The Impact of Instagram Social Media Information on the Transformation of Student Identity in Yogyakarta City

[1]Afrilya Moudy Wuna*, [2] Dani Fadillah

Faculty of Literature, Culture, and Communication, Ahmad Dahlan University, 55191, Yogyakarta
[1] 2200030030@webmail.uad.ac.id*; [2] Dani.fadillah@comm.uad.ac.id
*Correspondent email author: 2200030030@webmail.uad.ac.id

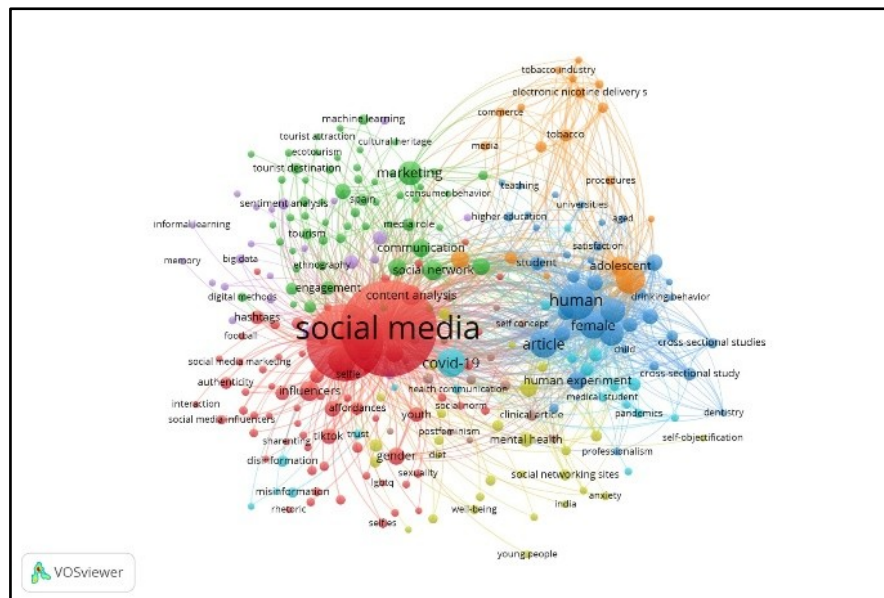| ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aims to analyze how exposure to information about beauty on Instagram influences the identity transformation of female students at private universities in Yogyakarta. 's discussion focuses on three main aspects,namely: the process of forming a digital identity that is carried out selectively and aesthetically; the role of social validation in shaping self-confidence and self-assessment; and the discrepancy between digital identity and real identity that causes psychological pressure. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collectio techniques through online open questionnaires to ten informants who actively use Instagram and are exposed to beauty content. The analysis was conducted using Goffman's dramaturgy theory, Uses and Gratifications (U&G), and Social Identity Theory (SIT) to understand performative identity practices, social gratification needs, and social comparison processes in the digital space. The results show that female students construct digital identities as ideal images in an effort to gain positive impressions from their audience, but this creates a gap between their online representation and their authentic selves. The study confirms that Instagram functions as a complex space for identity negotiation and highlights the importance of digital literacy and reflective awareness in the use of social media among students.

1. Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has changed the way individuals form and express their identity (Puri et al., 2024). Social media, especially Instagram, has become a new space that mediates this process. Instagram is not only a platform for sharing photos and stories, but also an arena for shaping self-image, social identity, and cultural values internalized by its users, especially students (Iqbal et al., 2019). The use of Instagram is not only as a promotional tool but also as a strategic space for shaping users' self-image, particularly through the visualization of lifestyles and collaborations with public figures (Wara & Fadillah, 2025).

According to , students' use of social media indicates a shift in communication patterns and the way they build their identity perceptions.Meanwhile, Saputri & Pinem (2022), highlights how the glorification of aesthetics on social media, through accounts such as @ugm.cantik, influences the formation of visual identity among students in Qiao (2025) reveals that social media plays a role in

building brand experience that impacts users' self- perception. Additionally, Matang et al. (2023) shows that the second generation of digital natives experiences a dual identity phenomenon in their online and offline behavior due to the existence of social media.
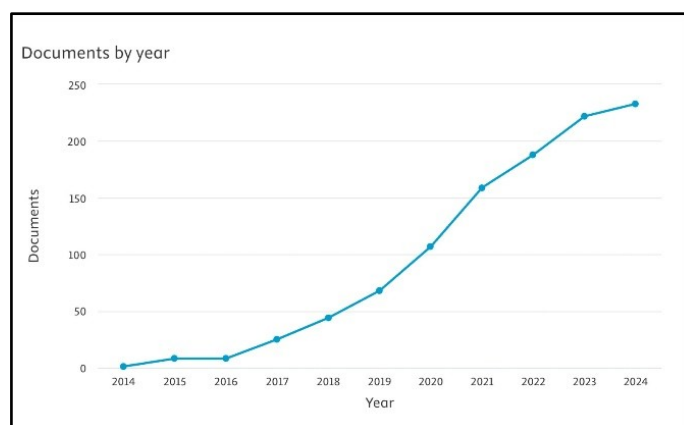
Unlike previous studies that emphasize the ethical aspects of social media use, visual exploitation, brand experience, or identity anomalies, this study specifically highlights how information exposure through Instagram influences the transformation of students' identities, particularly in terms of lifestyle, values, and self-expression (Rahardjo, 2023). This study also takes a specific local context, namely students in the city of Yogyakarta, which is known as a student city with a high level of social media usage (Hendriyati, 2021).

