

# Negotiating Belonging in Digital Spaces: Social Media Practices of Malaysian Diaspora Communities Abroad

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**Abstract:** The Malaysian diaspora, estimated at more than two million globally (World Bank, 2022), increasingly relies on digital platforms to sustain kinship, cultural identity, and transnational engagement. Social media particularly WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok has emerged as an indispensable tool for maintaining 'silaturahmi', a Malay cultural value centred on social bonds and reciprocity. Unlike earlier diasporic practices limited to letters or occasional phone calls, today's communication is marked by immediacy, intimacy, and visibility, enabling what Madianou (2022) terms "ambient co-presence." This shift highlights how diasporic belonging is continuously redefined through digital interactions. Beyond the personal sphere, Malaysian diaspora communities are active participants in political and cultural debates. These practices illustrate how social media functions as both a bridge to the homeland and a platform for transnational political communication (Treré and Milan 2022). At the intersection of tradition and modernity, diasporic Malaysians construct hybrid identities that negotiate between cultural rootedness and global belonging. Younger generations frequently adopt cosmopolitan practices shaped by host societies, while older members emphasise cultural preservation. This generational tension underscores Stuart Hall's (1990) view of identity as a process rather than a fixed essence. In this context, Malaysia's recent Madani framework, which promotes inclusivity and shared values, offers a potential lens for understanding diaspora engagement. By harnessing digital literacy and fostering inclusive online spaces, the Malaysian diaspora can evolve as a vital extension of national belonging, simultaneously rooted in heritage and attuned to global realities.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Diaspora Studies, Malaysia Abroad, Digital Spaces, Communication

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## 1. Introduction

Digital platforms are a set of digital resources allowing interactions between individuals while creating value such as relationships (Bartelheimer et al., 2022). The Malaysian diaspora has grown substantially over the last ten years. It is concentrated in other parts of the world such as Australia, Singapore, United Kingdom, Brunei, and the United States. Hence, the United Nations roughly estimated Malaysian placing abroad about 1.7 million people (United Nations, 2020).

There is an increasing reliance on digital platforms due to a dispersed population in order to sustain social ties, cultural practices, and ongoing connections and exchanges. A qualitative study by Adzmi and Bahry (2020) found that social media such as WhatsApp, and Facebook works as the main medium for practicing kinship, sharing homeland news, coordinating events, and preserving cultural rituals in virtual communities.

Other studies with different Malaysian diasporic groups and age corroborate this pattern. According to Habibi and Andini (2024) research on Malaysians students abroad highlights how social media use keeps students connected to homeland and to one another. The Malay-Bugis community members used to represent and further explore their identity through Facebook including daily status updates and photo and video uploads, as well as Bugis-related insignia used in profile photos (Sunarti, Haghia, and Sari, 2022). Another research by the Malaysian Chinese diaspora uses Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter to circulate cultural and religious content (Hu, Ho, and Fan, 2024).

This study main purpose is:

1. To explore how Malaysian diaspora communities use social media to maintain 'silaturahmi' and family connections across distance.
2. To understand how social media influences identity formation and generational differences among Malaysians living abroad.

## **2. Literature Review**

Existing scholarship widely recognizes that digital platforms play a significant role in sustaining cultural identity, particularly among migrant and diasporic communities, by enabling communication, cultural expression, and connection across distance (Baldassar et al., 2016; Madianou, 2020; Leurs, 2022). Studies have shown that social media, messaging applications, and digital content-sharing platforms facilitate the preservation of language, traditions, religious practices, and cultural memories.

While cultural expression online has been documented, fewer studies systematically examine how platform affordances such as visibility, algorithmic curation, persistence, and metrics of engagement reconfigure how culture is performed, recognized, and legitimized (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Poell et al., 2022). Research tends to focus on explicit or symbolic expressions of culture such as festivals, language use, or identity claims, in which overlooking routine, low-intensity digital interactions that sustain cultural belonging through ambient co-presence and habitual exposure (Baldassar et al., 2016; Madianou, 2016).

According to Boland (2020) and Leurs (2020), although hybrid identity is acknowledged, there is limited empirical analysis of how digital platforms actively facilitate selective, situational, and hybrid cultural performances, and how these practices reshape notions of authenticity, authority, and cultural continuity across generations.

