



## TRANSFORMING DIGITAL EXPERIENCE INTO LITERACY PRACTICE THROUGH PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG GEN ALPHA CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how digital experiences are transformed into meaningful literacy practices in children of Generation Alpha through the lens of phenomenological consciousness. Anchored in Husserl's framework of noema and noesis, this research examines how children perceive and internalize digital content, and how these experiences shape their narrative imagination and literacy production. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry, the study involved primary school students from four regions in Indonesia, collecting data through interviews, document analysis, and storytelling outputs. The findings reveal three noetic pathways: (1) digital perception as lived experience, (2) imaginative reconstruction through internalized digital stimuli, and (3) narrative actualization in multimodal literacy forms. This study proposes a synthetic model for integrating digital perception into pedagogical strategies that enhance critical and creative literacy. The implications suggest the need to reposition digital media not merely as learning tools, but as catalysts for cognitive-intentional transformation in young learners. The phenomenological perspective offers a novel orientation in literacy pedagogy amid the rise of digital-native generations.

**Keywords:** digital experience; phenomenological consciousness; noetic imagination; narrative literacy; Generation Alpha

### INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of digital media has radically transformed the experiential world of children, particularly those born into the conditions of permanent connectivity known as Generation Alpha (Uzuegbunam, 2024). For this cohort, digital environments are no longer auxiliary spaces of interaction but constitute a primary layer of lived reality (Green et al., 2024; Wefwafwa, 2024) in which perception, emotion, imagination, and meaning-making are continuously formed. Screens precede books, audiovisual narratives precede print-based stories, and algorithmic flows precede deliberate textual exploration. This transformation is not merely technological but ontological. The boundary between physical and digital spaces becomes increasingly blurred, integrating online and offline activities into a single, holistic field of experience (Farrugia & Busuttill, 2021; Poveda et al., 2020; Swart et al., 2023). Contemporary studies affirm that children now grow, learn, play, and build social relationships within this hybrid lifeworld, where identity, creativity,

and knowledge are constructed through simultaneous engagement across both realms (Granic et al., 2020; Hällgren & Björk, 2022; Serres, 2023).

Yet despite this profound shift, most contemporary literacy research continues to approach digital instrumentally. Digital media are predominantly treated as tools for instruction, platforms for content delivery, or technical supports for learning efficiency. Such a framing reduces digital experience to infrastructure and overlooks its deeper status as a field of consciousness in which children's experiences are constituted, structured, and internalized prior to any pedagogical intervention. Empirical findings increasingly show that children exercise high levels of agency in selecting, using, and even teaching digital technologies to adults (Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Meier & Kaspar, 2024). Their engagement with digital media is no longer passive consumption but an active process that shapes identity formation, literacy development, and social competence (Burke et al., 2023; Johnston, 2021; López-Ordosgoitia et al., 2023). For Generation Alpha, digital media are not perceived as a separate domain from "real life" but as an organic extension of everyday existence (Green et al., 2024; Uzuegbunam, 2024; Wefwafwa, 2024). It is precisely at this ontological level—where lived experience, not merely behavior, is transformed—that a crisis emerges in how childhood, learning, and literacy are presently conceptualized.

Within this instrumental paradigm, literacy is predominantly diagnosed through observable competencies such as decoding, encoding, comprehension, multimodal navigation, while the experiential genesis of these competencies remains theoretically under examined. Children's encounters with digital narratives, visual flows, interactive games, and algorithmically curated content are measured by outcomes rather than interpreted as intentional experiences that reorganize perception and imagination. As a consequence, literacy is positioned as a skill layered upon experience, instead of being understood as a transformation emerging from within experience itself. This conceptual separation between experience and literacy has produced a methodological gap in which the deepest operations of meaning formation remain largely invisible that are how digital stimuli become lived perception, how perception becomes imagination, and how imagination becomes narrative actualization.

