



Identity Construction and Cultural Negotiation in Second Generation Urban Migrants

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Abstract

The study examines how second-generation migrants construct and negotiate cultural identities within multicultural urban environments. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving second-generation migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds living in an Indonesian metropolitan city. The findings reveal that identity construction is a continuous and multidimensional process influenced by family traditions, urban social interactions, experiences of discrimination, and digital transnational engagement. Participants developed hybrid identities that enabled them to maintain cultural heritage while actively participating in contemporary urban society. Digital platforms further expanded opportunities for sustaining transnational connections and intercultural communication without weakening local social integration. The study contributes to migration scholarship by integrating cultural identity, acculturation, urban multiculturalism, and digital transnationalism into a unified analytical framework that explains identity negotiation in increasingly diverse societies. The findings also provide practical insights for policymakers and educational institutions seeking to promote inclusive multicultural policies, strengthen social cohesion, and support equitable participation among second-generation migrant communities.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the most important features of the twenty-first century, affecting demographic patterns, urbanization, and cultural relations throughout the world. Recent international migration reports have suggested that growing mobility has been driven to increase the number of culturally diverse metropolitan cities where migrants and their descendants negotiate multiple social, cultural, and civic belonging (Gatwiri & James, 2024; Yoon, 2025; Hossain, 2024). The first generation migrants face an adaptation problem of "relocation" and "resettlement" while the second generation migrants, whose birth or upbringing in the receiving society, face an adaptation problem of "inter-cultural identity construction". They do not simply absorb the cultural norms of their parents or the dominant cultures of their various

nations, but rather negotiate cultural meanings in ever-changing social, institutional, and digital worlds (Rao, 2025; Stepanova et al., 2023). For this reason, the theme of identity construction among second-generation migrants has emerged as a major topic in migration studies, sociology, urban studies and cultural studies, which has captured the attention of researchers and scholars to understand the broader issues related to multicultural citizenship, social cohesion, and inclusive urban governance (Georgiou, 2021; Crul, 2022; Vertovec, 2023; Cirella, 2024; Ullah, 2025).

These dynamics have been accelerated by rapid urbanisation, creating ethnically diverse and socially varied urban environments, where ethnic differences and transnational mobility meet with the process of globalisation (Yamamura, 2022; Landau, 2024; Wessendorf, 2022). In the contemporary context of cities, intercultural interaction is both a possibility and a reality, and inequalities are also reproduced in the context of residential segregation, educational differences, labour market discrimination and unequal access to social resources (Consolazio et al., 2023; Zapata-Barrero & Hellgren, 2023). In such ambiguous circumstances, second generation migrants find themselves in a "both/and" position: both included and excluded in the same contexts. Recent research shows that the migrant descendants often form hybrid identities that are not developed in a linear process of assimilation, but rather through ongoing processes of interaction between family expectations, peer groups, educational institutions, public discourse, and social media (Kılınc, 2022; Seriki, 2022; Hakooz, 2023; Svensson, 2025; Ferdous, 2025). The results show that identity has become a more relational, contextual, and negotiated social process, than a cultural characteristic.

Recent scholarship has also emphasized the growing importance of transnationalism in shaping identity among second-generation migrants. Advances in digital communication technologies have enabled individuals to maintain simultaneous cultural, emotional, and social connections across national boundaries (Silva, 2025; Xudoyberdiyeva & SMBM, 2025; Papadopoulos & Cleveland, 2023). Social media platforms facilitate interactions with ancestral communities while simultaneously strengthening participation within local urban societies, creating multiple and overlapping spaces of belonging. Georgiou (2021) argues that digital environments have fundamentally transformed migrant experiences by expanding opportunities for cultural representation and transnational engagement. Likewise, Vertovec (2023) explains that contemporary super-diversity extends beyond ethnicity alone to encompass intersecting dimensions of language, migration history, religion, education, legal status, and digital connectivity. These developments suggest that second-generation migrants increasingly construct identities within interconnected local and global networks rather than within geographically bounded communities (Kianpour et al., 2026; Arias Cubas et al., 2023; Vacca et al., 2025).