Specifically, this study focuses on female students aged 17 to 23 who are pursuing their education at private universities in the city of Yogyakarta. Amidst the flood of information about beauty on Instagram, these young women face challenges in building an authentic identity. Through photo uploads, the use of filters, and interactions in the form of likes and positive comments, they seek social validation. However, the constant exposure to ideal beauty standards presented through Instagram often encourages the formation of a visual identity that does not fully reflect their true selves.

Fig. 1. Visualization of Social Media Terminology Relationships using VOSviewer

Based on data collected from Scopus between 2014 and 2025, 1,399 documents were found as of April 14, 2025, within a period of 10.32 using the keywords social media, Instagram, human, female, body image, psychological, students, mental health, media role, social networking, fashion, emotion, social comparison, selfie, self-esteem, privacy, popularity, trust, and satisfaction. The Scopus database category has not yet discussed social media's influence on the digital identity transformation of students in Yogyakarta. Additionally, the map of term relationships in social media research in Fig. 1, shows that 'social media' is at the center of various important themes such as 'identity,' 'selfie,' and 'mental health,' which demonstrates how closely social media is related to identity transformation.

Fig. 2. Number of Social Media Research Documents Per Year (2014-2025)

Based on the annual research document trend data in Fig. 2, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of publications related to social media from 2014 to 2024. This shows the importance of social media as an academic subject that continues to grow.

As a result, many female students experience a mismatch between the identity they present on social media and their true identity in real life. This condition gives rise to the phenomenon of self-alienation, dissatisfaction with oneself, and even psychological pressure due to the inability to meet the beauty standards set by social media. Therefore, it is important to understand how the exposure to information on Instagram related to beauty shapes, changes, or even disrupts the process of identity formation among female students in Yogyakarta.

Based on this background, the research question in this study is how the exposure to information about beauty on Instagram influences the identity transformation of female students at private universities in Yogyakarta. Platforms such as Instagram have become an important means of shaping public opinion and building social image and status through virtual interactions Prihanum & Fadillah (2024), how does social validation (through likes, comments, and other interactions) play a role in the process of forming or changing the identity of female students; and what forms of inconsistency arise between the identity displayed on social media and the real identity of female students in Yogyakarta City. The objectives of this study are to analyze the influence of information about beauty on Instagram on the transformation of female students' identities at private universities in Yogyakarta, to understand the role of social validation in the process of forming and changing female students'identities on social media, and to identify forms of identity inconsistency between representations on Instagram and the reality of female students.

This study is expected to provide academic benefits, namely adding to the literature on the influence of social media on identity formation among students, particularly in terms of beauty and social validation. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a reference for students to be more critical in using social media, as well as for educational institutions to provide education on digital literacy and mental health in dealing with identity dynamics in the digital era.

2. Theoretical Framework

The formation of self-identity in the realm of social media, particularly among students aged eighteen to twenty-three, is a vibrant discursive arena at the intersection of personal expression, psychological calculation, and collective orientation (Jeyanthi, 2022). This study combines three theoretical traditions that are rarely deeply integrated in digital identity studies: Goffman's dramaturgy, Uses and Gratifications (U&G), and Social Identity Theory (SIT). When woven together

into a coherent analytical framework, these three traditions reveal that young actors are not merely passive users trapped in algorithms, but reflective agents who continuously construct, maintain, and negotiate their symbolic existence in online spaces.

The lens of dramaturgy, as proposed by Goffman in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), treats social interactions as theatrical productions, complete with a front stage, backstage, props, and audience (Kasirye, 2022). This metaphorical mapping becomes even more relevant when transferred to digital platforms, which are inherently visual and archive-based. The front stage on social media is transformed into an online showcase in Kilvington (2021), consistent feed color composition, aesthetic filter selection, and highlight story curation are artistic tools used by students to reinforce their published persona. Conversely, alternative accounts (finsta), "close friends" lists, and archive features offer an intimate space to shed performative masks, allowing for the insertion of more raw, spontaneous, even fragile narratives. In practice, students constantly weigh what is appropriate to show in order to maintain an ideal impression for example, as a "productive student" or "progressive activist" and what should be concealed so as not to disrupt the consistency of their image. It is this dialectic between openness and concealment that animates the dramaturgical logic in the contemporary online ecosystem (Hatipova, 2023).

