

# CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THAI YOUTH: A SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

*Adolescence is a vital stage to develop self-identity to help the individual to behave appropriately according to his social roles. This research was a qualitative research. This research aimed to synthesize the published articles which were relevant to cultural identity. The researchers collected the data from the articles which had been published on reliable electronic databases between 2012 to 2020. They were 17 research articles that met our criteria. The data were analyzed by using content analysis. It was found that there were 5 categories of Thai youths' cultural identity (Ethnographic identity, personal identity, sexual identity, indivisible self and multidimensional identity). Additionally, there were 3 approaches for Thai youth to express their cultural identity (Expression cultural identity by themselves, Expression cultural identity via social media and Expression cultural identity via other media). The findings of this research can be applied to further study in a construction of social space on social media in Thai youth and developing a psychological program to help Thai youth to express their cultural identity creatively and appropriately.*

**Keywords:** Synthesis of research, Cultural Identity Youth, Social media

## INTRODUCTION

In the lifestyles of human beings, each age must inevitably experience some changes, especially for young people who undergo rapid physical, mental, emotional and social changes. In addition, the youths are also at the age of searching for their identity in order to achieve full self-realization and understanding, as well as being able to develop themselves and live happily with others. However, some also have the inability adapting to changes that cause behavior problems (Sriyakun, 2018) such as having drug addiction problems, alcohol drinking problems, and other forms of adolescent controversy that can sometimes be difficult to solve on their own. Such a situation will eventually have an impact on the youth themselves, their families, the community, and the society.

The identity development of the person is a important for the youths as it will help them find their true self in a world of changes, and challenges for making a positive impact with their lives (Saleem, Iqbal & Jabeen, 2019). In addition, identity is also important in making career decisions and performing roles that are appropriate for the profession (Withayavanitchai, Choochom & Prasertsin, 2019). According to the study, the identity of the self is rooted in the study of contemporary Western philosophies in Greece and attracted the attention of scholars of social science in the middle of the 19th century (Masiri, 2016) and has expanded to study the identity of the self in other dimensions such as social psychology.

Although identity is a good thing for many young people, the research on identity is controversial among scholars, both in terms of definition, measurement, and evaluation of a person's identity (Saleem et al., 2019). In the context of Thailand, there is a research study in the field of identity research, but it has not been managed in a systematic way for developing an identity. This research synthesis will present the results of the analysis of cultural self-identity of Thai youth to create a body of knowledge about types of cultural identity of Thai youths and approaches to express their identity. The work will provide an important basis for the study of creating a social space on social media of Thai youth and developing a psychological training model for Thai youth to express their cultural identity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Thailand has made several adjustments in its human resource development approach to reflect the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental changes, especially in response to changes in the 21st century. The desirable characteristics of graduates are defined according to the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF) in five areas: moral, ethical, knowledge, intellectual skills, interpersonal skills, and responsibility. Also, the numerical analysis, communication and information technology skills, which are important for teaching and learning in the 21st century, are divided into three main groups: 1) Learning Skills and innovation (critical thinking and problem solving; innovation and creation; communication and cooperation). 2) Life and professional skills group (adaptability and flexibility; initiative and self-learning; social and cross-cultural interaction; responsibility and ability to produce work; leadership and social responsibility). 3) Information, media and technology skills group (information literacy; media literacy, and ICT literacy) (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). These three factors are in line with the Educational Management Guidelines, Section 22 that focuses on students and encourages students to develop themselves according to their potential (Office of Academic Resources and Information Technology Muban Chom Bueng Rajabhat University, 2016). In addition, there are studies that discuss about the 5 psychological traits which are necessary for future life, namely, proficiency, a creative mind, respect and ethics (Thanormchayathawat, Vanitsuppavong, Niemted & Portjanatanti, 2016). Thailand 4.0 sets the goal of four dimensions of development: economic prosperity, social well-being, human value enhancement and environmental protection. One of the key agenda is to prepare Thai nationals to step into a world by developing their cognitive ability, systematic skills, complex problem solving, content skills, and process skills (Damrong Rajanupab Institute, 2016) which is in accordance with the 20-year national strategy for developing Thailand to have stability, prosperity and sustainability. The idea is that in order to help the country achieve this goal it requires human resource development by maintaining the identity of the person.

Identity is rooted in the study of contemporary western philosophies in the early Greek era. Social psychologists, such as Freud, were interested in studying adolescent identities in relationships. In 1934, George Herbert Mead developed the interconnection between identity and social structure. It caught the attention of social science scholars in the middle of the 19th century until it became the main theory affecting the study of identity in other fields (Masiri, 2016).