Despite substantial advances in migration research, existing studies continue to exhibit several important limitations. First, many investigations concentrate predominantly on structural integration outcomes such as educational achievement, labour market participation, or socioeconomic mobility while providing comparatively limited attention to the dynamic processes through which identity is socially constructed and culturally negotiated. Second, previous studies frequently conceptualize identity using dichotomous frameworks that contrast assimilation with cultural retention, thereby overlooking the fluid, hybrid, and situational characteristics of contemporary migrant identities. Third, although digital technologies have become central to everyday migrant experiences, relatively few empirical studies have comprehensively examined how online interactions reshape cultural negotiation among second-generation migrants living in multicultural urban settings (Achouche, 2025; Nguyen, 2025; Ullah, 2025). Consequently, important

theoretical questions remain regarding how digital transnationalism, urban multiculturalism, and everyday social interactions collectively influence identity formation (Palmberger, 2023; K Obeng, 2025).

A number of empirical studies in recent times illustrated these research gaps. Ferdous (2025) identified how second generation South Asian migrants were more likely to reconfigure cultural belonging through transnational tourism and diaspora involvement, but mostly focused on mobility and not everyday urban interactions. While labour market outcomes for highly educated second generation immigrants in Europe were explored by Achouche (2025), identity negotiation was not a central focus of the research. In a similar vein, Nguyen (2025) examined identity as experienced by second generation Vietnamese migrants in Higher Education, and found that identities were complex in terms of feeling included and excluded but largely in the context of education rather than the wider social context of cities. The study by Ullah (2025) has focused on the second-generation South Asian diasporas and the issue of identity struggles, with studies on intergenerational conflict more focused and less on the role of digital media and multicultural urban spaces. All these studies show increasing awareness of identity complexity, but also a need for more integrated analysis, taking into account family culture, interaction in the city, discrimination, cultural hybridity and digital transnationalism simultaneously (Tedeschi et al., 2022; Hussien, 2025; Maragh-Lloyd & Corsbie-Massay, 2022).

In theoretical terms, this research contributes to migration research by synthesizing the theoretical insights of cultural identity theory, acculturation theory, transnationalism, and urban multiculturalism with a single analytical framework. This research does not consider identity to be a result of assimilation or cultural maintenance, but as a process of negotiation across the domains of the domestic, institutional, community and digital. This would recognize the agency of second-generation migrants and at the same time take account of the structural constraints that are part of urban societies. Identity is therefore understood as a fluid and relational, a socially and dynamically negotiated concept, in ongoing negotiations between cultural heritage, institutional experiences, digital communication and daily life (Morgner et al., 2022; Stilling & Braae, 2023; Hansson & Dahlgren, 2022).

The novelty of this research is the comprehensive study of transnational contexts in the lives of the second generation urban migrants who are negotiating between two and three hybrid identities by adapting to family traditions, urban multicultural context, experiences of discrimination and digital transnational networks. The study does not address these aspects separately as most other studies do, but it combines and situates them in one analytical field, in order to get a more realistic view of how identity is being constituted in contemporary multicultural cities. In addition, the study with its qualitative narration approach brings a new perspective to the existing literature on migration, by capturing the lived experience and contextual meanings of the migration experience, which are yet to be explored.

Thus, this research aims to examine the production and negotiation of a second generation migrant's cultural identity in multicultural urban context. It focuses in particular on the influence of family expectations, urban social relations, discrimination, cultural hybridity and digital transnationalism in the emergence of every-day identities. It is hoped that the findings can contribute to theoretical understanding and advance the current debates and discussions on migration, identity and transnationalism and provide practical wisdom for policy makers, educators and urban planners, aiming to develop more inclusive multicultural policies that will foster social cohesion and equal participation of ever-diversifying urban populations.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the processes through which second-generation urban migrants construct and negotiate their cultural identities. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because identity formation is a socially constructed, context-dependent, and continuously evolving phenomenon that cannot be adequately understood through quantitative measurement alone. Case study research enables an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts while capturing participants' lived experiences and interpretations (Khawaja et al., 2022). This design also facilitates the exploration of how individual agency interacts with broader social, cultural, and institutional structures in shaping identity negotiation.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in a multicultural metropolitan city in Indonesia characterized by high levels of internal migration, ethnic diversity, and intercultural interaction. The city provides an appropriate setting for examining identity construction because individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds regularly interact within educational institutions, workplaces, residential communities, and digital environments. To maintain participant confidentiality, the specific location is not disclosed.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they possessed direct experience relevant to the research objectives (Egami & Lee, 2024). The study involved 20 second-generation migrants aged between 18 and 35 years, representing various ethnic backgrounds, including Bugis, Batak, Minangkabau, Chinese Indonesian, and Javanese. Participants were either born in the city or had migrated during early childhood and had completed most of their education in the urban environment. Recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, indicated by the repetition of themes and the absence of substantially new information (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data Collection