### **2.1 The Malaysian Diaspora**

According to early demographic analyses, the Malaysian diaspora was estimated at approximately one million individuals worldwide based on 2010 population data (Foo, 2011). However, more recent migration statistics reported by the World Bank (2022) indicate a substantial increase, with the number of Malaysian-born migrants now exceeding two million globally. As documented in contemporary migration studies, the Malaysian diaspora comprises international students, skilled professionals, transnational families, and labour migrants who relocate in pursuit of economic opportunities, educational advancement, and improved life prospects within global labour markets (Foley, 2023).

Before the widespread adoption of digital technologies, diasporic communication was largely mediated through traditional channels such as letters, postcards, and infrequent long-distance telephone calls. According to Sánchez (2025), these modes of interaction were characterised by high financial costs, temporal delays, and limited emotional immediacy, producing what is conceptualised as “delayed intimacy.” In the Malaysian context, ‘silaturahmi’ which is a culturally embedded principle emphasising social connectedness, loyalty, and reciprocal care that remained central to sustaining diasporic relationships across distance (Muhamad Adzmi, 2023).

With the expansion of internet access and the rise of social media platforms, scholars widely acknowledge a fundamental shift in diasporic communication practices. According to Kianpour et al. (2025), digital media transformed diasporic interaction from sporadic and linear exchanges into continuous, multidirectional forms of engagement. Empirical studies further indicate that such platforms enable real-time emotional presence, thereby reshaping experiences of belonging within transnational families (Tian et al., 2023). Taken together, these developments provide a critical analytical foundation for examining how digital platforms now mediate, sustain, and continually redefine relational ties within the Malaysian diaspora.

### **2.2 Digital Media and Diaspora Studies**

Digital communication technologies have fundamentally transformed the ways diaspora communities maintain and experience transnational ties. According to scholarship on transnationalism, contemporary migrants are no longer anchored to a single geographic location but instead operate within multi-sited social fields enabled by sustained digital connectivity (Bilgili, 2025). Within this context, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok function not merely as channels for information exchange, but as affective infrastructures that cultivate a sense of persistent proximity across geographical distance.

Madianou’s (2020) concept of ambient co-presence provides a particularly useful framework for conceptualising these digitally mediated relationships. The concept refers to a continuous yet low-intensity awareness of others that is produced through frequent, everyday digital interactions. Empirical studies suggest that practices such as viewing a family member’s WhatsApp status, reacting to Instagram stories, exchanging brief voice notes, or sharing religious content through Telegram channels generate micro-moments of connection that collectively reinforce emotional closeness (Aldamen, 2023). These interactions allow geographically dispersed family

members to experience a sense of “being there” in each other’s lives without the need for sustained or synchronous communication.

Within Malaysian diaspora communities, such digitally mediated practices play a central role in sustaining ‘*silaturahmi*’, a culturally embedded value that emphasises social connectedness, mutual responsibility, and emotional reciprocity (Muhamad Adzmi, 2023). At the same time, digital platforms facilitate new modes of religious, familial, and cultural participation, including virtual *du’a* recitations, online religious lectures, and remote celebrations of Hari Raya. These practices illustrate how traditional cultural values are not displaced by digital technologies but are instead rearticulated and adapted to the temporal rhythms and spatial conditions of global mobility.

### **2.3 Identity and Belonging in a Digital Age**

Identity formation within the Malaysian diaspora is best understood through the lens of hybridity. Stuart Hall’s (1990) assertion that identity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing process of negotiation is particularly relevant in a digitally mediated transnational context. Malaysian migrants constantly navigate between the cultural values of their homeland and the norms, expectations, and worldviews of their host societies (Dalib et al 2023). According to van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2022) acculturation is increasingly understood as a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by continuous interaction between individuals and their sociocultural environments. This process can involve integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization, and is influenced by both individual choices and the host country’s receptiveness.

Younger generations, especially international students and early-career professionals, often adopt more cosmopolitan practices such as embracing global cultural flows, multilingual communication, and diverse social networks (Latif et al., 2025). Older diaspora members, on the other hand, tend to prioritise cultural preservation through religious routines, traditional practices, and the maintenance of linguistic and familial norms (Bilgory-Fazakas et al., 2025). According to Bilgory-Fazakas et al., (2025), heritage language maintenance is a resilient process sustained through the interaction of family dynamics, cultural orientation, and pragmatic communicative choices. This generational divergence can generate tensions within diasporic households, particularly around questions of belonging, morality, and cultural loyalty.