Many dominant digital literacy frameworks continue to prioritize technical proficiency, such as the ability to operate devices, navigate applications, manage information, and perform digital tasks efficiently (Audrin & Audrin, 2022; Falloon, 2020; Feerrar, 2019; Ilomäki et al., 2023; Reddy et al., 2023; Tınmaz et al., 2022). Terms such as *digital skills*, *digital competence*, and *digital literacy* are frequently used interchangeably, despite their distinct conceptual scopes. This slippage gradually narrows digital literacy into a matter of operational mastery and performance indicators (Detlor et al., 2022; Jordan et al., 2025; Reichert et al., 2020), rather than critical understanding, reflexive engagement, or ethical orientation. As a result, the formative dimensions of experience such as how children interpret, evaluate, and internalize their digital encounters, are displaced by measurement regimes that privilege what is easily observable over what is phenomenological decisive.

This skill-centered orientation entails a deeper theoretical failure: it neglects the genesis of meaning from experience itself. Frameworks that focus excessively on competence tend to marginalize questions of how meaning is constituted, how digital encounters are lived affectively, and how reflection emerges from within experience (Audrin & Audrin, 2022). Although several studies have begun to call for more holistic approaches that integrate ethical awareness, digital identity, creativity, and critical

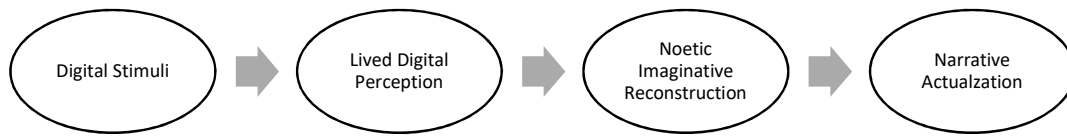


thinking, these dimensions are often appended as normative goals rather than grounded in an account of how meaning actually comes into being within consciousness. Without such grounding, digital literacy risks equipping children to function in digital environments without enabling them to understand, interpret, or critically reconfigure the very experiences that shape their subjectivity.

Phenomenology offers a foundational reorientation for understanding digital experience as a process of meaning constitution rather than passive reception. In Husserl's framework, consciousness is inherently intentional, always directed toward something as meaningful (Husserl, 2012). This intentional relation is structured through the dynamic interplay of *noesis* (the act of consciousness) and *noema* (the object as experienced), through which perceptual data are constituted as meaningful objects rather than raw stimuli (Zahavi, 2017). Perception, therefore, is never merely the intake of sensory information, but always a meaning-for-consciousness. Within digital environments, this intentional structure becomes increasingly complex. Images, sounds, texts, and interactions are experienced not as isolated elements but as layered horizons of sense that invite projection, identification, affective investment, and narrative anticipation. Yet despite this relevance, phenomenology has rarely been mobilized in contemporary literacy studies to examine how digital experiences are constituted at the level of lived consciousness before they emerge as expressive practices.

If Husserl clarifies how digital experience is constituted as meaningful perception, Sartre illuminates how such perception is transformed through imagination. Sartre argues that imagination is not a weakened form of perception, but a fundamentally different mode of consciousness oriented toward *irreal objects* (Sartre, 2012). While perception is bound to the presence of the world, imagination operates through negation and projection, allowing consciousness to detach from the given and reconstitute objects as what is not presently there. This distinction is crucial for understanding how children move from experiencing digital content as perceptual material such as images on a screen, characters in a game, narratives in a video, to reconstructing these contents as imaginative objects that can be freely reshaped, combined, and projected into new narrative worlds. This shift is not merely cognitive but ontological: what was once encountered as given is negated, reorganized, and re-presented as a new intentional object.

