



Modeling Structural Relationships Between Dimensions of Personal, Social, and National Identity Among Students at Islamic Azad University, Hamedan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between personal identity, social identity, and national identity, with an emphasis on the mediating role of social identity in fostering national cohesion. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from 373 university students through validated questionnaires: the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS) and the National and Social Identity Questionnaire. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were employed to validate the measurement models and test the hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed significant direct and indirect effects among the identity dimensions. Social identity emerged as the strongest predictor of national identity ($\beta = 0.58, p < .01$), while personal identity indirectly influenced national identity through social identity ($\beta = 0.29, p < .01$). The total effect of personal identity on national identity was significant ($\beta = 0.71, p < .001$). CFA results confirmed the multidimensional nature of identity constructs, with high factor loadings in subdimensions such as ethnic, religious, and modern identities. The model demonstrated excellent fit indices (CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.060), affirming its robustness. This study highlights the critical role of social identity in integrating individual values and affiliations into a collective national framework. The findings have practical implications for policymakers and educators aiming to strengthen national cohesion in multicultural societies through inclusive policies, educational reforms, and community-building initiatives. This research contributes to theoretical understanding of identity formation and its practical relevance for social cohesion, laying the groundwork for future studies exploring identity dynamics across diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: *personal identity, social identity, national identity, social cohesion, structural equation modeling.*

1. Introduction

Social cohesion, as the essential glue that holds societies together, has long been a cornerstone of sociological research and shapes the theoretical outlook on collective stability and social development. Researchers have

consistently examined the capacity of social cohesion to maintain order and societal integration, emphasizing its reliance on identity as a fundamental element. Identity functions both as a catalyst for social harmony and as a mechanism through which individuals and groups derive meaning and belonging. The interaction between identity

and cohesion is pivotal for understanding the dynamics of collective stability (1).

Identity, stemming from the human need for self-recognition, represents a complex interaction of self-awareness, social roles, and belonging. Erikson (1994) proposed that identity serves as a “frame of reference” that enables individuals to interpret personal experiences and respond to existential questions about purpose and direction. This process evolves through a dynamic interplay shaped by personal agency, social interactions, and cultural environments (2, 3). Giddens (2017) expanded on this concept by highlighting the need for individuals to continuously reconstruct and negotiate their identities in response to shifting social norms and institutional frameworks. This ongoing adjustment reflects the complex landscape of modernity, in which traditional sources of identity, such as religion and family, coexist with emerging influences like digital media and globalization (4).

The multidimensionality of identity encompasses personal, social, and national levels, each uniquely contributing to cohesion. Personal identity refers to individual traits and affiliations shaped by family and close environments (5). In contrast, social identity extends these affiliations to include professional, ethnic, and religious communities, emphasizing collective aspects of group membership. National identity, the highest form of collective identity, consolidates these affiliations within a unifying cultural and political framework and reinforces loyalty to shared heritage and values (6). By fostering unity amid diversity, national identity plays a vital role in strengthening social cohesion. This identity encompasses shared cultural elements such as language, history, and traditions, providing individuals with a sense of belonging to a larger collective (7). Nations that align diverse groups under a common identity can mitigate the divisive effects of ethnic, religious, and social inequalities.

Iran offers a compelling case study of these dynamics. As a multiethnic society, its rich cultural diversity underscores the importance of nurturing a cohesive national identity. However, disparities in socio-economic opportunities and perceived injustices among ethnic minorities have intensified tensions and challenged the pursuit of unity (5). The modern era has fundamentally altered the concept of identity. In premodern societies, identity was often

predetermined by stable social structures such as family roles or religious institutions. However, rapid globalization and technological advancements have introduced new variables that disrupt traditional identity frameworks. For example, digital media have transformed identity construction by enabling individuals to present and negotiate their identities on global platforms (8). This transition presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, by expanding identity boundaries, it promotes inclusion and intercultural exchange. On the other, it can lead to fragmentation as individuals struggle with conflicting values and norms in an increasingly interconnected world (1).