However, dramaturgy only answers the question of "how" identity is performed; it does not touch on "why" the performance is so intense and strategic. It is at this point that the Uses and Gratifications framework offers an explanation across needs. Since Blumler and Katz formulated it in the early 1970s, U&G has positioned the audience as autonomous subjects who choose media to satisfy cognitive, affective, social, and identity motives (J. Wang, 2022). Recent research on Generation Z in Southeast Asia reveals a distinctive gratification configuration: self-promotion drives, emotional validation needs, and the pursuit of creative inspiration all channeled through constantly connected devices. For students, academic achievements, creative projects, and volunteer participation are often posted not only to document accomplishments, but also to "invite" interactions in the form of likes and affirmative comments . Positive responses reinforce feelings of competence and social connectedness, forming a feedback loop that motivates repetition of behavior. Conversely, low engagement triggers critical evaluation: personas are recycled, aesthetics are updated, or platforms are changed entirely (Tay et al., 2022). Thus, U&G illuminates the internal mechanisms that drive Goffman's impression management practices, while explaining why online narratives are so invested with emotional and temporal energy (F. Wang & Wang, 2025).
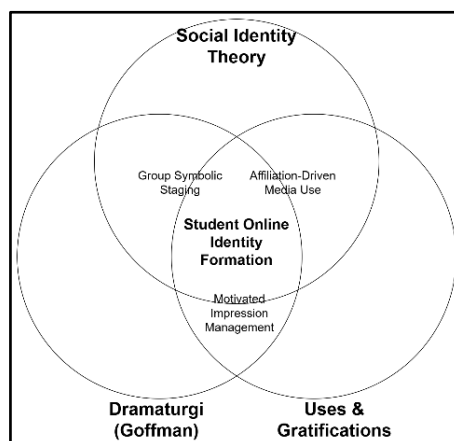
Digital identities, although produced individually, remain embedded within macro-level relational networks (Duxbury, 2024), precisely the problematic area addressed by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). SIT argues that most sense of self comes from social membership, which is activated through processes of categorization, identification, and intergroup comparison (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). In the landscape of algorithm-based platforms, this process occurs simultaneously and is accelerated. Hashtags operate as discursive markers that instantly contextualize oneself within transnational communities (Leurs, 2023). Anchoring oneself to such categories provides a source of collective meaning as well as an arena for status competition that influences self-esteem evaluation. A high number of followers within a fandom circle signifies prestige; intense interactions among peers solidify academic identity. Students, therefore, utilize the symbolic affordances of social media to intertextualize themselves into layered groups, while negotiating hierarchical positions within each layer of membership (Elliot et al., 2020).

When these three theories are read synergistically, a conceptual cycle emerges that explains the dynamics of online identity holistically. The process begins with psychological motives as described by U&G for example, the need for self-expression or the search for community which drive the

selection of specific platforms and features. These motivations are then materialized in the form of dramaturgical practices: students set the stage, arrange visual props, and play roles that are expected to produce favorable impressions. At the same time, they weave symbols of social affiliation organizational logos, fandom jargon, or academic badges to embed themselves in group structures as described by SIT. The audience responds to these performances through engagement metrics, creating a feedback loop that translates into feelings of satisfaction or disappointment. The results of this psychological assessment influence subsequent staging strategies, making online identity an iterative process that is never final. The success of this cycle reinforces both personal and collective identity; its failure triggers th repositioning of actors, either by changing personas, shifting to other groups, or migrating platforms (Hirsch et al., 2019).

As seen in Fig. 3, the methodological implications of this integrative framework are quite broad. Researchers can no longer rely on descriptive observations of account displays alone, but need to combine digital ethnography to capture real-time performance, in-depth interviews to uncover intrinsic motivations, and structured surveys to map the strength of social identity and user satisfaction (Walden, 2023). Variables such as feed aesthetic coherence, frequency of interactive story use, intensity of social feedback seeking, or group membership centrality must be precisely operationalized to demonstrate cross-interactions between the micro (symbolic actions), meso (psychological motives), and macro (social structures) levels (Ferdinand, 2017). This approach not only enriches the empirical foundation but also offers a theoretical contribution: it corrects the fragmentation of digital identity studies that often fall into one level of analysis, while emphasizing that identity in the online ecosystem is fluid yet structured, fluid because technological affordances enable rapid identity shifts, structured because platform logic and group demands continue to shape theboundaries of representation (Sohal & Kaur, 2018).