Later, German psychologist Eric Ericsson proposed the theory of psychosocial development in 1958 and 1963 by dividing a person's psychosocial development into eight stages from infancy. Until adulthood, Ericsson believed that individuals will face psychosocial crises. According to his theory, if they go through each stage of the crisis, they will have a good personality and fundamental virtue that can be used for solving problems. However, if the person cannot get past these crises, it will affect his/her personality. The perception of identity and development takes the next step, but the individual can solve the problems that will arise later in each stage of development (McLeod, 2018).

The theoretical psychosocial development of Eric Ericsson is divided into 8 stages (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020) as follows:

1. The stage of Trust - Mistrust in infancy
2. The stage of Autonomy - Shame, doubt in early childhood
3. The stage of Initiative - Guilt in childhood
4. The stage of Industry - Inferiority in the age of primary schooling
5. The stage of Identity - Identity confusion in adolescents
6. The stage of Intimacy - Isolation in adulthood
7. The stage of Generativity – Stagnation/Self absorption in adulthood
8. The stage of Integrity - Despair stage as an adult

Trepte & Loy (2017) also referred to Tajfel who invented the Social identity theory in 1978, and Tajfel and Turner adopted it in 1979 with the concept of "Social identity theory". It

is important that if a person feels they are part of a group, that group is classified as in-group, but if the individual perceives himself as not being a member of that group, then it is classified as an out- group, in which social grouping, group assessments and group member values are essential elements of a person's social identity development.

Findings from research studies have found that the identity of Thai youth are in many areas, such as the development of educational management models to enhance life skills in the 21st century for primary school students, with the following methods: management of curriculum and teaching and learning activities, student development, teachers and personnel, and environment (Ugsornwong & Kittipichai, 2016), adopting digital technology to develop innovation to prevent smoking. The studies were divided into 4 lessons for youth in the 21st century: 1) The Villainous Cigarette 2) Decisions in Smoking Refusal 3) Self-efficacy of Smoking Refusal, and 4) The Solution of Smoking Demand (Palacheewa & Thangkratok, 2019) and Thai citizens in the 21st Century to Youth in Bangkok with the Integration of Teaching, Learning and Society (Potisart, Dokmai, Viriyavathana & Ruankum, 2019). It was found that the identity of youth in Chiang Rai was divided into two parts: personal identity. (perseverance, adaptability, curiosity, and public consciousness) and social identity (language and cultural traditions) (Promjisa, Treeaekanukul & Muangjai, 2019).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research that synthesizes research articles and academic articles on the cultural identity of Thai youth using the study of information from the document, otherwise known as documentary research.

The sample population is the research and academic articles on the cultural identity of Thai adolescents between 2012–2020 that consisted of 17 issues. The process for collecting the data is as follows.

1. Studying documents and research related to research synthesis.
2. Creating a data sheet for recording details of research articles and individual academic articles.
3. Searching for a list of research articles and academic articles on cultural identity identity of Thai adolescents from the Thai Journals Online (ThaiJO), Google Scholar, and Thai-Journal Citation Index Center (TCI) database. during the period of 2012 – 2020.
4. Collecting research articles and specific academic articles in which 17 research articles and academic articles were in the specified criteria: 1) Research and academic articles on the cultural identity of Thai adolescents. 2) Research articles and academic articles published on the Thai Journals Online (ThaiJO), Google Scholar and Thai-Journal Citation Index Center (TCI) electronic journal database in the period of 2012 – 2020. 3) The articles were based on quantitative research, qualitative research or blended research. 4) Research works were published as full text.
5. Recording the information by using the data sheet.
6. Applying content analysis on the collected data.

The issues used in the synthesis of information are the cultural identity of Thai youth and Thai youth cultural identity guidelines.