Adolescence and early adulthood are critical stages for identity formation, as young individuals develop the cognitive and emotional capacities to explore abstract concepts such as ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship. This stage of development is marked by increased vulnerability to identity-related crises, as youth navigate competing societal expectations and personal aspirations. Educational institutions and family structures play central roles in shaping youth identity. Schools, as microcosms of society, offer a platform for exploring diverse perspectives, fostering inclusion, and instilling shared values. Meanwhile, families act as primary agents of socialization, transmitting cultural traditions and moral frameworks (5). However, the erosion of these traditional institutions has created gaps in identity development, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Governments and policymakers play a significant role in promoting social cohesion through identity-building initiatives. Nation-building efforts often focus on promoting a unified national identity, aligning cultural and political values with developmental goals. These efforts require a balance between inclusion and the preservation of cultural diversity, ensuring equitable representation for all social groups (9). One successful example of policy-based cohesion is the European Union’s cohesion policy, which strengthens a sense of European identity through initiatives that highlight shared values and benefits. This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural, economic, and political dimensions to promote unity (10).

Social cohesion and identity formation are central themes in the social sciences, offering interdisciplinary insights into the dynamics that bind individuals and societies. While

social cohesion is conceptualized as the “glue” that fosters solidarity, trust, and collective belonging, identity formation provides the cognitive and cultural frameworks through which individuals define their roles and relationships in society. This review highlights major developments in understanding social cohesion and identity, focusing on research published from 2020 onward to ensure contemporary relevance. Foundational sociological theories, particularly those of Émile Durkheim, distinguish between mechanical solidarity—based on shared traditions—and organic solidarity—arising from interdependence in complex societies (2, 3). Recent studies extend these foundations to explore cohesion in rapidly evolving multicultural contexts. Holtug (2021) introduces the “identity thesis,” proposing that shared identity significantly enhances cohesion by fostering trust and solidarity across groups, particularly under globalization and migration pressures (1). Empirical studies underscore the adaptability of cohesion, especially during socio-political disruptions (11), and emphasize the importance of trust, participation, and shared values, as shown in MacIsaac et al.’s (2023) research on Canadian communities. Identity operates across personal, social, and national levels, each contributing uniquely to cohesion. Erikson’s psychosocial theory remains essential for understanding identity development, especially during adolescence, a phase of increased exploration of nationality and ethnicity (7). Recent studies, such as Cheng et al. (2022), examine digital environments as both facilitators and challengers of identity formation, highlighting how virtual interactions can strengthen social support while intensifying identity conflicts (12). National identity, in particular, has gained attention for its role in unifying diverse populations, with Ng’eno (2023) showing how inclusive policies enhance national unity in Kenya (11). Iranian scholars such as Azhari (2022), Ansari (2022), and Solgi (2022) have contributed localized insights, demonstrating the significant impact of socio-economic status, peer interaction, and social intimacy on individual and social identities, as well as their collective influence on national identity (6, 13). Other national studies (2, 14, 15) confirm the strong and meaningful correlations among identity dimensions across student populations. Soltani et al. (2019) extend this to European contexts, affirming the predictive power of personal and social identity for national

identity (16). From a sociological lens, Ghaffari-Nasab et al. (2016) identify religiosity, age, communication networks, and media usage as key social-cultural factors shaping national identity in Iran (17). Meanwhile, Tavassoli and Asl Zaeim (2020) address ethnic identity and its dialectical relationship with national identity and social security, warning that overly political approaches to ethnic identity may intensify resistance rather than cohesion (18). Global perspectives further illustrate these tensions. Dielini et al. (2022) underscore the role of intercultural communication in enhancing cohesion in educational settings (19), while Sestito (2023) reveals that ethnic conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa reinforces in-group cohesion while deepening intergroup divides. Institutional frameworks and public policies thus play a crucial role in sustaining cohesion in diverse societies (20). Holuag (2021) advocates for inclusive narratives and shared identities, exemplified by EU cohesion policies that integrate economic and cultural dimensions (1). Ng’eno (2023) stresses the need for legal reforms to reduce systemic inequalities and promote citizenship rights for marginalized groups (11). Collectively, the literature demonstrates that fostering national cohesion requires a nuanced understanding of how personal and collective identities evolve and intersect in a rapidly changing world.