Conceptually, the combination of dramaturgy, U&G, and SIT presents a sharper argumentabout the performative nature of identity on social media. Identity is not merely a reflection of oneself; it is a constructive project that is constantly negotiated under the spotlight of algorithms, personal motives, and group norms (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Students, as subjects in the most plastic phase of identity development, exhibit high adaptability and experimentation. They test professional personas, micro-celebrities, or digital activists in a single timeline, using every click as a reference to formulate who they are and where they want to network. Consequently, the process of identity formation cannot be understood without reading these cross-level conversations simultaneously: symbolic acting on the online stage, the psychological satisfaction it produces, and the contestation of status in the collective realm.

Fig. 3. Theoretical Framework of the Impact of Instagram Social Media Information on the Transformation of the Identity of Students in Yogyakarta City

Thus, this integrative framework not only offers a more complete theoretical basis for explaining the phenomenon of identity on social media, but also provides an epistemic map that guides researchers in comprehensively exploring the layers of student experience. Ultimately, online identity becomes a locus where authenticity, performance, and solidarity converge; an emotional and symbolic space of negotiation that stakes personal honor and social capital in the eyes of a global network of friends. This is why this multi-theoretical study is urgent, as it allows us to see how the younger generation defines itself, and society, in an era where face-to-face interaction is increasingly being replaced by screen-to-screen interaction.

3. Method

The object of this study is the process of identity transformation among female students that occurs as a result of exposure to information from social media, particularly Instagram. This study specifically highlights how content themed around beauty, lifestyle, and social validation on Instagram influences the way female students form, display, and interpret their identities, both personally and socially. The research subjects are 10 female students aged between 18-23 years who are currently studying at a private university in the city of Yogyakarta. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which is a deliberate selection based on certain criteria, such as actively using Instagram for at least the past year, frequently accessing and interacting with content related to beauty, lifestyle, or self-improvement, and having personal experiences related to changes in self- perception or identity due to social media.

The primary data source in this study came from the informants' narratives, which were obtained through an online open-ended questionnaire. Data was collected through an open questionnaire distributed online using Google Forms. This questionnaire contained a series of exploratory questions designed to explore the informants' subjective experiences and personal perceptions of their identity and the influence of Instagram on that identity. The questions in the questionnaire were narrative in nature, allowing informants to answer freely, honestly, and in depth. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, by ing to identify patterns of meaning that emerged from the informants' answers. The stages of this analysis included data coding, theme grouping, and narrative interpretation.

Data collection was conducted from June to July 2025, with the entire process taking place online. The questionnaire was distributed through social media and student networks in the city of Yogyakarta. Data analysis was conducted in parallel with the data collection process to facilitate the identification of the main themes that emerged from the informants' narratives.

As seen in Fig. 4, flowchart and data collection process for research. This figure illustrates the methodological stages of research using a qualitative approach. The process began with the selection of methods (qualitative survey through an online open questionnaire), determination of subjects (10 female students from private universities in Yogyakarta aged 17–23 years), to data collection techniques using purpose sampling. The process continues with psychographic exploration through respondent narratives, identification of key variables such as Instagram usage patterns, content types, and in-depth analysis of gender and psychological dimensions based on questionnaire results. This diagram shows the systematic structure of the research steps from the design stage to data analysis.
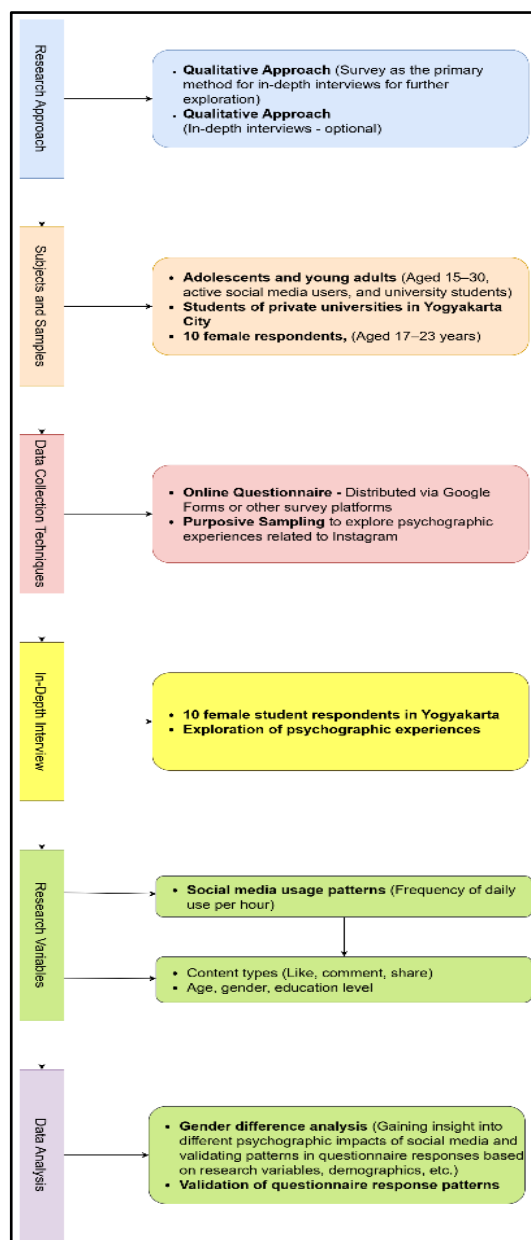
Fig. 4. Flowchart and data collection process