In recent years, Malaysia’s Madani framework which centred on values of inclusivity, compassion, and shared dignity. The Malaysia Madani framework, introduced by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in January 2023, articulates a policy vision for a civilised, skilled, and inclusive society structured around six core values comprising the acronym SCRIPT — Sustainability (Kemampanan), Care and Compassion (Ihsan), Respect (Hormat), Innovation (Daya Cipta), Prosperity (Kesejahteraan), and Trust (Keyakinan) which its prioritising good governance, social justice, and human dignity (*karamah insaniah*) in national development (Prime Minister’s Office Malaysia, 2023). It has emerged as a potential conceptual lens for understanding how diaspora communities might cultivate more cohesive and inclusive digital environments.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design to examine how Malaysian diaspora communities negotiate belonging, cultural identity, and social connectedness through digital platforms. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate given the study’s focus on meaning-making, everyday practices, and subjective experiences embedded in digitally mediated interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than measuring frequency or intensity of platform use, the research seeks to understand how and why social media practices are embedded within cultural norms such as ‘*silaturahmi*’, and how these practices are transformed through platform affordances.

The study is informed by digital diaspora studies and mediated identity frameworks, drawing conceptually on Stuart Hall’s notion of identity as a process and Madianou’s concept of ambient co-presence. These perspectives guide the analysis toward understanding belonging as relational, performative, and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or territorially bound (Hall, 1996; Madianou, 2016).

### 3.2 Data Collection and Processing

Data were collected through two complementary qualitative methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and observational analysis of diaspora-oriented digital spaces.

#### 3.2.1 In-Depth Interviews

A total of 32 Malaysian diaspora members range in age from early 20s to late 60s from all walks of life this include long-term migrants, and retirees participated in semi-structured interviews conducted between January and June 2025. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity across generation, ethnicity, gender, and host country location. Interviewees were based in the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Brunei, and the United States countries consistently identified as major Malaysian diaspora destinations (World Bank, 2022). Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or WhatsApp video calls, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were audio/video-recorded with informed consent has been signed digitally by all participants as part of ethical consideration before research can be conducted.

The interview guide explored themes including:

- Everyday social media practices and preferred platforms
- Experiences of maintaining 'silaturahmi' digitally
- Perceptions of cultural identity and belonging
- Generational differences in online communication
- Emotional proximity, obligation, and visibility in digital spaces

#### 3.2.2 Digital Space Observation

To contextualise interview narratives, the study also included non-intrusive observation of selected Malaysian diaspora digital spaces, including WhatsApp family groups, Facebook community pages, and Instagram or TikTok content shared by participants. Observation focused on interaction patterns rather than individual identities, examining how cultural norms, religious expressions, humour, and political discussions circulate within these spaces. No private content was reproduced verbatim, ensuring ethical compliance.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase approach. Initial open coding identified recurring practices and meanings related to connection, obligation, visibility, and identity. These codes were then grouped into broader analytical themes that aligned with the study's theoretical framework.

Analytical attention was paid to:

- Platform affordances (immediacy, persistence, visibility)
- Forms of interaction (active communication vs. ambient awareness)
- Narratives of belonging and distance
- Generational and cultural tensions

To enhance analytical rigour, coding was conducted iteratively, with constant comparison across interviews and observational data. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout the analysis to document interpretive decisions and minimise researcher bias, consistent with qualitative best practices (Tracy, 2020).

### 3.4 Ethics Declaration

This research adhered to ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process, and all data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

## 4. Results

The data obtained from the in-depth interview discussed on the participant's background, and participants' negotiating belonging in digital space practices their cultural activities and 'silaturahmi' relationship.

#### 4.1 The Participant's Demographic

Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the study participants, illustrating diversity across age, migration status, host country, and length of residence abroad. This diversity enabled a nuanced analysis of generational and contextual variations in digital practices and identity negotiation.

**Table 1: Participant's demographic**

Demographic Variable	Category	Number of Participants (n)
Gender	Female	18
	Male	14
Age Group	18–29 years	9
	30–39 years	11
	40–49 years	6
	50 years and above	6
Migration Status	International students	8
	Professionals / skilled migrants	14
	Long-term migrants / permanent residents	7
	Retirees / dependents	3
Host Country / Region	United Kingdom	8
	Australia	7
	Singapore	6
	United States	6
	Brunei	5
Length of Residence Abroad	Less than 3 years	7
	3–7 years	10
	8–15 years	9
	More than 15 years	6
Primary Digital Platforms Used*	WhatsApp	32
	Facebook	21
	Instagram	18
	TikTok	12

#### 4.2 The Digitalisation of 'Silaturahmi'

Table 2 summarises the primary digital platforms utilised by Malaysian diaspora members and their associated cultural functions.