This study investigates the relationships between personal identity, social identity, and national identity, with a particular focus on the mediating role of social identity in strengthening national cohesion.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed an applied research approach aimed at addressing practical issues related to identity formation and social cohesion. Methodologically, a descriptive-correlational research design was used, incorporating path analysis to examine the relationships among personal, social, and national identities. This research design was particularly suitable for analyzing the structural relationships between variables and assessing the overall fit of the proposed model. The statistical population consisted of all male and female students enrolled at Islamic Azad University, Hamedan Branch, during the 2022–2023 academic year across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. This accessible population provided a diverse group of participants from various academic levels and fields, making it suitable for

investigating identity-related constructs. A stratified random sampling method was applied to ensure representation across educational levels (undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral). Stratification based on education level was essential to capture potential differences in identity structures across academic experiences. The Morgan sampling formula was used to determine the required sample size. Based on a student population of approximately 10,000, the required sample size was determined to be 373 participants according to the Morgan table. This sample size provided sufficient statistical power for path analysis and ensured generalizability within the population.

Data were collected using two standardized questionnaires designed to measure identity dimensions and their associations with social and national cohesion. The Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS-2) was used to assess identity status across four dimensions: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved identities. This instrument evaluates identity in three domains: occupation, political ideology, and religion. The extended version of the questionnaire includes 64 items rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Originally developed by Adams, Shea, and Fitch (1979) and later revised by Adams and Bennion in 1986, the instrument has been validated in 37 countries. Studies report satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from .59 to .81) and various forms of validity, including predictive, concurrent, and construct validity (e.g., factor analysis, convergent, and discriminant validity). Test-retest reliability coefficients ranged from .59 to .82 (Adams et al., 1984). In Iran, local adaptations of the EOM-EIS-2 have shown reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from .60 to .81 among student populations (Ghazanfari, 2003). The second instrument was the National and Social Identity Questionnaire, developed by Salgi et al. (2015), which assesses national and social identity across three subdimensions: ethnic identity (e.g., "I prefer to live among people of my own tribe or ethnicity, regardless of family ties"), religious identity, and modern identity. This comprehensive questionnaire contains 141 items rated on a four-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." It measures both traditional and contemporary aspects of identity, making it especially relevant for

multicultural and rapidly modernizing societies. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year using both printed and online versions of the questionnaires. Participants were randomly selected within each educational stratum. Informed consent was ensured by briefing participants on the study's objectives, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics included the calculation of means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for demographic variables and questionnaire responses. For inferential analysis, path analysis was conducted to assess the hypothesized structural relationships among the variables. Path analysis was particularly effective in understanding both direct and indirect effects of personal and social identity on national identity and social cohesion. Several model fit indices were computed to evaluate the adequacy of the proposed model, including Chi-square (χ^2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Reliability tests involved computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each questionnaire subscale to ensure internal consistency. For validity testing, construct validity was examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using previous validation studies as benchmarks.

3. Findings and Results

The descriptive analysis provided an overview of the distribution and central tendencies of the study variables. As presented in [Table 1](#), the dimensions of personal identity—including achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffuse identities—showed varied yet consistent mean scores. The achieved identity (VIR1) recorded the highest mean score of 4.52, indicating a strong sense of self among participants, rooted in personal values and experiences. Moratorium identity (VIR3) had a moderate mean score of 4.12, reflecting ongoing exploration of values and roles among respondents. The diffuse identity (VIR4) yielded a mean of 3.79, suggesting some fluctuation in participants' commitment to personal and social roles.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Objective Identity Measures (Theoretical Mean = 3)