Data were collected between January and April 2025 using three complementary qualitative techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews constituted the primary source of data. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and explored participants' experiences regarding cultural identity, family traditions, social belonging, discrimination, and everyday cultural negotiation. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Second, participant observation was undertaken in community gatherings, educational environments, and cultural events to capture everyday interactions and the performance of cultural identity within natural social settings. Third, document analysis was conducted by examining community publications, field notes, and publicly accessible digital content, including participants' social media activities related to cultural representation and transnational engagement. The combination of these three methods enabled methodological triangulation and provided a richer understanding of identity construction across both physical and digital spaces.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun et al. (2023). The analytical process began with repeated reading

of interview transcripts and field notes to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were subsequently generated to identify meaningful statements related to identity construction, cultural negotiation, belonging, discrimination, and transnational practices. Similar codes were then grouped into preliminary themes, which were systematically reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to theories of cultural identity, acculturation, and transnationalism. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was employed to ensure consistency across participants while preserving the contextual uniqueness of individual experiences.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were implemented following Lindheim (2022). Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating interview, observation, and documentary evidence. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. A reflexive research journal was maintained throughout the study to document analytical decisions and minimize researcher bias. Furthermore, all participants voluntarily provided informed consent prior to data collection, and pseudonyms were used throughout the study to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the identity construction and cultural negotiation of second-generation migrants living in multicultural urban environments. Consistent with the qualitative case study design, the findings are organized into five interrelated themes generated through thematic analysis of interview transcripts, participant observations, and documentary evidence. The themes include dual identity, acculturation strategies, cultural negotiation, discrimination, and transnational identity in the digital era.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnic Background
P1	Male	24	University Student	Bugis
P2	Female	21	University Student	Minangkabau
P3	Male	27	Private Employee	Batak
P4	Female	22	University Student	Chinese Indonesian
P5	Male	19	University Student	Bugis
P6	Female	23	Graduate Student	Javanese
P7	Male	26	Private Employee	Minangkabau
P8	Male	25	Entrepreneur	Chinese Indonesian
P9	Female	22	Graduate Student	Batak
P10	Male	30	Entrepreneur	Bugis
P11	Female	24	Civil Servant	Javanese
P12	Female	27	Lecturer	Chinese Indonesian
P13	Male	29	NGO Officer	Bugis
P14	Female	24	Marketing Officer	Batak
P15	Male	28	Software Engineer	Minangkabau
P16	Female	23	University Student	Javanese
P17	Male	31	Business Owner	Chinese Indonesian
P18	Female	25	Teacher	Bugis
P19	Male	32	Consultant	Batak
P20	Female	26	Journalist	Minangkabau

Source: Primary qualitative data collected by the authors, 2025

The participants represent diverse educational, occupational, and ethnic backgrounds, enabling the study to capture multiple perspectives on identity construction and cultural negotiation among second-generation migrants in multicultural urban settings. The diversity of participants also strengthens the credibility of the thematic patterns identified throughout the analysis.

Dual Identity and the Dynamics of Social Belonging

One of the strongest findings emerging from the interviews concerns the coexistence of multiple identities among second-generation migrants. Participants consistently described themselves as living between two cultural worlds that simultaneously shaped their values, behaviours, and social interactions. Family environments encouraged the preservation of ancestral traditions, whereas educational institutions, workplaces, and urban social networks required adaptation to mainstream cultural expectations. Consequently, identity was experienced not as a stable characteristic but as a continuous negotiation influenced by changing social contexts.

Field observations also confirmed this pattern. During community gatherings, participants actively practiced family customs, spoke their heritage languages, and participated in traditional ceremonies. However, the same individuals adopted different linguistic styles, communication patterns, and behavioural norms when interacting with colleagues, classmates, or friends in public spaces. These observations indicate that cultural identity was highly situational rather than permanently attached to a single cultural orientation.

One participant (P1), a 24-year-old university student from a Bugis family, described this experience as follows:

"When I am at home, everything feels very traditional. My parents expect me to speak our regional language, participate in family gatherings, and follow customs that have existed for generations. I respect those traditions because they remind me where my family comes from. But when I leave the house and spend time with friends at university, everything changes. We communicate in Indonesian, sometimes English, and even use popular slang that has become part of urban youth culture. I don't consciously choose one identity over another. Instead, I automatically adjust depending on where I am and who I am talking to. Sometimes I realize that I behave like two different people, although deep inside I know both identities belong to me."