The transformation of digital perception through imagination ultimately reaches its expressive form in narrative and literacy practices. Bruner conceptualizes narrative not merely as a mode of representation but as a fundamental form of human cognition through which experience is organized, interpreted, and made meaningful (Bruner, 1986, 1990). From this perspective, literacy is not reducible to decoding and encoding skills, but functions as a cultural instrument for the actualization of meaning. In contemporary contexts, this actualization increasingly takes multimodal forms, integrating linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources into hybrid narrative expressions (Kress, 2009). When children translate imaginative reconstructions of digital experience into stories, dialogues, images, and symbolic plots, they are not simply expressing content but objectifying the meanings that have already been constituted within consciousness. This phenomenological sequence—from lived digital perception, through noetic imaginative reconstruction, to narrative actualization in literacy—constitutes the core analytical pathway of the present study and is schematically represented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 Phenomenological Model of Digital-to-Literacy Transformation*

Most existing studies on digital literacy among children continue to emphasize functional engagement, media skills, or critical consumption (Falloon, 2020; Ilomäki et al., 2023). While these approaches have generated important insights into navigation, information evaluation, and participatory competencies, they often bypass the pre-reflective dimension in which digital content first becomes meaningful as experience. When children retell a story inspired by a game, imitate characters from online videos, or reconstruct narrative worlds through drawings and hybrid texts, they are not simply reproducing content; they are reconfiguring the intentional structures through which their consciousness relates to the world. Without a phenomenological lens, these transformations are easily misread as imitation, exposure effect, or media influence, rather than as processes of lived meaning formation.

Theoretical limitations also persist in how imagination is conceptualized within digital literacy research. Imagination is frequently framed as representational imagery, creative recombination, or divergent cognitive production. Such formulations emphasize output while overlooking the inner movements of consciousness that generate imaginative acts. Sartre's distinction between perception and imagination as fundamentally different modes of consciousness—one bound to presence, the other to irrealization—points to a crucial transformation that occurs when children move from experiencing digital content as perceptual material to reconstituting it as imaginative object. This shift is not merely cognitive but ontological: what was once encountered as given becomes negated, reshaped, and projected as a new intentional object. In literacy practice, this movement materializes when children translate digital impressions into narrative forms that no longer merely refer to the screen but reappear as personal worlds of meaning.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological narrative inquiry to examine how children's digital experiences are constituted at the level of lived consciousness and transformed into literacy practices. The participants were primary school students from four regions in Indonesia, representing diverse sociocultural and digital contexts. All participants belonged to the Generation Alpha cohort and participated voluntarily with parental consent. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and children's original storytelling outputs, including written, visual, and multimodal narratives inspired by their digital experiences.

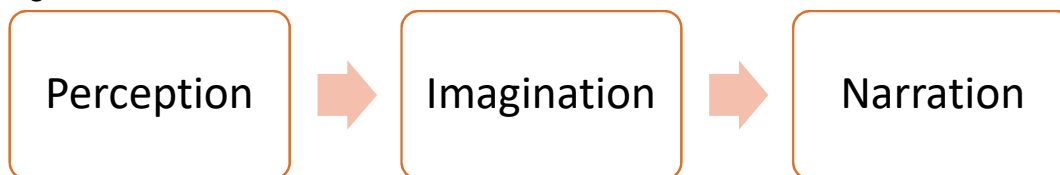
Data analysis followed a phenomenological–narrative procedure. First, phenomenological reduction was applied to bracket instrumental assumptions about digital media. Second, the data were coded to trace noetic movements from digital perception to imaginative reconstruction and narrative actualization. Third, children's narrative products were structurally interpreted to identify recurring patterns of meaning transformation. Through this process, three noetic pathways were systematically

identified: digital perception as lived experience, imaginative reconstruction through internalized digital stimuli, and narrative actualization in multimodal literacy forms. To enhance trustworthiness, the analysis involved iterative reading, cross-comparison across data sources, and peer discussion among the research team.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

Analysis of interview transcripts, narrative products, and visual storytelling artifacts revealed a stable empirical structure in how children's digital experiences were transformed into literacy practices. Across participants and research sites, the data consistently converged on three observable noetic pathways: (1) digital perception as lived experience, (2) imaginative reconstruction through internalized digital stimuli, and (3) narrative actualization in multimodal literacy forms. These pathways did not appear as isolated stages but as a continuous intentional movement linking perception, imagination, and expression. The overall structure of these pathways is synthesized in Figure 2.