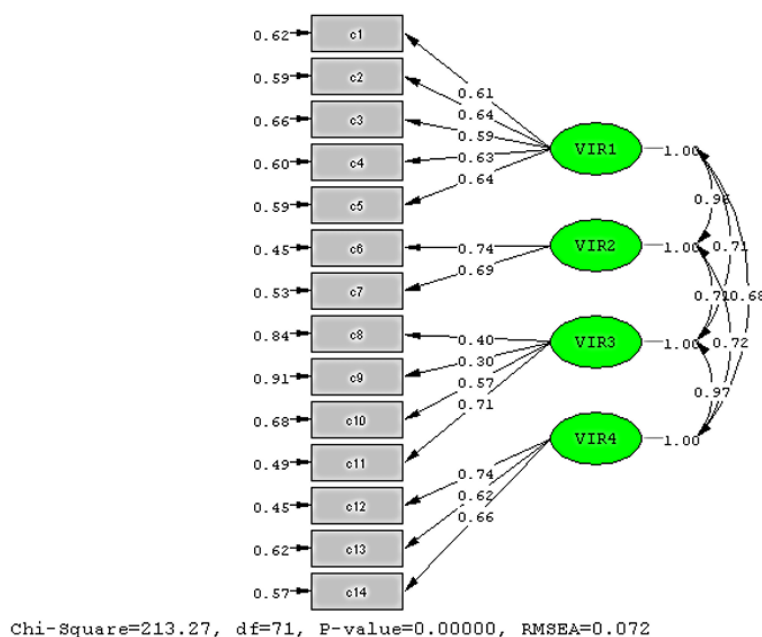
Component	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Diffuse Identity	4.12	0.914	1	6
Foreclosed Identity	4.06	1.003	1	6
Moratorium Identity	3.84	1.212	1	6
Achieved Identity	4.77	1.379	1	6
Personal Identity	4.14	0.530	1	6
Ethnic Identity	4.37	0.904	1	6
Religious Identity	4.46	0.866	1	6
Modern Identity	2.57	1.150	1	6
Social and National Identity	5.90	1.466	1	6

Descriptive statistics for social identity, summarized in Table 1, revealed similarly high mean scores across subdimensions. Ethnic identity scored 4.29, reflecting participants’ strong attachment to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Religious and modern identities scored 4.14 and 3.78, respectively, illustrating a balance between

traditional and contemporary identity structures. For national identity, the mean scores, indicated a robust sense of belonging to the nation, significantly influenced by components such as historical awareness, territorial pride, and cultural affiliation.

Figure 1

CFA Results for Personal Identity Questionnaire (T-values)

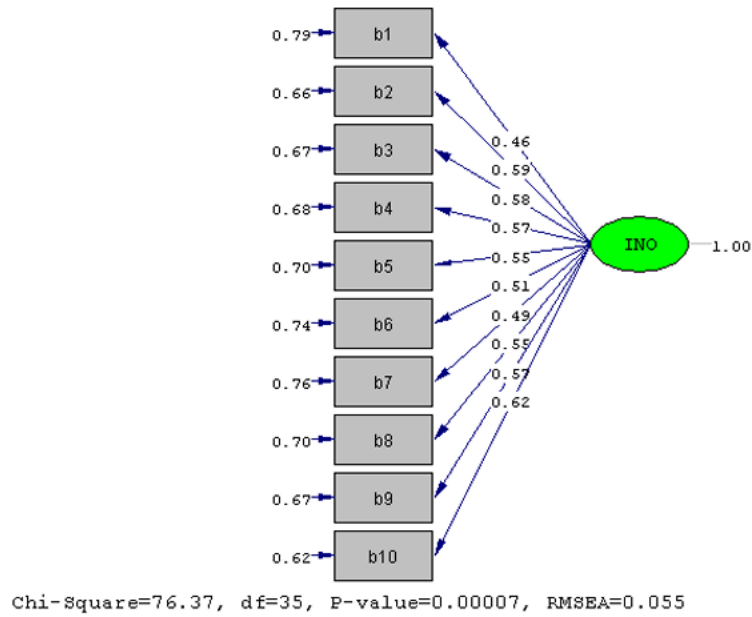


Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for personal identity provided strong validation of the questionnaire’s structure. All four dimensions—achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffuse identities—were confirmed with factor loadings ranging from 0.45 to 0.91. Achieved identity

emerged as the strongest component, with items such as “I rely on my values when making decisions” showing the highest loading at 0.91. The model fit indices indicated an adequate model fit, with RMSEA = 0.072, CFI = 0.93, and TLI = 0.91.

