistemic fissures in national identity formation. Such vulnerabilities underscore the necessity for digital literacy frameworks that equip youth with metacognitive tools to navigate informational complexity while maintaining cultural-psychological homeostasis.

Culture Shock and Loss of Direction

Adolescence constitutes a critical psychosocial moratorium characterized by simultaneous identity crystallization and cognitive schema formation, wherein youth confront multidimensional developmental imperatives: resolving existential uncertainties, alleviating spiritual disquiet, fulfilling cultural-epistemic needs, and managing psychological stressors. Within this formative crucible, robust national identification emerges as an essential orienting framework, providing ontological security through directional clarity, communal belonging, and existential fulfillment—foundational prerequisites for Chinese youth's ethical cultivation, social anchoring, and contributory potential. However, digital globalization's dissolution of spatial boundaries has precipitated asymmetric cultural engagement patterns, manifesting notably in generational divergence from indigenous cultural heritage. Contemporary data reveal a paradoxical acculturation gradient: 25% of K-12 students perceive Confucian canonical texts as anachronistic, 48% demonstrate heightened affinity for Western calendrical rituals over traditional festivals, and 58.1% exhibit preferential consumption of foreign audiovisual media. This cultural displacement phenomenon reflects deeper epistemic realignments, wherein exogenous value systems increasingly mediate youth's symbolic universes through digital acculturation channels. The resultant value eclecticism challenges intergenerational cultural transmission mechanisms, necessitating urgent recalibration of patriotic pedagogy to address this civilizational discontinuity. Such cultural-ideological permeability underscores the imperative for innovative educational paradigms that reconcile digital natives' hybrid identity formation with the preservation of civilizational continuity, ensuring national narrative coherence amidst transnational cultural flows.

The Dissemination of Information and the Deviation of Values

China's digital landscape, as quantified by the Statistical Report on China's Internet Development (December 2023), reveals 1.092 billion internet users, with 1.053 billion engaged in short video consumption and 816 million participating in live-streaming ecosystems (CNNIC, 2024). While digital-native youth demonstrate heightened receptivity to novel experiences within this hyperconnected environment, they simultaneously confront three paradigmatic challenges: cognitive fragmentation from decentralized information flows, decision paralysis induced by content oversaturation, and ideological polarization through algorithmic information silos. The democratization of content creation through ubiquitous livestreaming platforms has engendered a value distortion phenomenon manifesting dually in socio-occupational perceptions and financial behaviors. Contemporary research tracking over 6,000 high school students documents a 23% decline in preference for traditional professions like education and healthcare, paradoxically juxtaposed against rising aspirations for influencer careers (Yang, Li, & Liu, 2023). On the other hand, live streaming of rewards for favorite Internet celebrities by teenagers has been increasing year by year, resulting in many cases of "huge rewards by minors" and "crimes caused by rewards". These behavioral shifts underscore the transformative power of algorithmic curation in reshaping youth value hierarchies, where viral immediacy increasingly supersedes traditional meritocratic paradigms.

Identification Education Is a Two-Way Problem

In the digital era, national identity education confronts dual systemic challenges across traditional and online pedagogical paradigms. The conventional education system, constrained by entrenched examination-oriented practices, frequently prioritizes rote knowledge transmission over value internalization. Empirical studies reveal significant historical literacy gaps: 13.4% of adolescents demonstrate limited comprehension of modern Chinese history, revolutionary history, and reform-era developments; 62% exhibit superficial understanding of contemporary domestic affairs, with 10.7% displaying minimal engagement; notably, 4.1% remain unaware of China's developmental achievements, while 3.1% manifest deficient national confidence (Hu, 2021). These metrics suggest a concerning disjunction between pedagogical forms and value-oriented outcomes in current patriotic education frameworks. Simultaneously, digital education platforms exhibit their own limitations, with providers disproportionately emphasizing resource abundance and technological novelty while neglecting substantive developmental impacts. Research indicates insufficient consideration of how prolonged exposure to digital learning environments fundamentally restructures adolescent cognitive architectures—including knowledge acquisition patterns, critical thinking capacities, and ultimately value formation processes (Xie, Qin, & Liu, 2024). This dual-system failure creates an urgent need for integrative solutions that bridge formal education's normative strengths with digital pedagogy's adaptive potential.

The Response Strategies of Youth's National Identity Education in the Digital Age

Strengthen Patriotic Education and Shape Values

Patriotism is a political category, and this is especially true of the concept of "nation" on which it rests, an emotional mapping drawn from the logic of nation-building. According to Marxist theory and political science, patriotism education is, in the final analysis, national identity education. Patriotism in the new era is based on the law, regulates the rights and obligations of citizens and social responsibilities, emphasizes the importance of individual development, and takes this as the premise and foundation, rather than the patriotism concept that ignores individual values. In the context of the digital age, patriotic education not only carries the emphasis on

national identity and collective power in the traditional sense, but also needs to keep pace with The Times and integrate new elements. First of all, the digital age makes the content of patriotic education more vivid and diversified. Secondly, the digital age emphasizes individual development and innovation, injecting new vitality into patriotic education. In a social atmosphere that respects individuality and encourages innovation, patriotic education should also pay attention to young people's individual growth needs and guide them to combine their personal ideals with national development. Moreover, patriotic education in the digital era needs to pay more attention to the cultivation of legal awareness and social responsibility. Educators should guide young people to establish correct values, actively abide by laws and regulations, and consciously resist the erosion of bad information, so as to enhance their civic awareness and social responsibility.

