


## DIGITAL COLONIALISM AND ITS THREATS TO ASIAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: WHAT DO TEENAGERS SAY?

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 10 Sept 2024 Revised: 14 Oct 2024 Accepted: 28 Oct 2024 Published: 1 Nov 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Digital colonialism Asian Culture identity Teenager Society</p> <p>OPEN  ACCESS</p>	<p>This study explores how digital colonialism affects the cultural identity of teenagers in Asian societies, focusing on their perceptions of cultural erosion and acceptance of Western norms. A qualitative approach was used to collect data from open-ended questions among teenagers aged 13–19 through a Google Form survey. The findings indicate that many teenagers perceive Western-dominated digital platforms as a threat to their cultural values, while some are actively involved in preserving their cultural traditions. Peer influence, family, and education are essential in shaping these perceptions. The study highlights the need for social and policy interventions to promote cultural preservation amid global digital forces. It emphasizes empowering adolescents to maintain their cultural identity in the digital age.</p>

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the digital environment has transformed how civilizations connect, communicate, and retain their traditions. The concept of digital colonialism has become a topic of serious contention, especially in the context of Asian cultures. This study investigates the allegation that the internet is exploitative of digital

natives' daily routines and regulates their lives (Oji & Nzeaka, 2020). These corporations are becoming more powerful. The digital ecosystems of the Global South, including Asia, are dominated by technology corporations, the majority of which are from the Western world. This phenomenon is known as digital colonialism, and it goes beyond the control of economic resources. This regulation influences the economy and societal culture, making it a contemporary empire (Pinto, 2018).

Digital colonialism has recently become a hot topic among academics, delving into its many forms and consequences (Kwet, 2019). This kind of colonialism is characterized by acquiring and managing data, often without the express knowledge of the target, using communication networks established and controlled by Western technology firms. The power dynamics inherent to this connection give rise to worries about digital sovereignty and the possibility of cultural homogenization. Digital colonialism involves the appropriation of digital infrastructures by powerful nations or corporations to exert control over less developed regions. This includes exploiting data as a resource, leading to economic and political dependencies that mirror traditional colonial relationships (Ricaurte, 2019).

Asian countries, renowned for their diverse languages and traditions, are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon. Western ideals have become more universal due to the widespread usage of Western-owned platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, sometimes overshadowing regional customs. Consequently, young people, especially teens actively utilizing digital platforms, are torn between the draw of global culture and the need to preserve their cultural heritage (Coleman, 2019). Teenagers are an essential group for understanding how digital colonialism affects cultural identity since they are the main consumers of digital content and are in the process of shaping their cultural viewpoint.

In addition, many Asian nations do not possess the solid digital infrastructure and laws required to mitigate this influence's effects. As a result, they are forced to depend on technology that originates from the West, which further complicates the situation. This dependency on technology can potentially increase power inequalities and restrict the capacity of Asian countries to define their digital goals. Establishing local digital ecosystems and regulations is critical to preserving cultural autonomy in the face of digital colonialism.

This study aims to explore these relationships by examining how Asian teens perceive the digital platforms they use and how these platforms influence their understanding of culture, identity, and tradition. By focusing on this demographic, we can gain insights into the future trajectory of Asian cultural identity in the digital age and identify potential strategies for preserving cultural diversity while engaging with global digital platforms. The research also considers the potential for digital platforms to serve as cultural preservation and exchange tools, examining how Asian youth utilize these technologies to maintain connections with their heritage and share their cultural experiences with a global audience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **DIGITAL COLONIALISM**

Early colonizers came to Asia's shores to expand their empires by exploiting local labor to extract valuable natural resources and raw materials, and in the process, built critical infrastructure such as railroads to facilitate the import and export of these often-expropriated goods. Today's colonizers, however, are digital. Western tech companies build communications infrastructure such as social media platforms and network connections to collect data, earn profits, and store data as raw material for predictive analytics. "Digital colonialism" is the decentralized extraction and control of citizens' data, with or without their explicit consent, through communications networks developed and owned by Western technology companies (Coleman, 2019). The implications of digital colonialism are profound, as they echo historical patterns of exploitation and raise concerns about privacy and sovereignty in the digital age (Couldry & Mejias, 2020).