Figure 2

CFA Results for Social Identity Questionnaire (Factor Loadings)

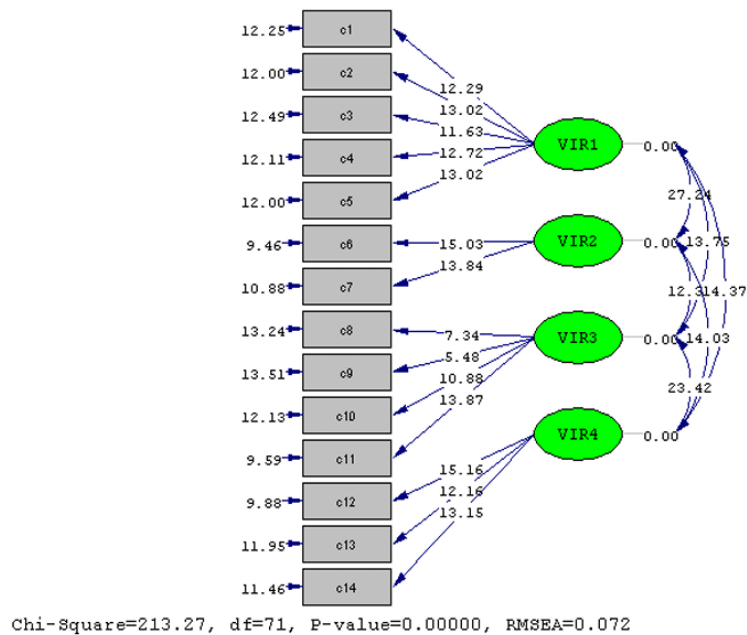


For social identity, CFA demonstrated significant loadings across all three subdimensions. Ethnic identity showed the highest loading ($\lambda = 0.94$), underscoring its pivotal role in social identity formation. Religious and

modern identities showed moderate factor loadings of 0.75 and 0.94, respectively. The model fit indices were excellent: RMSEA = 0.000 and CFI = 0.96, confirming the model's robustness.

Figure 3

CFA Results for National Identity Questionnaire (T-values)

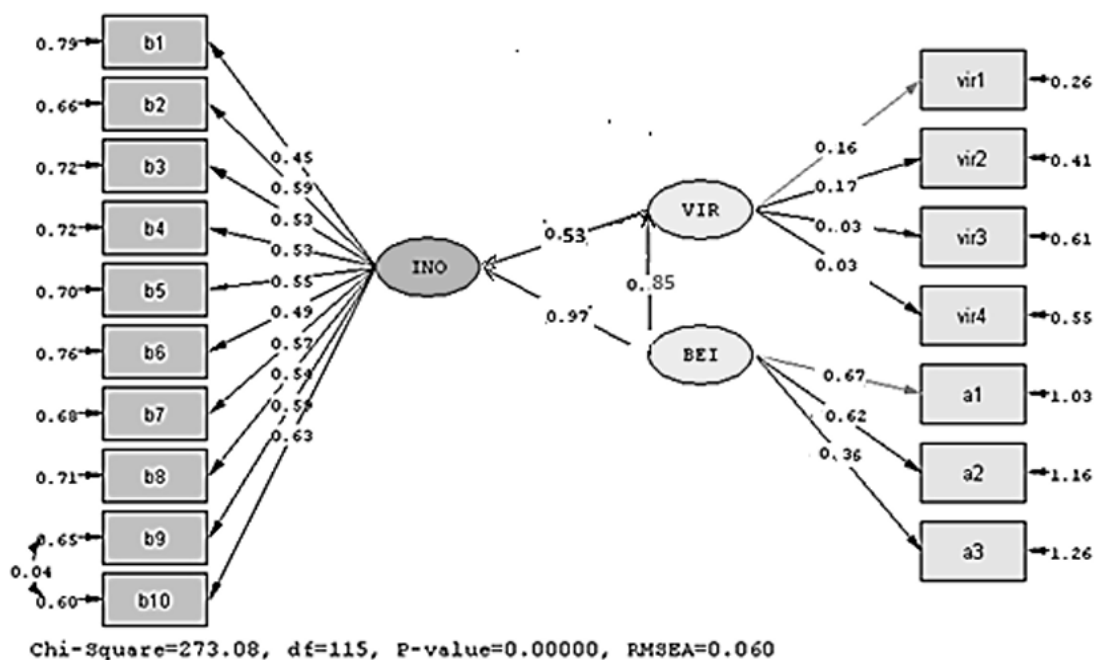


The CFA for national identity presented a breakdown of ten components with factor loadings ranging from 0.62 to 0.81. Historical awareness ($\lambda = 0.79$) and territorial affiliation ($\lambda = 0.76$) were the most significant contributors, highlighting their importance in national identity development. The model fit indices included $\chi^2 = 76.37$, df

$= 35$, $p < .001$, and $RMSEA = 0.055$, indicating an acceptable fit. The CFA results collectively confirmed the multidimensional nature of personal, social, and national identities and validated the measurement models for further hypothesis testing.