4. Result and Discussion

This study involved ten female students aged 17–23 years from various private universities in Yogyakarta who actively use Instagram. Data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire and then analyzed thematically to identify patterns of meaning and the dynamics of student identity transformation due to exposure to information from Instagram. The analysis results found three major themes: (1) selectively constructed self-representation; (2) transformation of lifestyle and behavior due to content exposure; and (3) the need for social validation and the impact of social comparison on self-concept.

Selectively Constructed Self-Representation

The majority of informants stated that their Instagram accounts did not fully reflect their true selves, but had undergone a curation process that showcased the best, most enjoyable, and most aesthetic aspects of their lives. For example, Zahrotun Nasikha (21) stated that her Instagram posts

only contained "fun activities and certain achievements," and avoided content that showed her tired or failing.

This reinforces the concept of the "front stage" in Goffman's dramaturgy, which explains that social interactions in the media (including social media) are a form of calculated identity performance. Individuals select and arrange their appearances based on the impression they want to create in front of their digital "audience." Viral content on social media has great power to influence users' perceptions and emotions in the long term (Fadillah & Jandevi, 2020). Instagram as a visual space encourages its users to maintain an ideal narrative about themselves, rather than an authentic reflection of their personal identity. Comparison with previous research: This study aligns with the findings of in Saputri & Pinem (2022), which show that students form visual identities based on aesthetic expectations driven by popular accounts such as @ugm.cantik. This process not only reveals visual exploitation but also a shift in self-worth from authenticity to publicly accepted digital performance.

Transformation of Lifestyle and Behavior Due to Exposure to Instagram Content

Most respondents admitted to experiencing lifestyle changes due to exposure to information from Instagram. These changes include aspects of appearance, healthy living, fashion consumption, and self-awareness. For example, Rina Tresnasari (21) stated that she began exercising regularly after following healthy lifestyle content from influencers. Sri Rahayu (22) admitted to being encouraged to dress better after watching content with the theme "dress well." This indicates that digital content is not merely passive entertainment but can shape how students think and act in their daily lives.
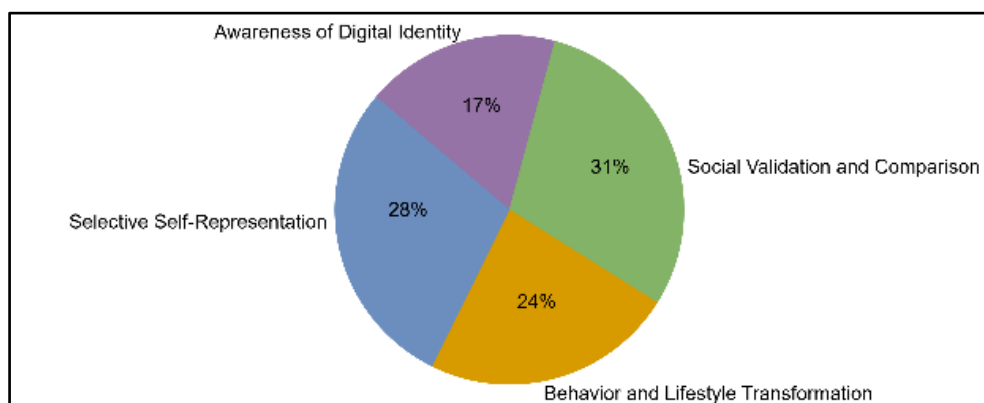
This transformation reinforces the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) principle, which explains that media users actively seek content that meets their cognitive, affective, and social needs (J. Wang, 2022). Instagram has become a medium that provides emotional gratification and inspiration, which is then translated into real behavioral change. Comparison with previous research: These findings are consistent with Ratriyana's (2024) study, which states that social media shapes personal brand experiences that influence self-perception. Instagram has become a means of self- image not only in the digital space but also in shaping students' physical and social habits in real life.

Social Validation and the Impact of Social Comparison on Self-Concept

The majority of respondents stated that positive responses such as likes and comments were an important part of their experience using Instagram. Although not everyone bases their self-confidence on these digital metrics, social validation still influences self-perception. Irma Noviani (22) said that a high number of likes increased her self-confidence. However, when posts did not receive the expected response, some respondents felt disappointed and began to question their self-worth and the quality of their content. Social media users like Instagram are not only recipients of information but also producers of content that reflects their social identity (Qiao, 2025). Additionally, almost all respondents experience the phenomenon of social comparison, especially when seeing other people's posts that appear more successful, more attractive, or more productive.