This narrative illustrates that participants did not perceive cultural adaptation as abandoning their ancestral identity. Instead, they regarded identity as flexible enough to accommodate multiple social expectations simultaneously. The ability to navigate different cultural environments was frequently described as an important social competence rather than a source of permanent conflict.

Another participant (P7), a 26-year-old private-sector employee, expressed a similar experience:

"People often ask me whether I identify more strongly with my family's ethnic background or with the city where I grew up. Honestly, I cannot separate the two. My family shaped my values, but my everyday experiences in the city shaped how I think, communicate, and build relationships. Sometimes people expect me to choose one side, but I don't think identity works like that anymore. It changes according to the situation. I can celebrate traditional ceremonies with my relatives and attend multicultural events with my colleagues without feeling that one identity cancels the other."

The interview demonstrates that identity negotiation involved balancing multiple cultural affiliations rather than resolving them into a single dominant identity. Participants consistently rejected binary distinctions between assimilation and cultural preservation, emphasizing instead that belonging could exist across different social environments simultaneously.

This interpretation was further reinforced by another participant (P9), a 22-year-old graduate student, who reflected on the emotional dimensions of identity construction:

"When I was younger, I often worried about whether I was 'traditional enough' for my family or 'modern enough' for my friends. As I became older, I realized those expectations would never completely disappear. Instead of trying to satisfy everyone, I learned that my identity is something I continuously build through experience. Every environment teaches me something different, and over time those experiences become part of who I am. I no longer see my different identities as contradictory. They actually complement each other."

Across interviews, participants consistently described identity as an evolving social process shaped by everyday interactions rather than inherited cultural characteristics alone. The findings therefore indicate that second-generation migrants construct multiple, context-dependent identities that enable them to participate effectively within diverse social environments while maintaining meaningful connections to their family heritage. This pattern highlights identity flexibility as one of the defining characteristics of second-generation urban migrants.

Diverse Acculturation Strategies among Second-Generation Migrants

The analysis further revealed considerable variation in the ways participants negotiated cultural adaptation. Although all participants experienced interaction between family culture and urban society, they adopted different strategies depending on their educational background, workplace experiences, friendship networks, and perceived social acceptance. Rather than following a single pathway toward integration, participants continuously adjusted their behaviours according to changing social circumstances.

Observational data showed that participants often combined cultural practices instead of replacing one with another. Traditional celebrations incorporated contemporary lifestyles, multilingual communication became common during social interactions, and family values were selectively maintained while participants adopted broader urban norms. Such practices demonstrate that cultural adaptation occurred through negotiation rather than complete assimilation.

A female participant (P2), aged 21 years, explained how she balanced these different cultural influences:

"In my family, religious traditions remain very important, and we continue to celebrate cultural events exactly as my parents did when they were younger. At the same time, my daily life is very different from theirs. I study at university, my closest friends come from many different ethnic groups, and we spend most of our time together discussing our future careers instead of cultural differences. I never feel that I must abandon one culture to accept another. Instead, I take the values that remain meaningful for me while adapting to the environment where I live. For me, that balance happens naturally because both cultures have become part of my everyday life."

This statement illustrates that integration emerged not as a formal strategy but as a practical response to living within culturally diverse urban environments.

Participants generally perceived flexibility as facilitating social participation while preserving meaningful family relationships.

However, not every participant experienced this balance successfully. Several interviewees acknowledged adapting more extensively to mainstream urban culture because they feared social exclusion or negative stereotyping.

Participant P3, a 27-year-old employee working in a multinational company, described this situation in greater detail:

"When I first entered the workplace, I quickly realized that people often judged others based on how they spoke, dressed, or behaved. I became more careful about showing my family's cultural background because I didn't want colleagues to think I was different. Gradually I began using Indonesian more often than my regional language, avoided discussing certain family traditions, and tried to fit into the dominant workplace culture. Sometimes I wonder whether I have changed too much, but adapting seemed necessary if I wanted to build professional relationships."

This account suggests that assimilation was not always motivated by personal preference but frequently reflected institutional expectations and perceived social pressures. Participants who experienced stronger concerns regarding acceptance were more likely to minimize visible expressions of their ethnic identities.