Figure 4

Structural Model with Path Coefficients



Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results revealed significant direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. In terms of direct effects, personal identity significantly predicted social identity ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < .01$), indicating that a well-defined personal identity enhances alignment with social groups. Social identity exerted the strongest direct influence on national identity ($\beta = 0.58$, $p <$

$.01$), reinforcing its pivotal role in strengthening national belonging. Indirectly, personal identity influenced national identity through social identity ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .01$), emphasizing the mediating role of collective affiliations. The overall model fit was adequate, with $\chi^2/df = 2.73$, $CFI = 0.93$, and $RMSEA = 0.060$, confirming the suitability of the structural model.

Table 2

Factor Loadings and T-Values for Social Identity Questionnaire Items

Item	Factor Loading	T-Value	Significance
We should only associate with religious individuals.	0.61	12.29	$p < .01$
In terms of lifestyle and customs, I consider myself Iranian.	0.64	13.02	$p < .01$
We are obliged to promote peace and security in all countries worldwide.	0.59	11.63	$p < .01$
I feel responsible toward my fellow townspeople and speakers of the same language.	0.63	12.72	$p < .01$
In my opinion, the indivisibility of Iran is important for every Iranian.	0.64	13.02	$p < .01$
Everyone living in Iran should have equal rights.	0.74	15.03	$p < .01$
Society should be governed by rational and customary standards.	0.69	13.84	$p < .01$
Iranian culture and civilization are among the most superior in comparison to others.	0.40	7.34	$p < .01$

I am willing to invest my resources and skills for the benefit of the Iranian nation.	0.30	5.48	$p < .01$
The Iranian nation is part of the greater Muslim community and should strive for unity.	0.57	10.88	$p \leq .01$
I consider religiosity a criterion for choosing a spouse.	0.71	13.87	$p < .01$
Not every belief or opinion is acceptable.	0.74	15.16	$p < .01$
I feel peace and comfort living in Iran.	0.62	12.16	$p < .01$

The SEM analysis provided a comprehensive evaluation of the relationships among personal, social, and national identities, affirming the study's hypothesized framework. This section focuses on detailed path coefficients, indirect effects, and model fit indices, as depicted in Figure 4 and summarized in Table 2.

The direct effects among study variables are as follows: Personal identity \rightarrow Social identity ($\beta = 0.50, p < .01$) suggests that personal identity, characterized by achieved and moratorium dimensions, significantly enhances social identity. Participants with a strong sense of self are more likely to engage in group affiliations, reinforcing collective bonds. Social identity \rightarrow National identity ($\beta = 0.58, p < .01$) showed the strongest influence on national identity, indicating that ethnic, religious, and modern identity structures collectively contribute to respondents' sense of national belonging. Personal identity \rightarrow National identity ($\beta = 0.42, p < .01$) demonstrated that personal identity also significantly contributes to national identity independently of social identity, though the strength of this direct effect was less than the mediated pathway.

The indirect effect of personal identity on national identity through social identity was $\beta = 0.29 (p < .01)$, highlighting the importance of social identity as a bridge between personal and national identification. This path shows that individuals with well-defined personal identities are more likely to integrate into social groups, which in turn enhances their attachment to national identity. The total effect, combining direct and indirect pathways, was $\beta = 0.71 (p < .001)$, underscoring the comprehensive impact of personal identity on national identity through social structures. This aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and collective affiliations.

The overall fit of the structural model was evaluated using standard indices. The Chi-square/df ratio was 2.73, indicating a good fit. The RMSEA value was 0.060, within the recommended range for SEM models. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.93, demonstrating strong incremental

fit, while the Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.91, confirming model adequacy. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) was 0.81, reflecting an acceptable fit. Collectively, these indices support the validity of the structural model and its capacity to represent complex relationships among the study variables.