## RESULTS

There is a total of 17 research articles and academic articles (16 research articles and 1 academic article). The research is divided into three quantitative research articles, 11 qualitative research articles, and three integrated research articles as illustrated in the following below:

| <b>Table 1</b>  |                |   |                          |                        |                               |
|---|----------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>ILLUSTRATION ON THE TYPES OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THAI YOUTH</b> |                |   |                          |                        |                               |
| <b>No.</b>  | <b>Subject</b> | <b>Categories of Thai Youths' Cultural Identity</b> |                          |                        |                               |
|   |                | <b>Ethnic Identity</b>                              | <b>Personal Identity</b> | <b>Gender Identity</b> | <b>Holistic Self-identity</b> |
|   |                |   |                          |                        |                               |

|    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1  | The Maintenance of Akha Ethnic Adolescence Identity: A Case Study at Pasangnangeon Village, Mae Fahluang District, Chiangrai Province   | ✓ |   |   |   |   |
| 2  | A Study of Indivisible Self Model of Adolescent in School Under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration School  |   |   |   | ✓ |   |
| 3  | A Study of Self-Identity of Broken Home Adolescents   |   | ✓ |   |   |   |
| 4  | Perception of Sexual Identity among Early Male Adolescents  |   |   | ✓ |   |   |
| 5  | Identity Constuction among Teenagers on Facebook Fan Pages  |   |   |   |   | ✓ |
| 6  | A Study of Identity of First-Year Students Kasetsart University   |   |   |   |   | ✓ |
| 7  | SOTUS The Evil Sophomore and the Freshman : Construction of Queer Identity in the Y Novel   |   |   | ✓ |   |   |
| 8  | Analysis of Male Teenagers' Identity through Consuming Behavior of Sign Happening in Thai Films   |   |   | ✓ |   |   |
| 9  | The Processing of Creating Gender Identity of MSM: A Case Study of Students in the Hospitality and Tourism, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya |   |   | ✓ |   |   |
| 10 | The Ideology of Studying Musical Identity   |   | ✓ |   |   |   |
| 11 | Negotiations with Isan-ness in the Digital Space: Identity Politics of Isan Net Idols   | ✓ |   |   |   |   |
| 12 | The Role of New Media in the Social Construction of Values of University Students   |   | ✓ |   |   |   |
| 13 | A Study on Ego Identity and Professional Identity of Nursing Students   |   |   |   |   | ✓ |
| 14 | The Search of Friendship and More: Camwomen Identity Formation On the "Camfrog" Chatroom Programme  |   | ✓ |   |   |   |
| 15 | The Relationship between Strategic Management of Royal Police Cadet Academy and Identities of Police Cadets   |   | ✓ |   |   |   |
| 16 | Model of Nursing Student Identity Development, the Royal Thai Army Nursing College  |   |   |   |   | ✓ |
| 17 | A Development of Youth Drama Activities to Enhance the Awareness of Lamphun Identity  | ✓ |   |   |   |   |

### Cultural Identity of Thai Youth

From the synthesis of information, it was found that the cultural identity of Thai youth is divided into 5 categories as follows:

## **Ethnic Identity**

Some Thai youths expressed their own ethnic identities in order to maintain their identity amid the adaptation of new cultures and changes in today's world. A number of Akha youth expressed their ethnic identity by recognizing it through personality expressions, expressing cultural identity through lifestyle and history, as well as expressing linguistic identities with the use and preservation of Akha language (Jaisurach, 2014). Also, the Lamphun youth realized their identity through their activities and events (Songketkun & Inchan, 2020), and some Isaan youth defined their identity with social media to create bargaining power (Chalermsan, 2019).

## **Personal Identity**

In recent years, several studies have been conducted that have found that some Thai youths express their identity through behavioral expression (Apichayakul, France & Richardson, 2019; Chanthasin, Chanthasin, Supmee, Hatthasak & Boonsathirakul, 2019; Klinutto, Wong-In & Jarupeng, 2012; Masiri, 2016; Sripasuda, 2019; Yaktavong & Rojviroon, 2019) as a study of the identity of Adolescents from broken families found that such adolescents showed five aspects of their identity: self-awareness, emotional maturity, life goal setting, and interpersonal relationships (Klinutto et al., 2012). In addition, the research that found that the relationship between three individuals is important to the process of establishing the identity of Thai women who expressed themselves through the Camfrog program which is an online gig-sibling and lover relationship (Apichayakul et al., 2019)