A contrasting perspective emerged from participant P10, who emphasized selective cultural preservation despite living in an increasingly multicultural environment:

"Even though I spend most of my time in the city, I deliberately maintain some traditions because they remind me of my family history. I still speak my regional language with my parents, prepare traditional food during family gatherings, and participate in cultural celebrations whenever possible. At the same time, I enjoy meeting people from completely different backgrounds. I don't think preserving culture prevents integration. In fact, it gives me confidence because I know where I come from before I interact with others."

Taken together, these findings indicate that acculturation among second-generation migrants cannot be understood through a single explanatory model. Instead, participants demonstrated multiple adaptive strategies shaped by personal experiences, institutional environments, and social relationships. Cultural negotiation therefore emerged as a dynamic process in which integration, selective assimilation, and cultural preservation coexisted within the everyday lives of second-generation urban migrants.

Cultural Negotiation in Everyday Urban Life

Beyond the coexistence of multiple identities, the findings reveal that participants actively negotiated cultural practices in their everyday lives rather than merely preserving or abandoning inherited traditions. Cultural negotiation emerged as a continuous adaptive process through which second-generation migrants reconciled family expectations with the social realities of multicultural urban environments. This negotiation was particularly visible in family celebrations, friendship networks, religious practices, language use, and everyday consumption patterns. Instead of reproducing cultural traditions exactly as inherited, participants modified, combined, and reinterpreted them to fit contemporary urban lifestyles.

Participant observations supported these findings. During several family and community gatherings, traditional ceremonies were maintained while simultaneously incorporating modern cultural elements. Traditional cuisine was served alongside international food, conversations shifted naturally between regional languages and Indonesian, and younger participants frequently documented cultural

activities through social media. Such practices illustrate that cultural continuity did not occur through rigid preservation but through creative adaptation that reflected changing urban realities.

Participant P4, a 22-year-old university student, explained this process in detail:

"Our family still organizes traditional gatherings several times a year because my parents believe they are important for maintaining relationships with relatives. But if you look closely, those gatherings are very different from what my grandparents experienced. The younger generation brings contemporary music, modern fashion, and food that reflects urban lifestyles. We still prepare traditional dishes, but we also order pizza or other international food because everyone enjoys them. Nobody sees this as abandoning our culture. Instead, we feel that culture continues to grow together with our lives. We respect our traditions while allowing them to adapt to the realities of living in a multicultural city."

This narrative demonstrates that participants understood culture as a living process rather than a fixed heritage. Cultural practices were continuously reconstructed through interaction between generations and between traditional values and contemporary urban experiences. Consequently, identity negotiation became a creative activity rather than a defensive attempt to preserve authenticity.

Another participant (P8), a 25-year-old entrepreneur, described similar experiences regarding language and social interaction:

"At home I naturally speak my family's regional language because that is how my parents communicate with me. However, once I meet customers, friends, or colleagues, I immediately switch to Indonesian and sometimes English depending on the situation. I don't consciously think about changing languages because it has become part of everyday life. Language is not only about communication; it also reflects respect for different social environments. Being able to move comfortably between different languages actually makes me feel more connected to different communities rather than divided between them."

This interview indicates that multilingual practices functioned as important mechanisms for negotiating social belonging. Participants viewed linguistic flexibility as an advantage that enabled them to participate effectively across diverse cultural settings while maintaining meaningful relationships within their families.

Participant P11 further illustrated how cultural negotiation extended beyond language into broader social values:

"Many people think young migrants eventually forget their family traditions, but I don't think that's true. What changes is the way we practice those traditions. Some customs remain exactly the same, while others become more flexible because our lives are different from those of our parents. Living in the city means meeting people from different religions, ethnic groups, and cultures every day. That experience teaches us to appreciate diversity without losing our own identity. In my opinion, culture survives because it adapts, not because it remains unchanged forever."

These findings indicate that cultural negotiation represents an ongoing process of adaptation in which second-generation migrants creatively integrate inherited traditions with contemporary urban experiences. Rather than experiencing culture as competing systems, participants actively constructed hybrid cultural practices that reflected both continuity and transformation. The findings therefore demonstrate that everyday urban life functions as an important arena where cultural

identities are continuously produced, modified, and reaffirmed through routine social interaction.