*Figure 2 Noetic Pathways of Digital-to-Literacy Transformation*

Empirical data indicate that children experienced digital content not as detached informational input, but as situationally embedded, affectively charged experience. Digital encounters were consistently described in relation to emotional states (excitement, tension, fear, curiosity), bodily reactions (laughter, surprise, alertness), and immersive spatial positioning (being “inside” a game world, story environment, or character perspective). Across interviews, children did not position themselves as external observers of digital media, but as participants located within digital narrative spaces.

Document analysis of early narrative drafts further demonstrated that perceptual elements derived from digital content—visual scenes, characters, sound effects, and action sequences—were recalled with high sensory density. These recalls were anchored in first-person experiential positions, indicating that digital perception functioned as lived experience rather than visual reception alone. This pattern was consistently observed across home-based and school-based digital encounters.

A second empirical regularity emerged when children moved beyond perceptual recall toward imaginative modification of digital material. Narrative products showed systematic patterns of character role transformation, setting displacement, conflict recomposition, and plot deviation from original digital sources. These transformations did not follow a logic of direct imitation. Instead, digital stimuli functioned as internalized imaginative material that was reorganized according to children's personal fears, desires, values, and narrative intentions.

In written narratives, children frequently altered story outcomes and character motivations. In visual artifacts, characters were repositioned into environments not present in the original digital texts. In oral storytelling, children combined multiple digital references into hybrid narrative worlds. These empirical variations demonstrate that

internalized digital experience underwent noetic reconfiguration before reaching expressive form.

The third empirical pathway was observed in the actualization of imaginative reconstructions into structured literacy products. Children expressed their transformed digital experiences through written stories, visual narratives, dialogue-based storytelling, and mixed symbolic representations. Structural analysis of these products revealed coherent narrative organization, including character positioning, conflict development, temporal sequencing, and resolution patterns.

The literacy artifacts functioned as objective crystallizations of prior intentional movements. Perceptual density and imaginative modification observed in earlier phases were stabilized into communicable narrative forms. Across research sites and participants, this actualization pattern indicates that literacy did not emerge as a detached technical skill, but as the final expressive phase of an intentional transformation originating in lived digital perception.

To demonstrate how the general noetic pathways operate at the level of individual consciousness, two exemplary individual noetic networks are presented in Figures 3 and 4. These networks visualize the relational structure between noema, noesis, experienced reality, epoche, and intentionality within children's digital and narrative experiences. The networks show that each child's digital perception (e.g., game scenes, animated characters, video narratives) is directly linked to noematic objects, which are then reorganized through noetic acts and reflective distancing (epoche), before being directed by specific intentional orientations toward narrative production. Despite variation in content across cases, the structural configuration of these networks consistently reflects the three-stage noetic transformation identified in Figure 2.

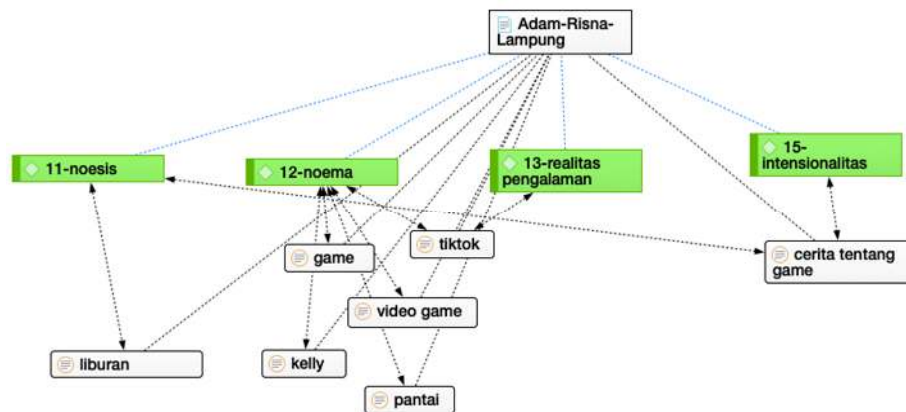


Figure 3 Exemplary Noetic Experience Network – Child A.