Innovate the Educational Model and Inherit the Excellent Culture

As a key link of national spiritual inheritance, cultural identity, and political sovereignty, education has become increasingly important. National identity education in the digital era is no longer just about the indoctrination of knowledge, but needs to use the power of digital technology to deeply integrate environmental and humanistic education, build a more vivid, three-dimensional, and interactive education system, so that young people can naturally inherit excellent culture in the digital world. Digital technology fully enables the practice of “two creation” of Chinese excellent traditional culture. From the perspective of production, digital technology provides the largest ability to ingest, generate, store, and process various cultural elements so far, and brings more diversified carrier forms (Li & He, 2024) for the modern expression of traditional culture. Modern technologies such as VR, AR, and online platforms allow students to explore Chinese culture immersively. Digital technology Internet platform breaks the traditional communication path, builds a multi-directional communication system, and breaks through time and space limitations. Educators can collect and organize educational resources and provide comprehensive learning materials through the Internet.

Cooperate With Multiple Subjects to Broaden the Choice of Paths

In recent years, UNESCO has published the Digital Transformation of Education: Connecting Schools, Empowering Students, Artificial Intelligence and Education: A Guide for Policymakers, Reimagining Our Future Together: A New Social Contract for Education and other reports are aimed at guiding countries around the world to actively respond to the opportunities and challenges brought to education by digital technologies, and build a new digital ecology (Man & Bi, 2024) of education for the future. In the digital era, the integration of digital technology and educational practice has expanded the new field of educational research, and it has become the demand of The Times to explore and deal with the practical problems and possible risks faced by digital technology-enabled educational reform. Nowadays, under the development of digitalization, “cloud education” realizes cross-border teaching. Cultivating national identity among young people requires collaboration among families, schools, and society. Families need to cultivate patriotic sentiments; schools need to strengthen their curricula, build teachers' qualifications, and innovate in teaching; and all sectors of society need to create a good patriotic atmosphere and provide rich educational resources and practical opportunities.

Enhance the Connotation of Education and Enrich Interactive Activities

The connotation of national identity education in the digital age should not only continue to deepen the training of teenagers in cognition, emotion, and behavior, but also actively embrace technological changes and strengthen the foundation of national identity with innovative education models and strategies. In terms of smart campus construction, China has actively built modern digital classroom Spaces, such as interactive smart

blackboards and panoramic classroom behavior monitoring systems, to help carry out high-quality education and teaching. Young people's patriotic awareness stems from a special psychological and experiential process, and its cultivation requires innovative educational methods. Schools can use social media to carry out national identity activities and encourage young people to participate in spreading positive energy. Teachers should create an atmosphere to use digital tools to tell heroic stories and inspire patriotic feelings. At the same time, practical education and digital support should be strengthened and an online volunteering platform should be developed. In today's world of diverse information, educators should use the Internet to create an all-round patriotic atmosphere, so that young people can practice patriotism.

Purify the Network Ecology and Cultivate Digital Literacy

In the digital age, the use of traditional and new media and political participation are significantly correlated with youth's national identity. Media use not only has a direct role in promoting the national identity of Chinese adolescents, but also exerts an indirect impact through political participation. By promoting active political participation, media use will weaken the national identity (Zhang & Liu, 2022) of adolescents. Therefore, in order to purify the Internet ecology, the government needs to improve cross-sectoral collaboration, strengthen legal regulation, improve Internet legislation, and crack down on Internet rumors, pornography and violence, and extremist ideas. The Internet industry should respond to the government's call to set strict standards and develop advanced filtering and auditing technologies to block and remove harmful information. At the same time, schools should emphasize the cultivation of digital literacy among young people, incorporate media literacy education into the curriculum, and cultivate young people's ability to recognize the authenticity of information and think critically through teaching, case studies, and practice. In addition, they should strengthen mental health education, offer relevant courses and activities, pay attention to young people's mental health, and intervene in a timely manner to promote their healthy growth.

Conclusion

The Times value of national recognition education mainly shows that young people "patriotic casting soul, determined to strengthen the country and rejuvenate the country"; "Revitalizing the Chinese nation, helping the dream of The Times"; "Learn from fine culture and carry forward the spirit of Chinese civilization"; And "Remember history and stick to our original mission". In the digital age, the road of youth's national identity education is facing multiple difficulties such as global culture, network media, traditional educational thinking, and Internet education. In order to cope with these challenges, patriotism education should be strengthened to shape youth's value concept; Innovate the teaching mode, combine the cognitive characteristics of young people, and inherit the excellent culture; Cooperate with multiple subjects to broaden the choice of national identity education paths; Improve the connotation of national identity education and enrich various interactive activities for young people; Purify the online ecological environment and cultivate the digital literacy of young people.

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