This is consistent with Social Identity Theory (SIT), which states that identity is formed in the context of social membership and self-evaluation through comparison with other groups (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Instagram facilitates this process through simultaneous exposure to the lives of others, which causes psychological pressure and fluctuating self-assessment. Comparison with previous research: These findings are in line with Nur's (2024) research, which reveals that digital

native generations experience a "double face" or dual identity due to the pressure to maintain an ideal image online while living as an authentic person in real life. Social media creates a gap between the personal that is displayed and the real self.

Fig. 5. Diagram of the distribution of dominant themes in the identity transformation of students in Yogyakarta

As seen in Fig. 5 illustrates that the pie chart shows the proportion of dominant themes in the identity transformation of students due to the influence of information from Instagram. Social validation contributed 31% of the total informants' experiences, followed by selective self-representation (28%), behavioral transformation (24%), and digital identity awareness (17%). This presentation indicates that social media is not only a space for expression but also for self-evaluation and the formation of a complex social image.

In a digital era dominated by visuals and interactivity, Instagram has become a highly influential social space in the formation of self-identity, especially among female students. The findings in this study show that students no longer use social media only to share their daily activities, but also to strategically design, manipulate, and display their identities in front of a virtual audience. This phenomenon shows that identity in the digital era is not a fixed entity, but rather a project that is continuously negotiated through the active involvement of users in various forms of visual and social content.

Goffman's concept of dramaturgy provides a strong conceptual basis for understanding how individuals present themselves in public spaces, which in this context is Instagram. Goffman argues that in social interactions, individuals act as if they are on stage, where they present the best version of themselves to create a certain impression in the eyes of others. On Instagram, this "front stage" is manifested through edited photo uploads, persuasive caption choices, the use of filters to enhance visuals, and the overall aesthetic arrangement of profiles. The female students who were informants in this study showed a strong tendency to curate content to reflect an ideal version of themselves: beautiful, productive, happy, and inspiring. The digital identities they constructed became a kind of performative construction aimed at gaining social recognition and strengthening their personal image within the online community.

However, this staging of identity is not done passively. The Uses and Gratifications theory explains that media users have specific goals in consuming and producing content. The students in this study consciously chose to use Instagram as a means to fulfill various psychological needs, including the need for self-expression, social validation, aesthetic inspiration, and even escape from a daily reality that may not be as ideal as the digital life they portray. Interaction with content themed around beauty, healthy lifestyles, and academic or professional achievements is part of a personal strategy to manage self-image and build higher self-esteem.

Active involvement in shaping digital identity through Instagram also shows how social gratification, such as the number of likes, positive comments, or an increase in followers, can strengthen users' self-confidence. However, when expectations for social validation are not met, such as in the case of posts that do not receive much response, some informants reported feelings of disappointment, anxiety, or even questioning their self-worth. This is where the U&G theory directly intersects with social psychology's conception of how media acts as a mirror for identity achievement. The content consumed and disseminated is not only a source of entertainment but also a source of psychological pressure when individuals feel they must constantly maintain an ideal image to retain the attention and acceptance of their digital community.

The tension between the displayed identity and the actual identity then leads to the phenomenon of identity dissonance or self-alienation. Students feel trapped between the demands to look perfect online and the reality of life that is not always in line with this digital representation. In this context, Social Identity Theory plays an important role in explaining how individuals assess themselves through the lens of social group membership and comparison with others. Informants in this study revealed that they often compare themselves to other Instagram users who appear more beautiful, more successful, or more popular. This comparison process not only affects self-perception but also creates a virtual social hierarchy that indirectly directs subsequent identity representation strategies.

Instagram provides features that support social identity affiliation, such as the use of hashtags, locations, or mentions of other accounts that indicate involvement in a particular community. By presenting themselves as part of the hijabers, bookstagram, or healthy lifestyle communities, students not only build individual personas but also affirm their existence in broader social groups. Their identities become part of a macro structure that shapes certain values, norms, and standards of representation. In this context, identity is no longer merely a reflection of the individual self but a reflection of their position within a larger social landscape.

The tendency of students to internalize the values of social groups through social media raises critical questions about identity autonomy in the digital age. When identity is shaped in the shadow of algorithms and ever-changing social expectations, to what extent can individuals maintain their authenticity? The answer to this question depends on users' reflective capacity in interpreting the process of self-representation and in recognizing the difference between personal needs and collective pressures. When students are able to navigate the digital world with critical awareness, they become not only subjects of social media pressure, but also agents of change who can reshape digital identity narratives in a healthier and more contextual way.