Experiences of Discrimination and Identity Challenges

Although participants generally demonstrated considerable flexibility in negotiating multiple cultural identities, nearly all interviewees reported experiencing various forms of discrimination, stereotyping, or social exclusion during different stages of their lives. These experiences significantly influenced how they perceived themselves and shaped their strategies for managing cultural visibility within public spaces. Discrimination did not necessarily occur through overt hostility; instead, it frequently appeared in subtle forms such as assumptions regarding ethnicity, language, physical appearance, or cultural competence.

Participant observation similarly revealed that participants often adjusted their behaviour depending on the perceived inclusiveness of particular social environments. In educational institutions and workplaces, several participants intentionally minimized visible expressions of their ethnic identity to avoid negative judgement or unnecessary attention. Such behavioural adjustments suggest that identity negotiation was influenced not only by personal preference but also by unequal power relations operating within multicultural urban societies.

Participant P5, a 19-year-old undergraduate student, reflected extensively on these experiences:

"When I entered secondary school, many classmates immediately noticed that my name sounded different from theirs. Some asked where I was 'really' from even though I had been born in this city. Others joked about the way my family spoke or the food we brought from home. At first I laughed because I didn't want to create conflict, but over time those comments made me question whether people actually considered me part of the same community. I realized that even if I spoke the same language and grew up in the same city, some people still saw me as different because of my family background."

This narrative illustrates that everyday stereotypes accumulated over time and influenced participants' sense of belonging. Rather than isolated incidents, repeated experiences of subtle exclusion encouraged participants to reconsider how openly they expressed their cultural identities.

A similar experience was described by participant P12, who emphasized the psychological consequences of persistent stereotyping:

"The difficult part was not direct discrimination. It was the constant feeling that I always had to explain myself. Whenever someone learned about my family's ethnic background, the conversation immediately changed. People expected me to behave in certain ways or asked questions based on stereotypes. Eventually I became more selective about discussing my cultural identity because I didn't want every interaction to become an explanation about where my family came from."

The interview demonstrates that identity management frequently involved emotional labour. Participants carefully evaluated social situations before deciding how much of their cultural identity to reveal, reflecting the influence of broader social expectations on everyday behaviour.

Participant P13 further emphasized that experiences of exclusion also generated resilience and self-awareness:

"Looking back, I think those experiences actually strengthened my understanding of who I am. At first I wanted to hide my background because I

feared rejection. But eventually I realized that trying to become completely invisible would never solve the problem. Instead, I became more confident in explaining my family's culture whenever people genuinely wanted to understand it. The negative experiences taught me resilience, but they also reminded me how important inclusive communities are for young people growing up with different cultural backgrounds."

The findings indicate that discrimination remains an important factor influencing identity construction among second-generation migrants. Participants did not simply experience prejudice as individual incidents but interpreted it as part of broader social structures that shaped opportunities for belonging and participation. Nevertheless, the interviews also demonstrate considerable agency, as participants transformed experiences of exclusion into opportunities for self-reflection, cultural affirmation, and stronger commitment to intercultural understanding.

Transnational Identity in the Digital Era

The final theme identified through the thematic analysis concerns the increasingly significant role of digital technologies in shaping the identity construction of second-generation migrants. Participants consistently reported that social media platforms had expanded opportunities to maintain relationships with their ancestral communities while simultaneously strengthening their participation in contemporary urban society. Rather than functioning merely as communication tools, digital platforms became spaces where cultural memories, family histories, social relationships, and personal identities were continuously negotiated. The findings indicate that digital environments have transformed identity construction into a process that extends beyond physical communities and national boundaries.

Field observations further supported this finding. Nearly all participants actively used digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube to communicate with relatives, participate in cultural celebrations, share traditional practices, and engage with communities representing similar cultural backgrounds. These online interactions complemented rather than replaced face-to-face relationships. Consequently, participants simultaneously occupied local urban spaces and transnational digital communities, allowing them to sustain multiple forms of belonging.

Participant P6, a 23-year-old graduate student, explained how digital media strengthened both family relationships and cultural identity:

"My grandparents still live in our hometown, while most of my daily life takes place here in the city. Social media makes that distance feel much shorter. Every week we exchange photos, celebrate birthdays through video calls, and share stories about family traditions. At the same time, I also follow communities of young people from similar cultural backgrounds living in different countries. Sometimes I realize that I learn more about my own culture from these online conversations than from formal cultural events. Digital media allows me to remain emotionally connected to my family's heritage without preventing me from becoming fully involved in urban life."