### **THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON VALUES, NORMS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

Platforms such as online television services are changing global television financing, production, and consumption, with significant cultural impacts (Potter, 2020). In addition, a survey of young people sharing

comics on Facebook showed how digital media promotes local, global, and local identities, reflecting highly diverse conditions and demonstrating the impact of global cross-cultural trends on identity construction (Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014). These platforms play a dual role in cultural preservation and change by enabling the preservation of local culture through online communities while simultaneously introducing strong foreign cultural influences that can erode local elements (Pangesti et al., 2024).

Social media plays an essential role in promoting the expression of personal cultural identity by providing a platform for interaction, self-expression, and identity negotiation (Radwan, 2022). Research conducted on youth in rural communities in Egypt and Qatar showed that social media impacts cultural identity by promoting discussion of social and political issues, connecting with society, and shaping personal preferences and behaviors (Condemayta Soto et al., 2023). However, this influence is not without its challenges; social media's capacity to transcend cultural gaps can lead to cultural encroachment, where intercultural phenomena might replace genuine identities (Tang & Chan, 2020).

## **THE MECHANICS OF DIGITAL COLONIALISM**

Today, the “open veins” of the Global South are the “digital veins” that span the oceans, connecting tech ecosystems owned and controlled by a handful of primarily US-based companies. Transoceanic cables are often loaded with optical fiber owned by companies like Google and Facebook to extract and monopolize data. Cloud centers are heavy machines led by Amazon and Microsoft, growing like the military bases of the US empire, with Google, IBM, and Alibaba not far behind. Engineers are a corporate army of hundreds of thousands of elite programmers, earning annual salaries of 4 million South African rand (\$250,000) or more. Centralized hubs of brokerage and espionage are panopticons, and data is the raw material processed by artificial intelligence services. (Kwet, 2020).

## **COLONISING STRATEGY**

The classic strategy of imperial rule is to divide et impera, divide and conquer, and rule by training subjects to feel the illusion of power in the conflicts between them. On colonial platforms, users also invest their energy in opposition to each other, gaining influence and affirmation through struggle and becoming increasingly profoundly identified with the non-transferable reputation they have earned on the platform. Virality is fleeting if it occurs, but the possibility exists, so we pursue it. Before long, we are reenacting the final scene of the 1954 McCarthyist blockbuster *On the Waterfront*, where longshoremen flee union issues and throw themselves into the arms of their bosses, newly experiencing collective exploitation as a personal liberation. Virality seems to offer an uncontrollable freedom to say anything endlessly and to constitute ephemeral publics. But the economy of virality does not succumb to the indifference or urgency of self-organization. Platforms optimize for “engagement” through chat rather than decision, resolution, or consensus. Community control is uncommon. (Schneider, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a desk research method. Desk research design is often called secondary data collection. This involves collecting data from existing resources because is cost-effective compared to field research (Echesony, 2024). In addition, a Google Form survey will be designed to collect qualitative data, consisting of open-ended questions. Our target group is teenagers (13-19 years old) from different Asian countries, and it is conducted through convenience sampling distributed online.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

This study also employed open-ended questions to gather qualitative data to complement the quantitative data. We used both thematic and sentiment analyses to analyze the qualitative responses. The combination of the quan-qual methods should provide a more comprehensive understanding of teenagers' perspectives on digital colonialism and its threats to Asian culture and civilization. We use thematic analysis to extract underlying themes and patterns in the data, and sentiment analysis offers insights into the overall attitude toward the impact of digital colonialism in Asian culture. Table 1 presents the sentiment analysis findings from the first open-ended question, which asked the respondents' general views on digital colonialism and its effects on Asian culture.