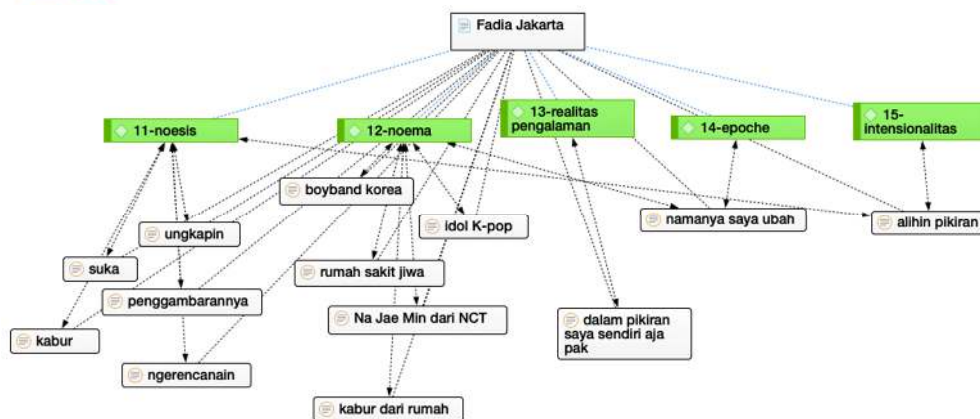


Figure 4 Exemplary Noetic Experience Network – Child B.

Figure 5 Noetic Pathways of Digital-to-Literacy Transformation

Figure 6 Paradigmatic Shift in Literacy Studies

**Discussion**

*Noetic Transformation as a Structure of Consciousness*

The findings of this study demonstrate that children’s literacy practices do not emerge as direct technical responses to digital exposure, but unfold through a structured transformation within consciousness itself. The empirically identified sequence—perception, imagination, and narration—confirms that digital experience first appears as lived perception, is subsequently reorganized through noetic imagination, and is finally objectified in narrative form. This pattern strongly resonates with Husserl’s conception of intentionality, in which consciousness is always consciousness of something, and meaning is not received passively but constituted through the dynamic relation between noesis and noema (Husserl, 2012; Zahavi, 2017). In this sense, children’s encounters with digital content are not simply sensory engagements with external stimuli, but intentional acts through which digital objects acquire experiential and affective significance prior to any pedagogical framing.

The transition from perception to imagination observed in the data further substantiates Sartre’s distinction between perceptual and imaginative consciousness. Sartre (2012) argues that imagination is not a weakened copy of perception, but a fundamentally different mode of consciousness oriented toward unreal objects through negation and projection. The narrative variations, character transformations, and hybrid story worlds produced by the children indicate precisely this movement of irrealization: what was initially encountered as given in digital form is negated as fixed reality and reconstituted as an imaginative object open to manipulation. This confirms that imagination operates as a noetic transformation rather than a mere cognitive embellishment of perception. The Results thus provide empirical grounding for Sartre’s philosophical claim, showing how imaginative consciousness functions concretely in children’s engagement with digital media.

The final movement from imagination to narrative actualization aligns with Bruner's view of narrative as a fundamental mode of human cognition through which experience is organized and made meaningful (Bruner, 1986, 1990). The children's multimodal literacy products—written stories, visual narratives, and dialogic compositions—demonstrate how imaginative configurations are stabilized into communicable symbolic forms. Literacy, in this framework, cannot be reduced to decoding and encoding skills; it emerges as the cultural articulation of prior intentional processes. The Results thus position literacy not as a technical endpoint, but as the crystallization of a phenomenological movement originating in lived digital perception and mediated by noetic imagination. Through this lens, the data validate a phenomenological architecture of literacy in which consciousness, rather than competence alone, functions as the primary generative source of textual production.