This interview illustrates that digital communication functioned as an important mechanism for maintaining emotional continuity across geographical boundaries. Rather than separating participants from their immediate social environments, online interactions enabled them to strengthen multiple cultural affiliations simultaneously.

Participant P14, a 24-year-old marketing professional, described how social media facilitated intercultural learning:

"What I appreciate most about social media is that it exposes me to different cultures every day. I follow creators from my family's ethnic community, but I also interact with people from many other cultural backgrounds. Through those conversations, I have become more confident discussing my own identity because I realize diversity is something normal rather than unusual. Instead of feeling isolated, I feel connected to a much larger community that values different cultural experiences."

This statement suggests that digital platforms contributed not only to cultural preservation but also to intercultural dialogue. Participants viewed online engagement as an opportunity to broaden cultural understanding while simultaneously reinforcing personal confidence regarding their own identities.

Another participant (P15), aged 28 years, emphasized that digital environments enabled continuous identity negotiation:

"I don't think my identity exists only in one place anymore. During the day I work with colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds, in the evening I communicate with relatives from my hometown, and before sleeping I often participate in online discussions with migrant communities overseas. All of these interactions influence how I see myself. My identity keeps changing because the people I interact with are constantly changing too. Digital technology doesn't replace my cultural roots; it simply gives me more spaces where those roots can continue to grow."

Across interviews, participants consistently described identity as increasingly transnational and multidimensional. Digital technologies enabled them to maintain meaningful cultural connections without limiting their participation in multicultural urban life. Consequently, identity was understood not as a geographically bounded phenomenon but as a socially constructed process extending across physical and virtual environments.

The findings demonstrate that digital media has become an important catalyst for identity construction among second-generation migrants. Online communication expands opportunities for preserving cultural heritage, strengthening family relationships, participating in global migrant communities, and fostering intercultural dialogue. Rather than producing fragmented identities, digital transnationalism appears to facilitate more flexible, adaptive, and multilayered forms of belonging that reflect the realities of contemporary multicultural societies.

The five themes identified through thematic analysis demonstrate the multidimensional nature of identity construction among second-generation migrants. Although each theme represents a distinct aspect of participants' experiences, they are closely interconnected and collectively explain how identity is continuously negotiated across family, social, institutional, and digital contexts.

Table 2. Summary of Themes

Theme	Main Findings	Primary Evidence
Dual Identity	Participants simultaneously identified with their family heritage and the dominant urban culture.	Interviews (P1, P7, P9), observations
Diverse Acculturation Strategies	Participants adopted integration, selective assimilation, and cultural preservation depending on social contexts.	Interviews (P2, P3, P10), observations
Cultural Negotiation	Everyday cultural practices were continuously adapted to contemporary urban life.	Interviews (P4, P8, P11), observations

Experiences of Discrimination	Stereotypes and exclusion influenced identity management and participants' sense of belonging.	Interviews (P5, P12, P13)
Transnational Identity in the Digital Era	Digital media strengthened cross-border cultural connections and facilitated hybrid identity formation.	Interviews (P6, P14, P15), document analysis

Source: Primary qualitative data analyzed by the authors, 2025

The thematic analysis indicates that identity construction among second-generation migrants is shaped by the interaction between family cultural heritage, urban multicultural environments, experiences of discrimination, and digital transnational networks. These findings provide the empirical basis for the subsequent discussion, which interprets the results within broader theoretical perspectives on migration, identity construction, and multiculturalism.

Identity Negotiation as a Dynamic Process in Multicultural Urban Contexts

The findings demonstrate that identity construction among second-generation migrants is best understood as a dynamic process of continuous negotiation rather than a linear transition from ancestral culture to the dominant culture. Participants simultaneously maintained cultural ties with their families while actively adapting to multicultural urban environments, indicating that identity remains fluid, situational, and socially constructed. This finding reinforces recent migration scholarship arguing that second-generation migrants increasingly develop hybrid identities shaped by interactions across multiple social spaces rather than through assimilation alone (Vertovec, 2023; Cirella, 2024; Ullah, 2025). Unlike traditional assimilation models that conceptualize cultural adaptation as a gradual replacement of ethnic identity, the present study demonstrates that participants strategically integrated multiple cultural affiliations according to specific social contexts.