Table 1: Sentiment analysis

Comment	Sentiment	Magnitude	Sentiment Score
"I think digital colonialism is a real threat. Western apps and social media are taking over, and we are losing touch with our traditional Asian values."	Positive	0.929	0.483
It's not all bad. The internet has helped me learn more about other Asian cultures I didn't know much about before.	Negative	1.247	-0.593
I'm worried that we're becoming too Westernized. Everyone's trying to copy American influencers instead of being proud of our culture.	Negative	1.13	-0.578
Digital colonialism? That is just adults trying to scare us. We can enjoy global trends while still maintaining our Asian identity.	Neutral	1.118	0.187
It's a complex issue. Sure, Western culture influences us, but we also use technology to preserve and share our cultural heritage.	Positive	1.047	0.585
I feel like we are losing our language. Everyone is using English slang when talking to other Asians.	Neutral	1.048	0.127
Digital colonialism is just globalization. It's not about losing our culture; and it's about sharing it with the world and learning from others.	Negative	1.447	-0.512
I'm conflicted. I love K-pop and anime, but do they represent traditional Asian values?	Positive	1.053	0.489

It's not fair to blame everything on the West. We choose what to adopt and what to keep from our own culture.	Negative	0.987	-0.582
I think digital colonialism is making us more alike globally, but also more aware of what makes our Asian cultures unique.	Neutral	0.26	0.185

We have used two indicators, magnitude and sentiment score, to examine the sentiments. Overall, the responses show a mix of attitudes towards digital colonialism and its impact on Asian culture. By inspecting the individual responses, many teenagers expressed concerns about the influence of Western digital platforms on Asian cultural values. In contrast, others saw both challenges and opportunities in the digital landscape. Most of the feedback reflects a complex understanding of digital colonialism. Comments like "I think digital colonialism is a real threat" and "I am worried that we are becoming too Westernized" indicate concerns about cultural erosion. Some responses, such as "It is a complex issue" and "It is not all bad," are more neutral or positive. Responses like "We can enjoy global trends and still keep our Asian identity" and "We choose what to adopt and keep from our own culture" provide insights into how teenagers navigate between global digital influences and their cultural heritage. Overall, the sentiment analysis indicates a varied reception of digital colonialism among Asian teenagers, with a slight tendency towards concern about its impact on their culture.

However, it is also essential to consider the constructive perspectives in some of the responses, highlighting the potential benefits of digital globalization and individuals' agency in maintaining their cultural identity. These insights are valuable for understanding the multifaceted nature of digital colonialism's impact on Asian youth culture.

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis would demonstrate how digital colonialism threatens Asian culture and civilization by weakening cultural integrity, economic independence, and national sovereignty. By examining these patterns, the analysis highlights the broader implications of technological imperialism on the Asian socio-cultural fabric.

Table 2: Thematic analysis

Theme	n	%
Individual Choice	3	30%
Westernized influence	3	30%
Positive Aspects	4	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ten responses are included in Table 2, all of which were valid for analysis. The analysis of these responses yielded three themes. The first theme highlighted the role of handling digital influences. This perspective underscores the empowerment of individuals to select aspects of digital culture to embrace while preserving their cultural identity. The second theme focused on concerns about the dominance of Western culture and its potential threat to Asian values and traditions. This theme shows Asian teens' fear of losing their cultural identity due to Western digital influences. The third theme was about what people think are the good things about digital globalization and how it can help people learn about and share other cultures. This theme shows

that some Asian teens don't just see digital platforms as dangers but also as ways to keep their culture alive and learn about other cultures. These themes show that Asian teens have a lot of different and complex ideas about digital colonialism. The variety of perspectives highlights the complex effects of digital colonialism on the culture and identity of Asian teenagers.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that digital colonialism poses a real threat to the cultural identity of adolescents in Asian societies. The pull of Western digital platforms and content is strong, gradually eroding traditional values and customs. However, the study also shows that some adolescents actively preserving cultural heritage are culturally resilient. To this end, countries in the Global South should develop and implement free software, decentralized internet services, and technologies designed to achieve social justice and pro-poor development. This will socialize technology from the bottom up and prevent state or private entities from owning technological architecture (Kwet, 2019).

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