## **Gender Identity**

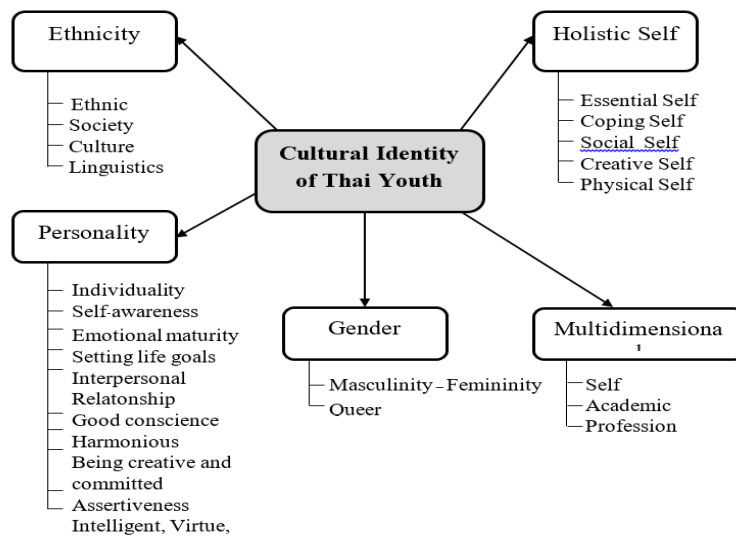
Based on the synthesis of data, it was found that several studies have studied adolescent gender identity in terms of gender identity perception outside the box or groups of individuals who are sexually diverse (Boonthai, Tungpunkom & Fongkaew, 2014; Kansamut & Siriwong, 2017; Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017; Udompoth & Siriwong, 2014). Such a study that divided the gender identity of early male adolescents was based on the perception in three forms: full-body man, abman, and young man (Boonthai et al., 2014).

## **Holistic Self-Identity**

Nakto, Saenubol, Mekkhachorn, & Sirikit (2017) have studied the identity of Thai youth under the concept called "The Indivisible Self". Ayers and Sweeney (Jane E. Myers and Thomas J. Sweeney) focused on developing a holistic identity that is inseparable from one another. Studies have shown that Thai youth in Bangkok have a holistic scores. To a large extent, the scores are sorted from the top-rated holistic component to the low scoring component as follows: Coping Self, Social Self and Creative Self (Equal score) Essential Self and Physical Self, respectively.

## **Multidimensional Identity**

From the four research studies, it was found that there were research studies on the self-expression of Thai youth in many dimensions (Chanthasin, Chanthasin, Supmee, Hatthasak & Boonsathirakul, 2019; Kansamut & Siriwong, 2017; Thongkaew & Buakaew, 2018; Withayavanitchai, Choochom & Prasertsin, 2019) with regards to works based on the professional identity of nursing students (Withayavanitchai et al., 2019). It was found that the identity of the nursing student was on self-awareness, emotional maturity, life goals, and interpersonal relationships, while the student's professional identity as nurses were on professional knowledge and skills, volunteer services, discipline, and morality. The information is shown in Figure 1 below.

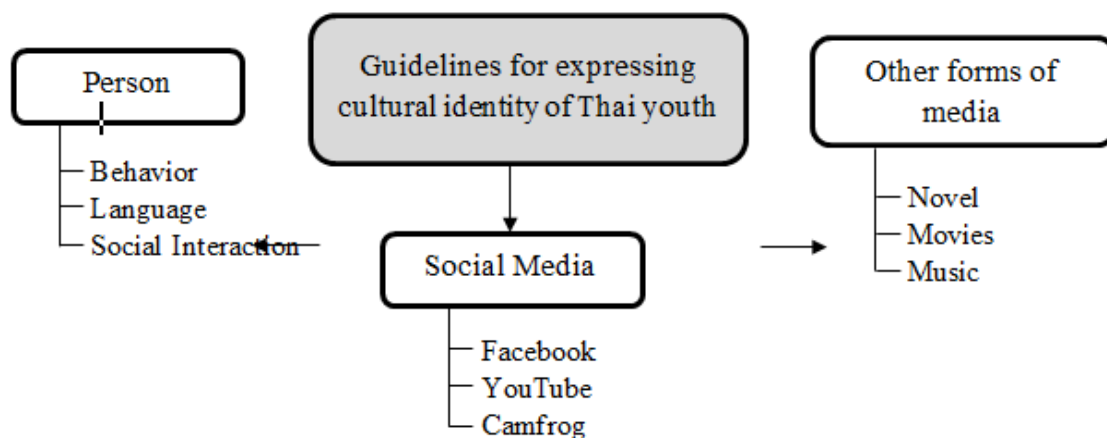


**FIGURE 1  
CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THAI YOUTH**

**Guidelines for Showing Cultural Identity of Thai Youth**

From the synthesis of information, it was found that the Thai youth cultural identity guidelines were divided into 3 categories:

- 1) Cultural identity is an expression through the person, that is, the youth will display their identity through behavior, language and social interaction, which was in the study of the first year students' identity at Kasetsart University according to admission. It was found that the students had the highest conscious identity, followed by being creative and determining unity identity, respectively.
- 2) The expression of cultural identity through social media, such as using Facebook to express their identity through the selection of profile pictures, naming profiles, using pronouns, using adolescent language to express opinions (Tongkaew & Siriwong, 2016), reflects the values, beliefs, attitudes and gender identities of each youth.
- 3) In addition to expressing identity through youth and social media, there is also a reflection of identity through other types of media: novels, movies and music, for example, are studies that present a new kind of love and gender diversity in modern society between male protagonists and young men (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017).



**FIGURE 2  
GUIDELINES FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THAI YOUTH**

## DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS

### Personal Identity

Studies have shown that Thai youths express themselves by displaying a variety of behaviors, such as adolescents from broken families, displaying 5 aspects of identity, namely Individuality, self-awareness, emotional maturity, and goal setting. In life and interpersonal relationships (Klinsutto et al., 2012) young women demonstrate their identity by using Camfrog to build relationships at shows, siblings, and develop online lovers (Apichayakul et al., 2019)

According to Eric Ericsson's theory, the development of a person's psychosocial development is in eight steps (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020).

1. The stage of Trust - Mistrust in infancy
2. The stage of Autonomy - Shame, doubt in early childhood
3. The stage of Initiative - Guilt in childhood
4. The stage of Industry - Inferiority in the age of primary schooling
5. The stage of Identity - Identity confusion in adolescents
6. The stage of Intimacy - Isolation in adulthood
7. The stage of Generativity – Stagnation/Self absorption in adulthood
8. The stage of Integrity - Despair stage as an adult

It can be said that Thai youths have the fifth stage of social development because Thai youth show personality identities. Both are observable external behaviors such as social interaction, self-confidence, and internal behaviors such as self-awareness, self-esteem, etc.

### Gender Identity

In recent times, Thai youths have shown their gender identity more openly, for example, a study found that male adolescents exhibited three forms of gender identity based on their perceptions: full man, abman and young man (Boonthai et al., 2014), and the reflection of youth gender identity through novels to demonstrate the love between one sex (Hero Khai Ek) (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017). (Morelli & Zupanick, 2020) has said that gender identity is a condition in which a person considers to represent their own identity, which is divided into masculinity, femininity, and transgender people whose gender identity is different from the gender of the birth gender. Additionally, (Eagly & Wood, 2017) made a different opinion from Janet Taylor Spence's multifactorial gender identity theory because they believed that gender identity consisted of self-identification of a person (male-female) and self-assessments of expressive traits that are used as a tool for gender stereotypes, both of which influence a person's evaluation as a group member being male or female. While Janet Taylor Spence views a person's instrumental and expressive traits as just two of the sub-elements of psychological traits that may be related to discriminating on a person's masculinity, femininity, identity, and sexuality as a fundamental sense of masculinity, the issue of femininity is responsive to homosexuality (Eagly & Wood, 2017). Therefore, it can be said that the expression of gender identity among Thai youths is a perceived gender identity of their own, for which it may not be that gender identity is inherent or defined under different socio-cultural contexts.

### Self-Holistic Identity

The study found that Thai youth in Bangkok had a high overall score of their own, with scores in each area ranked in descending order of identity, management, social identity and creative self-esteem, (Equal score), identity, importance and physical identity (Nakto et al., 2017)

Myers and Sweeney (JANE E. Myers and Thomas J. Sweeney) invented and proposed the model of complete happiness in 2004, focusing on the development of an inseparable holistic identity called “The Indivisible Self”, consisting of 5 main elements: 1), Essential Self, 2) Coping Self, 3) Social Self. 4) Creative Self and 5), Physical Self and 17 sub-elements (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). So, a holistic study of Thai youth's identity will help to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of identity of Thai youth. It can be used as a guideline for laying out policies and plans to develop the identity of Thai youth in a constructive and effective manner.

### **Multidimensional Identity**

It is interesting that in addition to researching the individual identities of Thai youth, there are several levels of research on the identities of Thai youth, such as studies showing identity of nursing students' self-awareness, emotional maturity, goal-making in life and interpersonal relationships, while the professional identity is on knowledge and skills, volunteering, discipline, and moral ethics (Withayavanitchai et al., 2019).