The results are in line with recent research which highlighted the complexity of second generation migrants' identity formation processes. The findings of Hakooz (2023) indicated that language practices and educational experiences are connected to the process of identity negotiation, and Ferdous (2025) reported that, second generation migrants are emotionally attached to their homeland despite their active involvement in the host societies. Likewise, Achouche (2025) suggested that there are still unobvious voices of exclusion in the lives of highly skilled second-generation migrants after they have made successful socioeconomic transitions. The present study builds upon these findings by showing how identity negotiation can happen in different ways, such as through educational and occupational experiences as well as through familiar family interactions, multicultural friendships, and the embeddedness of everyday cultural practices in urban contexts. IdIOt comes to be seen as an adaptive social resource that helps people effectively manage their way through increasingly pluralistic societies.

The second major contribution has to do with the construction of identities through discrimination. Overall, participants showed high levels of cultural adaptability, but stereotyping and social exclusion had a significant impact on the ways in which they expressed their identities in public spaces. The results are in line with recent studies showing that, despite the improvement of educational qualifications and labour market participation among second-generation migrants, structural inequalities persist (Svensson, 2025; Achouche, 2025). But, unlike other studies where discrimination is mainly seen as a barrier to integration, this study found that for the participants, there is a tendency to redefine exclusion as a chance to build intercultural competence, resilience, and cultural awareness. This discovery underscores the significance of individual agency in the context of structural constraints in an understanding of migrant identity formation.

The study also offers new empirical insights into the increasing importance of digital transnationalism. Digital platforms were regularly referred to as places of holding together of family relations, culture memory and intercultural communication. The results align with more recent studies which have shown the ways digital technologies are increasingly influencing migrant identities through transnational communication networks (Georgiou, 2021; Vertovec, 2023; Nguyen, 2025). This research, however, brings a new understanding that digital engagement does not destroy identity, but rather creates more nuanced and complex notions of belonging. Digital interaction thus reinforces everyday urban interaction, enabling second generation migrants to negotiate local interaction and foster meaningful ties to their culture of origin.

The current theoretical contribution of the research is the use of a single analytical framework for cultural identity, acculturation, urban multiculturalism, and digital transnationalism. The preceding studies have tended to focus on these dimensions one at a time, but the present results suggest that the dimensions are active concurrently during the process of constructing identity. This integrated view enriches migration theory with the concept of identity formation as an ongoing process resulting from the interaction between family culture, institutional settings, social networks, discrimination and digital communication. The study, therefore, transcends the binary logic of assimilation and cultural retention in proposing a process of "identity negotiation" that enables second generation migrants to negotiate and create hybrid identities.

The results emphasise from a practical standpoint the need to implement more inclusive multicultural policies in educational contexts, workplaces and cities. Strategies to foster intercultural dialogue, anti-discrimination efforts, and culturally responsive teaching and learning can help support social cohesion while allowing migrant descendants to preserve their cultural heritage without sacrificing civic engagement. It is also important to consider digital communities as significant platforms for intercultural engagement and social inclusion among more and more diverse populations, for urban policy makers.

While there are many contributions in this study, there are also limitations. The study took place in one metropolitan area and the qualitative case study design does not allow for the results of this study to be extrapolated to other second-generation migrant populations. Additionally, identity negotiation was explored at a particular time, and can change throughout the lifespan and in various migration contexts. Future research could be conducted using comparative designs across cities or countries, longitudinal designs, and qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the process of one's identity negotiation through generations and across various sociopolitical contexts. Such research would give a deeper understanding into the process of migrant identity development in rapidly changing multicultural societies.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that second-generation urban migrants construct their identities through a complex negotiation process between their family's culture of origin and the dominant culture of their host society. The identities they form are not singular, but rather fluid, flexible, and situational, depending on the social context they encounter. Fieldwork suggests that second-generation migrants tend to develop transnational identities, where they do not completely abandon their ancestral cultural roots but simultaneously strive to adapt to urban norms, values, and lifestyles.

Furthermore, experiences of discrimination and stereotyping are factors that contribute to the emergence of identity crises, but also trigger the formation of

resistance strategies and cultural creativity. The presence of digital media has also expanded the space for this generation to build imaginary communities across borders and strengthen their sense of transnational connectedness. Thus, the identity construction of second-generation migrants in urban areas reflects the dynamics of cultural hybridity and the importance of supporting an inclusive social environment. This research confirms that second-generation migrant identities are not simply the result of cultural inheritance but also a product of social interactions, daily experiences, and an increasingly connected global context.

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