**Table 2: Digital platforms used by Malaysian diaspora for practising 'silaturahmi'**

Platform	Primary Functions	Dominant Forms of Interaction	Cultural Significance
WhatsApp	Family communication, kinship maintenance, religious reminders	Daily greetings, voice notes, status viewing, group chats	Central platform for practising 'silaturahmi' through routine, obligation-based communication
Facebook	Community engagement, cultural events, homeland news	Posts, comments, livestreams, group discussions	Facilitates collective identity and diasporic community cohesion
Instagram	Identity performance, lifestyle sharing	Stories, reels, visual narratives	Enables hybrid identity expression combining Malaysian and global aesthetics

Platform	Primary Functions	Dominant Forms of Interaction	Cultural Significance
TikTok	Cultural humour, political commentary, short-form storytelling	Short videos, algorithmic discovery	Amplifies generational differences and visibility-driven cultural performances

Findings indicate that social media platforms have become central infrastructures for practising ‘silaturahmi’ among Malaysian diaspora communities. WhatsApp emerged as the most pervasive platform, particularly for family-based communication, while Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok facilitated broader community and cultural engagement.

Participants described how daily micro-interactions such as sending morning greetings, reacting to WhatsApp statuses, or sharing short videos functioned as expressions of care and moral obligation. Unlike earlier modes of communication characterised by delay and scarcity, digital platforms enabled continuous and low-intensity relational maintenance, aligning closely with Madianou’s concept of ambient co-presence (Madianou, 2016).

Several participants contrasted current practices with pre-digital experiences:

*“Before this, you only call during Raya or emergencies. Now, even just seeing my mother’s WhatsApp status every morning already feels like I’m present in her life.”* – (P1, female, 45, professional, United States)

*“Before social media, we waited for letters or very expensive phone calls. You only really knew what was happening during big occasions. Now, even small updates—someone cooking, someone feeling tired—you feel part of their everyday life.”* – (P15, male, late 50s, retiree, United States)

*“Keeping in touch used to mean calling home maybe once a month. Now it’s different. If I’ve seen their updates, I already feel connected, even if we haven’t spoken properly. The meaning of staying close has changed.”* – (P21, male, late 50s, retiree, United Kingdom)

Such accounts illustrate how ‘silaturahmi’ has shifted from episodic interaction to persistent visibility, where being socially present no longer requires direct conversation but sustained awareness. This visibility, however, also generated new expectations. Participants reported feelings of guilt when failing to respond promptly or engage with shared content, suggesting that digital ‘silaturahmi’ involves both emotional closeness and moral labour.

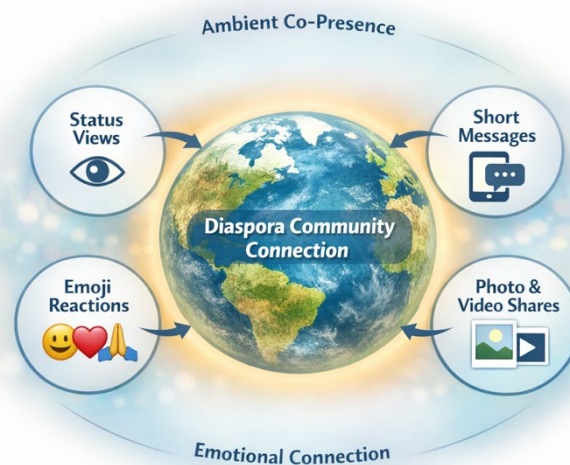
**Table 3: Forms of digital ‘silaturahmi’ practised among Malaysian diaspora**

Type of Interaction	Description	Frequency	Cultural Meaning
Ambient monitoring	Viewing WhatsApp statuses, Instagram stories	Daily	Sustains emotional proximity without direct communication
Ritual greetings	Morning messages, religious reminders	Daily / Weekly	Reinforces moral obligation and care
Event coordination	Online planning of Raya, kenduri, visits	Periodic	Translates offline communal rituals into digital space
Crisis communication	Health updates, bereavement announcements	Situational	Heightens moral responsibility and emotional labour

*“we share our living situation stories through TikTok and sometimes Facebook where not only my family can commented on it but also our other close friends where they always like to know our well-being”* – (P10, male, late 20s, student, Australia)

*“..social media has made every relationship more simple and easy to connect among each other around the world, during festive season, we can do video call via WhatsApp and share family photo and saying ‘Selamat Hari Raya’ towards each other.”* – (P23, male, early 30s, professional, Brunei)