From the multidimensional model of identity, which is the key factor in the perception of identity or self-identity of a person, the study has been conducted on ethnicity, gender, religion, family background, and social and cultural conditions (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In addition to studying and researching multidimensional identities of Thai youth, not only will it help to understand the Thai youth identity through many aspects but also seeing how they are linked to the surrounding context, which will be useful in planning to develop the appropriate and constructive representation of the identity of Thai youth, as well as solving problems related to the expression of the identity through cooperation from individuals close to their family, community and social surroundings

The findings are consistent with research suggesting that the second generation of immigrant ethnic identity manifestations occurs most during adolescence and in transition from adolescence to adulthood, but ethnic identity is less important. In adulthood, other aspects of identity are established as parents, employees and spouses (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2019) and this is consistent with research showing that ethnic identity is related. With regards to political views and behaviors, ethnic friendships and cultural practices (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2018), it can be said that there are some limitations in the representation on the identity of Thai youth in society. In particular, gender identity has to be expressed under the traditions and values of Thai society in order to gain social acceptance, but later on, Thai youth have become increasingly influenced by Western values, such as with the advancement of technology and innovation. Communication has resulted in Thai youths being more inclined to express their identity more openly, especially by showing their gender identity through social media.

In addition, it was found that the cultural identity of Thai youth was divided into 3 categories: 1) Cultural identity expression through the person, that is, the person demonstrating cultural identity by expressing cultural identity and social interaction. 2) Cultural identity expression through social media is the expression of cultural identity through the use of Facebook, YouTube and Camfrog. 3) Finally, the expression of cultural identity through other media is the expression of cultural identity through content in fiction, movies or music. They express their identity by texting on the YouTube website to show their own impression and expressing opinions to share their experiences and feelings (Torres, Ruiz & Boubaker, 2018). Also, this research found that creating a virtual persona called an avatar of adolescents can reflect self-satisfaction and adolescent self-esteem (Villani, Gatti, Triberti, Confalonieri & Riva, 2016). It can be said that today's Thai youth have a way of expressing multicultural identity by using a synthesis of information. It was discovered that Thai youth choose to express their cultural identity as an individual regardless of their behavior, language usage and social interaction. Some people or groups choose to express their cultural identity through social media or other media in order to express another form of identity that may not be accepted by their family, close friends, community, or society. For them, defining self



identity that is different from the understanding of others, includes an area where the youth can negotiate their authority with others who may share the same interests with them. Expressing a cultural identity through social media or other types of media on part of the Thai youth may be due to the convenience of use, the ability of using such media, and reaching a large number of target audiences in a fast, low cost and unnecessary time.

### **Research Limitations**

This is a documentary research where the majority of the samples used were focused on Thai youth studying at an educational institution. Therefore, it may not cover other youth groups such as young workers employed in a full-scale establishment. In addition, this research collected data from research and academic articles published on Thai Journals Online (ThaiJO), Google Scholar and Thai-Journal Citation Index Center (TCI) database. Therefore, this information does not cover research and academic articles published on other databases.

### **Suggestions for Applying the Research Results**

The results of this research found that Thai youth's cultural identity is divided into 5 categories: 1) ethnic identity 2) personality identity 3) gender identity 4) traditional holistic identity and 5) multidimensional identity. The approach for the cultural identity expression of Thai youth is divided into 3 categories: 1) the cultural identity expression through the person 2) the expression of cultural identity identity through social media and 3) cultural identity expression through other media. The results of the research generate a body of knowledge that can be used to guide the policy-making of the institution. Results of the study can be created as a mission, develop the educational curriculum, and improve the environment to facilitate the development of the student's cultural identity in line with the framework of the National Qualifications Standards for Higher Education and the 20-year National Strategy. Furthermore, psychologists can build on from the research results to go further in-depth with the current study. The facts can be applied in planning assistance or counseling on youth development. Otherwise, develop a psychological training model to enable Thai youth to properly and creatively express their cultural identity. In addition, the results of the research provide the foundation for teachers in the management of teaching and learning activities for cultivating the student's individual identity. In addition, educational institutions can use the information to plan and develop the curriculum for producing graduates with an identity that are consistent with the vision and mission of the school.

### **Suggestions for the Next Research Study**

This research and academic articles from the ThaiJo Journals Online (ThaiJO), Google Scholar and Thai-Journal Citation Index Centre (TCI) databases should be synthesized only from other databases or sources, as well as to synthesize information about the identity of other youths, such as those who are at risk of addiction or drinking alcohol.

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