The results of this study also reveal that exposure to beauty-themed content consistently plays a role in directing real behavioral transformation. Several informants reported that they began to take better care of themselves, adopted healthy eating patterns, or tried certain styles of clothing after being inspired by influencer accounts. This shows a shift from the influence of media as mere representation to media as an instrument of lifestyle transformation. Visual representations on social media are not only ideal reflections, but also catalysts for real actions oriented towards the formation of new identities in line with dominant aesthetic expectations.

However, this kind of transformation also presents ethical dilemmas that need to be further examined. When the beauty standards displayed on Instagram are very limited and homogeneous for example, white skin, slim bodies, symmetrical faces, individuals who do not conform to these standards risk symbolic marginalization. In the long term, this can affect users' mental health, including increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and pressure to undergo extreme body modifications to conform to the dominant digital image.

Considering all of the above dynamics, it can be concluded that female students' identities on social media are complex performative projects, which are influenced by the interaction between psychological motivations, social group norms, and the visual aesthetic logic of digital media. The three theories used in this study complement each other to explain how identities are formed, negotiated, and reproduced in a highly dynamic social media ecosystem. Dramaturgy explains how representations are made, U&G explains the reasons and purposes for using media, while SIT elaborates on the social framework that shapes the context of that identity.

Table 1. Integrated Theoretical Perspectives on Digital Identity Formation on Instagram

Theory	Key Comcepts	Relevant Research Findings	Conceptual Implications
Dramaturgy (Goffman)	Front stage and back stage, impression management, performativy of identity	Female students construct their identities on Instagram through selectively curated and aesthetically pleasing content, in order to maintain an ideal self-image in the digital public sphere.	Digital identity is staged as a social performance full of symbolic calculations.
Uses and Gratifications (U&G)	Motives for media use (cognitive, affective, social, satisfaction, media interaction	Female students use Instagram to seek beauty inspiration, build self-confidence, and seek social recognition through likes, comments, and engagement from other users.	Social media use is active and directed toward fulfilling psychological and social needs.
Social Identity Theory (SIT)	Social categorization, group affiliation, social comparison, self-evaluation	Female students compare themselves with other users who are considered more beautiful or successful, and form their identity based on affiliation with certain digital communities such as hijabers, etc.	Self-identity is formed in social (relations and symbolic competition in the digital space.
Theoretical Integration	Synergy of dramaturgy + U&G+SIT	A digital identity cycle occurs: motive → self-presentation → social affiliation → social feedback → evaluation → digital identity adjustment.	Identity on social media is fluid, repetitive, and influenced by personal motives and social pressure.

This Table 1, presents the integration of three main theoretical frameworks, Dramaturgy (Goffman), Uses and Gratifications (U&G), and Social Identity Theory (SIT), to analyse the process of digital identity formation among female students on Instagram. Each theory explains different but complementary dimensions: dramaturgy highlights the practice of self-representation as a social performance; U&G explains psychological and social motives in media use; while SIT emphasises group-affiliation pressure and social communication in self-evaluation. The integration of the three shows that digital identity is formed through a dynamic cycle involving personal motives, self-presentation strategies, social death, audience feedback, and ongoing evaluation, making identity on social media fluid, iterative, and highly influenced by digital social pressures.

This Table 2, summarises the thematic findings on the process of identity transformation among female students resulting from exposure to Instagram content. The first theme indicates that self-representation is selectively constructed through the curation of positive and aesthetic content, reflecting the front-stage practices in Goffman's dramaturgy, where digital identity is treated as an ideal and consistent self-performance. The second theme confirms that repeated exposure to lifestyle and influencer content drives tangible behavioural changes, including adopting healthy

lifestyles, specific clothing styles, and self-care practices. These findings reinforce the Uses and Gratifications framework, which views Instagram use as an active activity to fulfil needs for inspiration, aesthetics, and self-motivation, and demonstrate the close relationship between media gratification and behavioural transformation in the offline realm.

Table 2. Thematic Findings on Self-Representation and Lifestyle Transformation through Instagram Use

No	Main Theme	Subtheme	Description of Findings
1	Selectively constructed self representation	1. Content curation and Sellf-Image	Female students only display positive, aesthetic, and pleasant aspects on Instagram, such as achievements and productive activities. Tiredness, failure or negative emotions are avoided to keep the feed ideal.
		2. Digital front stage (Goffman's 3. dramaturgy)	Digital identity is constructed as a "performance of self" where female students choose photos, filters, and narratives to present to their audience as an ideal persona.
		4. Consistency with previous appearances	Consistent with Saputri & Pinem (2022) regarding the glorification of aesthetics and the formation of visual identity through campus content that displays ideal beauty.
2	Lifestyle transformation due to exposure to Instagram content	1. Lifestyle changes	Informants began adopting new habits such as exercise, self-care, specific fashion styles, and healthy lifestyles after frequently consuming lifestyle content on Instagram.
		2. Influencer influence	Influencer content serves as a reference for behavioral changes, such as clothing styles, self-care habits, and health routines.
		3. Uses and Gratifications (U&G)	Female students use Instagram to fulfill their needs for inspiration, aesthetics, self- motivation, and role models. This gratification influences offline behavioral transformation.
		4. In line with previous research	In line with Ratriyana (2024), who states that social media shapes users' "personal brand experience" and influences their perceptions and real actions.