### *Repositioning Digital Literacy as Meaning Transformation*

The empirical structure identified in this study stands in a critical tension with dominant paradigms of digital literacy that continue to frame literacy primarily as a set of technical skills, operational competencies, and measurable performances. Major frameworks of digital literacy have emphasized device operation, information management, navigation, communication efficiency, and task-based performance as core indicators of literacy (Audrin & Audrin, 2022; Falloon, 2020; Feerrar, 2019; Ilomäki et al., 2023; Reddy et al., 2023; Tinmaz et al., 2022). Within these models, literacy is largely approached as an external capacity that can be trained, assessed, and standardized. However, the Results of this study demonstrate that children's literacy practices do not originate at the level of technical mastery, but emerge from a prior, deeper process of meaning constitution that unfolds within consciousness itself. The transformation from perception to imagination to narration cannot be sufficiently explained by models that reduce literacy to competence descriptors or behavioral indicators.

Several assessment-oriented studies have further reinforced this instrumental orientation by operationalizing digital literacy through software-based tasks, performance analytics, and standardized competence structures (Detlor et al., 2022; Jordan et al., 2025; Reichert et al., 2020). While such approaches offer important insights into functional engagement and procedural fluency, they remain methodologically silent on how digital content becomes meaningful as lived experience. The children in this study did not merely demonstrate the ability to access, manipulate, or reproduce digital information; rather, they internalized digital objects as experiential realities, imaginatively transformed them, and re-expressed them as personal narrative worlds. This sequence reveals a layer of literacy genesis that is structurally invisible to skill-based assessment regimes.

Even models that attempt to extend digital literacy beyond technical skills—by incorporating critical thinking, ethics, identity, or creativity—often retain a competence-driven logic in which these dimensions appear as add-on outcomes rather than as processes grounded in the formation of consciousness (Ilomäki et al., 2023; Jordan et al., 2025). The findings of this study suggest that such extensions, while important, remain theoretically incomplete as long as they do not account for the intentional dynamics through which experience itself becomes meaningful. Without access to this phenomenological layer, digital literacy risks functioning as an advanced form of digital training rather than as an education of meaning.



By contrast, the noetic pathways identified in this study reposition digital literacy as a transformation of experience rather than as a mastery of tools. Literacy appears not as a technical endpoint achieved after exposure to digital content, but as the expressive crystallization of an intentional movement that begins in lived perception and is reshaped through imagination. This shift has significant theoretical consequences: it implies that digital literacy cannot be fully understood through performance metrics alone, because its generative source lies within the structures of consciousness that precede any observable skill. In this sense, the present findings call for a fundamental reorientation of digital literacy theory—from a paradigm of competence and control toward a paradigm of meaning, imagination, and intentional formation.

### *Imagination as the Core Transformative Mechanism in Digital Literacy*

The Results of this study reposition imagination from a residual creative skill into the core noetic mechanism through which digital perception is transformed into narrative literacy. In much of the existing digital literacy literature, imagination is implicitly treated as either a generalized cognitive capacity, a by-product of creative activity, or an outcome variable associated with divergent thinking and innovation. Such framings tend to emphasize what imagination produces rather than how imagination operates within consciousness. By contrast, the present findings demonstrate that imagination functions as an active transformative process that reorganizes perceptual material into new experiential configurations before any narrative expression takes place.

Empirically, this is visible in how children did not merely reproduce digital characters, settings, or plots, but systematically negated, displaced, recomposed, and hybridized these elements in their narrative productions. This pattern confirms Sartre's argument that imagination operates through irrealization, a mode of consciousness that detaches from the given world and projects new objects that are not bound by empirical presence (Sartre, 2012). What emerges in children's stories, therefore, is not a copy of digital reality but a reconstituted imaginative world shaped by personal fears, desires, values, and affective orientations. Imagination appears here not as embellishment, but as a structural operation of negation and reconfiguration.

This interpretation resonates with contemporary studies on children's digital play and identity work, which show that children actively use digital content as material for experimenting with possible selves, alternative worlds, and emotional scenarios rather than as static references to be consumed (Burke et al., 2023; Granic et al., 2020; Hällgren & Björk, 2022). However, while these studies describe the outcomes of imaginative engagement, they often stop short of theorizing the internal mechanisms by which imagination transforms perception into personal meaning. The present study fills this gap by demonstrating that imaginative reconstruction constitutes a noetic hinge linking lived digital experience to narrative expression.