The three hypotheses formulated in this study were supported by SEM results. H1: Social identity positively affects national identity was supported ($\beta = 0.58, p < .01$), reinforcing the crucial role of social identity in enhancing national cohesion. This suggests that ethnic, religious, and modern components of social identity are foundational to national identity. H2: Personal identity positively affects national identity was supported ($\beta = 0.42, p < .01$), indicating that personal identity independently contributes to national belonging. H3: Social identity mediates the relationship between personal and national identity was supported ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.29, p < .01$), highlighting social identity as a critical mediator that bridges personal and national identity. This mediation underscores the interaction between personal agency and collective belonging.

The SEM results, depicted in Figure 4, offer a visual representation of the hypothesized relationships. The direct paths from personal identity to social identity ($\beta = 0.50$) and from social identity to national identity ($\beta = 0.58$) illustrate the cascading influence of personal identity on national cohesion. The indirect path emphasizes the mediating role of social identity, which integrates personal values and affiliations within a collective framework.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the structural relationships among personal identity, social identity, and national identity among students at Islamic Azad University, Hamedan. Utilizing a structural equation modeling approach, the study revealed several significant findings that illuminate how identity components function in tandem to influence national cohesion. The most notable result was the strong direct effect of social identity on national identity (β

= 0.58, $p < .01$), underscoring the central role of collective affiliations—ethnic, religious, and modern—in shaping one’s sense of national belonging. This finding is consistent with Holtug’s (2021) “identity thesis,” which posits that shared identity strengthens trust and solidarity across diverse societal groups, particularly in multicultural settings (1). It also aligns with Ng’eno’s (2023) research in Kenya, which emphasized how inclusive social identities contribute to national unity when reinforced through institutional and policy-driven support (15).

Equally significant was the direct relationship between personal identity and social identity ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < .01$), indicating that a well-developed personal sense of self positively contributes to the integration into social groups. This reflects Erikson’s psychosocial theory, where identity formation in adolescence and young adulthood is crucial for social role internalization and interpersonal cohesion (2, 3). This pattern was similarly observed in research by Azhari (2022), who found that socio-environmental factors like peer interaction and media usage influence both personal and social identities among students (10). The current study adds to this understanding by empirically validating that a robust personal identity—particularly one that is achieved or in the moratorium stage—is foundational for participating in collective social frameworks, which in turn foster national attachment.

Moreover, the results highlighted a meaningful indirect effect of personal identity on national identity, mediated by social identity ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .01$), and the total effect of personal identity on national identity was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < .001$). These findings affirm the importance of intermediary mechanisms in identity development. The mediating role of social identity reflects how individual beliefs and values are translated into a broader collective context, facilitating a sense of belonging to the nation. This aligns with the findings of Ansari (2022), whose study demonstrated the mediating effect of social intimacy in the relationship between personal identity and social adaptability, thereby suggesting the importance of relational and collective constructs in translating internal identities into societal engagement. Similarly, Solgi (2022) emphasized that the structural model of identity dimensions is best understood when accounting for the interdependencies among personal, social, and national

levels. His research affirmed the current study’s pathway model and highlighted that efforts to enhance national identity must engage with both the personal and social domains simultaneously.

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted for each identity dimension further supports the model’s validity. For personal identity, CFA results showed strong loadings for achieved and moratorium identities, reflecting participants’ reliance on internalized values and ongoing exploration, respectively. This supports Cheng et al.’s (2022) argument that identity development in digital societies is shaped through a combination of stable values and exploratory processes, especially in youth navigating dynamic social contexts. Social identity showed the highest loading on ethnic identity ($\lambda = 0.94$), suggesting a prominent role for cultural and ethnic background in participants’ collective self-definition. This echoes the work of Toselli and Asl Zaeim (2020), who highlighted the salience of ethnic identity in relation to national integration and emphasized that ethnic identification can serve both as a foundation for social cohesion and, when politically marginalized, as a source of resistance.

The multidimensional structure of national identity found in this study also reinforces McIsaac et al.’s (2023) work, which identified historical awareness, cultural pride, and shared values as key determinants of national cohesion in Canada. The strong factor loadings for historical awareness ($\lambda = 0.79$) and territorial attachment ($\lambda = 0.76$) in the current study confirm these findings in the Iranian context, suggesting that young people’s sense of national identity is grounded not only in current institutional or social affiliations but also in deep-rooted cultural and historical narratives. Ngeno (2023) similarly found that national identity was significantly influenced by legal recognition and cultural inclusion, emphasizing the need for policies that link individual and collective identities with broader national narratives.