*“..last time I have to collect all the cooking recipe from cook book but now during the preparation of festive season like ‘Hari Raya’, I video call my mom to ask about cooking recipe on traditional cuisine and this make us more close to each other where we can laugh while preparing the ingredient”* – (P32, female, 35, professional, United States)



**Figure 1: Ambient co-presence and the transformation of ‘silaturahmi’ in digital diaspora communities.**

These practices demonstrate how ‘silaturahmi’ has shifted from episodic contact to continuous relational maintenance, aligning with the concept of ambient co-presence as low-intensity yet emotionally meaningful connection (Baldassar et al., 2016; Madianou, 2020).

Although participants did not frame these practices in policy terms, the emphasis on routine care, responsiveness, and emotional attentiveness reflects value orientations that later inform the Madani-based interpretative discussion.

### 4.3 Hybrid Identities and Generational Negotiation

The findings further reveal that digital platforms serve as sites where hybrid Malaysian identities are negotiated and performed. Younger participants frequently described blending Malaysian cultural references with global lifestyles, using English-Malay code-switching, humour, and transnational aesthetics on Instagram and TikTok. These practices reflected a form of selective cultural performance shaped by platform norms and peer visibility.

*“My parents expect daily messages and proper greetings, especially on WhatsApp. For me, I feel connected even if I just watch their status or send a reaction. It doesn’t mean I don’t care, but I think they see it differently.”* – (P7, female, late 20s, postgraduate student, United Kingdom)

*“I still feel Malaysian, but it comes out differently now. On Instagram, I might post food or travel, not traditional things all the time. But during Raya, suddenly I post in Malay, wear baju kurung, and that feels important to me.”* – (P12, female, early 30s, professional, Australia)

*“For my parents, replying properly means respect. For me, reacting or viewing is already a response. Sometimes they think I’m distancing myself, but actually I’m still very connected.”* – (P11, female, late 20s, doctoral student, United Kingdom)

Older participants, by contrast, emphasised cultural continuity through religious reminders, traditional greetings, and family-centred communication, primarily on WhatsApp and Facebook. This generational divergence occasionally produced tension, particularly when younger members were perceived as “less engaged” or insufficiently responsive to familial expectations.

*“For us, replying is important. Even a short message shows respect. When the younger ones only ‘like’ or send emoji, I feel something is missing. It’s not wrong, but it feels less personal.”* – (P19, male, late 50s, long-term migrant, Singapore)

*“I may not practise everything the same way anymore, but certain moments bring me back. During Raya or family events, I become more ‘Malaysian’ online. It’s like switching modes depending on the situation.”* – (P18, female, mid 50s, long-term migrant, United States)

Nevertheless, rather than representing cultural erosion, these differences illustrate Hall’s (1996) assertion that identity is always in process. Digital platforms enable individuals to inhabit multiple cultural positions

simultaneously, producing identities that are neither fully assimilated nor entirely traditional but dynamically negotiated across contexts.

**Table 4: Generational differences in digital cultural practices**

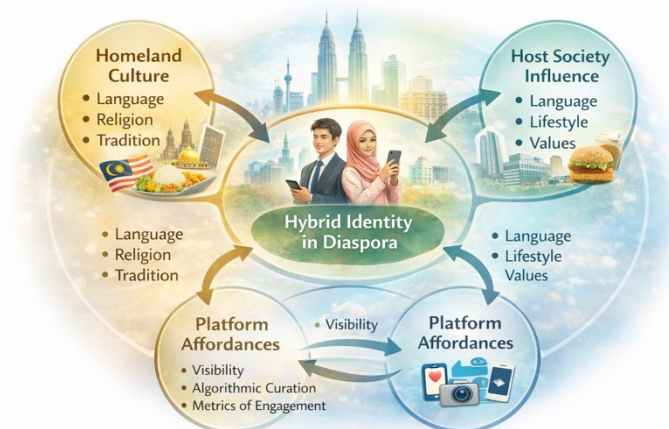
Dimension	Older Generation (40+)	Younger Generation (18–35)
Platform preference	WhatsApp, Facebook	Instagram, TikTok
Communication style	Text-based, directive, obligation-oriented	Visual, expressive, selective
Cultural emphasis	Preservation of tradition, religion, language	Hybrid identity, cosmopolitanism
Perception of obligation	Moral duty to respond	Contextual and situational
Identity performance	Collective and family-centred	Individualised and network-oriented

Beyond kinship maintenance, digital platforms functioned as key sites for negotiating Malaysian cultural identity in diasporic contexts. Findings reveal clear generational patterns in platform use, communication styles, and interpretations of cultural obligation, as outlined in Table 4.