Moreover, the data reveal that imagination mediates not only representational change but also emotional regulation and existential orientation. Children's hybrid narrative worlds—combining game violence with everyday school life, fantasy characters with familial spaces, or celebrity figures with imagined institutional settings—function as symbolic spaces in which personal anxieties, aspirations, and identity negotiations are played out. This supports the view that imagination operates as a site of affective and existential processing, not merely as a cognitive faculty for recombination (Granic et al., 2020; Serres, 2023). Within this framework, digital literacy becomes inseparable from children's imaginative work on the self.

By positioning imagination as the central mechanism of transformation, this study departs from models that locate creativity at the final stage of literacy performance. Instead, creativity is shown to emerge from within the noetic movement itself, as perception is continuously reworked into imaginative possibility. Literacy, in turn, appears as the objectification of this imaginative process into communicable narrative form. This reconceptualization has significant theoretical implications: it suggests that the true generative site of digital literacy does not lie in technical skill acquisition or critical evaluation alone, but in the imaginative labor through which children actively remake the meaning of their digital world.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the transformation of digital experience into literacy practice among Generation Alpha children cannot be adequately understood through a skill-based or competence-driven framework alone. The empirical findings reveal a consistent noetic movement in which digital content is first encountered as lived perception, subsequently reconfigured through imaginative transformation, and finally objectified in narrative and multimodal literacy forms. This sequence positions literacy not as a technical endpoint, but as the expressive crystallization of a deeper intentional process unfolding within consciousness.

By grounding the analysis in Husserl's phenomenology of intentionality and Sartre's conception of imagination as irrealization, the study advances a view of digital literacy as a process of meaning constitution rather than mere functional adaptation. Digital stimuli do not act directly upon literacy performance; instead, they become meaningful through the mediating work of imagination, where perceptual material is negated, recomposed, and projected into new experiential possibilities. Literacy, within this architecture, emerges as the symbolic stabilization of these imaginative reconfigurations into communicable narrative form.

This reconceptualization challenges dominant paradigms of digital literacy that continue to prioritize operational mastery, performance metrics, and competence descriptors. The findings suggest that such paradigms, while useful for assessing functional engagement, remain theoretically insufficient for explaining how digital experience becomes personally meaningful and narratively productive. The generative site of literacy is shown to reside not in technical skill acquisition alone, but in the internal dynamics of perception, imagination, and intentional orientation.

By repositioning imagination as the central transformative mechanism in digital literacy, this study contributes a phenomenological alternative to prevailing cognitive-instrumental models. Imagination is not treated as an ancillary creative outcome, but as the structural hinge through which lived digital experience is reworked into narrative meaning. In this sense, digital literacy appears as a form of existential and symbolic labor through which children actively remake their relationship to the digital world and to themselves.

This study is not without limitations. The analysis is based on qualitative phenomenological–narrative data drawn from a limited number of regional contexts in Indonesia, and the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. In addition, the research focuses on the internal noetic processes of transformation rather than on instructional intervention or measurable learning outcomes. These boundaries delimit the scope of the present contribution as conceptual–empirical rather than experimental or pedagogical in the technical sense.



Future research is therefore encouraged to extend this phenomenological framework into longitudinal, experimental, or design-based studies, particularly to examine how intentional, imaginative, and narrative processes can be consciously cultivated within formal educational settings. Comparative cross-cultural studies may also refine the universality and variability of the noetic pathways identified in this study. Nevertheless, as a conceptual–empirical contribution, this research offers a phenomenological architecture of digital-to-literacy transformation that foregrounds consciousness as the primary generative source of meaning. To understand digital literacy in the era of digital-native generations, scholarship must move beyond tools and competencies toward the deeper terrain of lived experience, imagination, and meaning formation.

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