Further supporting this interpretation are the findings from Mohammad (2023) and Rezaei (2020), who also found statistically significant and positive relationships between personal, social, and national identities in Iranian university populations. Their work affirms that identity constructs are interconnected and suggests a dynamic framework in which development at one level of identity (e.g., personal) can

enhance other levels (e.g., national). This is consistent with the current study's model, where personal identity serves as both a direct and indirect antecedent of national identity.

Another significant alignment can be seen with the results of Issazadeh (2021), who demonstrated that individual success in forming personal identity, combined with high social intelligence, significantly predicted social identity strength (14). This offers additional support for the role of psychological competencies in navigating the social landscape and shaping national affiliation. Likewise, Ghaffari-Nasab et al. (2016) pointed to religiosity, media usage, and social networks as substantial contributors to national identity formation, variables that overlap with the subdimensions assessed in the current social identity model (17).

The results also support the global literature. Dielini et al. (2022), in a study of intercultural communication in Ukrainian universities, found that shared academic experiences and inclusive dialogue can foster a sense of collective identity and national unity—even in conflict-ridden contexts (19). On the contrary, Sestito (2023) observed that in Sub-Saharan Africa, ethnic conflict often enhances in-group cohesion while deepening between-group divides, illustrating the importance of identity mediation mechanisms like social identity in managing diverse populations (20). The current study, through its structural modeling, illustrates precisely how such mediation can function in less volatile but culturally complex environments such as Iran.

Finally, the alignment of these findings with theoretical and empirical literature from both Iranian and global contexts enhances the external validity of the proposed identity framework. It confirms that social identity plays a critical bridging role between personal development and national integration, a model applicable to diverse educational and cultural settings. The implications are especially relevant for educational policy, multicultural management, and social planning in societies facing rising identity pluralism and cohesion challenges.

Despite the robustness of its methodology and theoretical grounding, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to students from Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, which may not fully represent the broader population of Iranian youth or

students from other cultural or educational contexts. While stratified random sampling enhanced internal validity, the generalizability of the findings remains limited. Second, the reliance on self-report questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias, particularly in assessing dimensions like national pride and religious identity, which are sensitive in the sociopolitical landscape of Iran. Third, while the structural model accounted for multiple pathways, it did not include potentially influential variables such as media exposure, intergroup contact, or political attitudes, which could enrich the interpretation of identity formation. Lastly, the cross-sectional design of the study precludes any causal inference, limiting the ability to examine changes in identity constructs over time.

Future studies should seek to expand the sample beyond a single institution to include students from various provinces, educational levels, and ethnic backgrounds, thereby enhancing generalizability. Longitudinal designs would offer valuable insight into how identity dimensions evolve over time and in response to societal changes. Researchers might also incorporate mixed methods, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews or focus groups to explore the nuances of identity experiences more deeply. Future research should consider examining the role of contextual variables—such as media consumption, exposure to globalization, and institutional trust—as potential moderators or mediators in the relationship between identity levels. Cross-national comparisons could also shed light on how structural differences in governance, policy, and education influence identity development across cultural contexts.

In practical terms, the findings of this study offer several implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and social organizations. Universities should create inclusive environments that allow students to explore personal and collective identities through culturally sensitive curricula, community engagement, and participatory governance. Policymakers should invest in programs that promote intercultural understanding, national narratives rooted in shared values, and equitable representation of minority identities. Educators and counselors must be trained to recognize and support identity development during adolescence and young adulthood. Social cohesion initiatives should integrate identity formation programs that

balance respect for diversity with the reinforcement of common national values. These measures, if implemented effectively, can foster a more unified yet pluralistic society.

Authors' Contributions

P. A. conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, and conducted data analysis using SEM and CFA. F. M. T. managed data collection, contributed to questionnaire design and validation, and participated in interpretation of the findings. Both authors collaboratively wrote and revised the manuscript and approved the final version for submission.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study placed a high emphasis on ethical considerations. Informed consent obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully aware of the nature of the study and their role in it. Confidentiality strictly maintained, with data anonymized to protect individual privacy. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines for research with human subjects as outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical considerations included obtaining

informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and avoiding any harm to participants.

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