Older participants generally prioritised platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, valuing structured communication, explicit greetings, and culturally recognisable practices such as religious reminders and family announcements. For this group, digital engagement was closely tied to cultural preservation and moral responsibility. Responsiveness was interpreted as a reflection of respect and familial loyalty.

In contrast, younger participants gravitated toward Instagram and TikTok, using visual storytelling, humour, and short-form content to express identity. Their engagement with Malaysian culture was more selective and situational, often blending national references with global lifestyles. Rather than daily greetings, cultural belonging was performed through symbolic acts such as sharing Malaysian food content, participating in festive trends, or engaging with political satire.

These differences occasionally generated tension within families, particularly when older members perceived younger relatives as disengaged or insufficiently responsive. However, analysis suggests that such tensions do not signal cultural erosion but rather reflect different modes of cultural performance shaped by platform affordances (van Dijck et al., 2018).



**Figure 2: Hybrid identity negotiation through platform-mediated cultural practices.**

This process is conceptualised in Figure 2, which illustrates hybrid identity negotiation as an interaction between homeland values, host-society influences, and digital platform logics. Digital spaces allow diaspora members to inhabit multiple identities simultaneously, validating Hall’s (1996) argument that identity is not fixed but continuously produced through representation and context. Importantly, younger participants emphasised that reduced frequency of direct communication did not imply weakened attachment. Instead, belonging was maintained through ongoing exposure and symbolic participation. This reinforces the argument that digital identity work operates through visibility and recognition, rather than constant verbal affirmation.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Redefining Belonging Beyond Geography

The findings demonstrate that belonging among Malaysian diaspora communities is increasingly constituted through digitally mediated everyday practices rather than physical proximity or periodic return. Through ambient co-presence, migrants sustain emotional and moral ties that blur distinctions between “here” and “there,” supporting Vertovec’s (2009) argument that transnationalism operates within multi-sited social fields.

While ambient co-presence strengthens emotional closeness, it also creates pressure to remain visible and responsive, especially in family WhatsApp groups. Participants reported feelings of guilt when responses were delayed or absent. This suggests that digital ‘silaturahmi’ fosters care and intimacy while also introducing new forms of obligation and emotional labour.

By foregrounding routine, low-intensity interactions, this study extends existing diaspora scholarship that has traditionally focused on symbolic or event-based expressions of identity. Belonging emerges not as a fixed attachment to place but as an ongoing relational achievement, sustained through visibility, responsiveness, and shared digital rhythms.

### 5.2 Digital Diaspora and the Madani Framework

Interpreted through the Madani framework, the Malaysian digital diaspora can be understood as a vital extension of national belonging grounded in values of care, respect, and inclusivity. Digital practices of ‘silaturahmi’ reflect Madani principles of compassion (ihsan) and trust (keyakinan), while hybrid identity performances illustrate pluralism and respect for difference.

The Madani framework is used as an analytical lens to interpret values of care and responsibility evident in digital silaturahmi, without implying that participants explicitly engaged with Madani policy discourse.

However, the findings also suggest that without adequate digital literacy and ethical engagement, platformed spaces may reproduce exclusion or generational misunderstanding. Embedding Madani values into diaspora engagement strategies—through culturally sensitive digital initiatives and inclusive online norms offers a pathway toward more cohesive transnational communities.

## 6. Conclusions

This study contributes to diaspora and digital media scholarship by demonstrating how Malaysian diaspora communities sustain ‘silaturahmi’ and negotiate cultural identity through everyday social media practices. The findings highlight the centrality of ambient co-presence, hybrid identity formation, and generational negotiation in redefining belonging beyond territorial boundaries. The study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on selected host countries. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how digital practices evolve over time or undertake comparative analyses with other Southeast Asian diasporas to identify shared and divergent patterns. Social media functions simultaneously as a bridge and a boundary for the Malaysian diaspora enabling intimacy, care, and continuity while introducing new forms of obligation and negotiation. Understanding this duality is essential for appreciating how cultural rootedness and global belonging are co-produced in an increasingly digital world.

### AI Declaration

AI tools have been used in developing this paper such as Grammarly for grammar check, Quiltbot for paraphrasing, Gemini for refining academic tone, language proficiency, developing figures based on the data collections, and re-arranging referencing style.

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