Table 3. Thematic Findings on Self-Representation and Lifestyle Transformation through Instagram Use

No	Main Theme	Subtheme	Description of Findings
		1. The need for social recognition	Likes and comments are important indicators that increase or decrease self- confidence. Low engagement can lead to disappointment and self-evaluation.
		2. Social comparison (Social Identity Theory)	Students often compare themselves to other users who appear more attractive, productive, or successful, causing psychological pressure and identity dissonance.
1.	Social validation and the impact of social comparison	3. Digital group identity	Identity is formed through affiliation with digital groups such as hijabers communities, healthy lifestyle communities, or specific fandoms. This strengthens a sense of togetherness but also creates new standards that must be followed.
		4. Consistency with previous research	In line with Nur (2024), who found the phenomenon of "double faces" due to the pressure to maintain an ideal online image and a real identity that is not always in harmony.

This Table 3, illustrates the dynamics of social validation and social comparison in the formation of digital identity among female students on Instagram. Findings indicate that interaction indicators, such as likes and comments, serve as sources of social recognition that directly influence self-confidence and self-evaluation. When expectations for audience response are not met, female students tend to feel disappointed and reassess their digital identity. Furthermore, the social comparison process facilitated by Instagram amplifies psychological stress and triggers identity dissonance, particularly when users compare themselves to figures perceived as more attractive or successful (Kilvington, 2021). Affiliation with specific digital communities, such as hijabers, healthy lifestyle groups, or fandoms, provides a sense of community while also creating new standards of representation to adhere to, thus reinforcing the phenomenon of dual identity between online image and real identity (Brown, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2019; Stoddard et al., 2017).

This research opens up space for the formulation of more humanistic and critical digital education policies. Educational institutions should begin to introduce digital identity literacy as part of the curriculum or character development activities (Fajri & Zakiyah, 2022). Students need to be encouraged to reflect on their experiences on social media, understand how their identities are shaped socioculturally, and be trained to develop healthy and contextual representations of themselves. This approach is not only important for students' psychological health, but also for building a digital generation that is autonomous, reflective, and resilient in the face of identity pressures in the visual era.

5. Conclusion

This study explicitly confirms that exposure to beauty-related information on Instagram significantly shapes and transforms the digital identities of female students at private universities in Yogyakarta. Based on a descriptive qualitative approach and thematic analysis of narratives from ten informants, the findings demonstrate that digital identity construction on Instagram is predominantly performative, selective, and aesthetic-oriented. Rather than reflecting authentic personal identities, students deliberately curate idealized representations that emphasize beauty, productivity, and positivity to align with dominant social norms and expectations of online validation. This indicates that Instagram operates not merely as a communication platform, but as a strategic space where identity is consciously designed and displayed. The findings provide clear empirical support for Goffman's dramaturgical theory, positioning Instagram as a digital front stage in which female students actively manage impressions and enact socially desirable roles for a virtual audience. This performative identity work is further driven by psychological motivations explained through Uses and Gratifications theory, as students intentionally engage with Instagram to fulfill needs for self-expression, inspiration, emotional gratification, and social recognition. Simultaneously, Social Identity Theory elucidates how identity formation is embedded within processes of group affiliation, social categorization, and continuous symbolic comparison. These processes often produce psychological consequences, including pressure to conform, identity dissonance, and feelings of self-alienation when expected social validation is not achieved.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the digital identity of female students is not fixed or stable, but instead constitutes a dynamic socio-cultural project that is continuously negotiated through the interaction of individual agency, social structures, and the algorithmic logic of social media platforms. Instagram functions as a symbolic arena in which students negotiate who they are, how they wish to be perceived, and to which social groups they belong. This condition highlights the urgent need for digital identity literacy and reflective awareness, enabling students to critically interpret performative pressures, resist harmful beauty standards, and maintain psychological well-being without becoming disconnected from their authentic selves. Given the complexity and implications of these identity dynamics, future research should involve more diverse participant groups, including male students, individuals from different educational levels and institutional backgrounds, and participants from regions beyond Yogyakarta to capture broader and cross-contextual patterns of digital identity construction. Methodologically, mixed-methods approaches are recommended to strengthen analytical rigor by integrating qualitative depth with quantitative validation. Furthermore, future studies should explicitly examine the role of platform algorithms, influencer culture, and their impacts on mental health and identity-related decision-making. Comparative research across social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn would also provide valuable insights into platform-specific logics shaping digital self-representation.

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