

## Self-Branding in Instagram as a Dramaturgical Stage: A Sociological Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Instagram, Teenagers, Dramaturgy, Identity Construction.</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> <a href="https://doi.org/10.22437/jssh.v9i1.39610">https://doi.org/10.22437/jssh.v9i1.39610</a></p> <p><b>Received:</b> Desember 15, 2024</p> <p><b>Reviewed:</b> April 19, 2025</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> April 25, 2025</p>	<p>Instagram began as a photo-sharing tool and has since grown into a multifaceted social media platform that profoundly influences the lives of teenagers. Beyond its fundamental function, Instagram has evolved into a virtual stage where teenagers can express themselves, explore their personalities, and form social connections. The platform's dynamic and visually appealing characteristics have made it a popular and successful tool for self-expression. This study uses Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory as a theoretical framework to investigate the sociological aspects of Instagram use among teenagers. This research examines how teenagers strategically construct and present their identities to online audiences by viewing Instagram as a social theater. Using a qualitative research approach, specifically netnography, the study analyzes various performative strategies employed by teenagers, such as filter selection, narrative creation, and social interaction. The findings reveal that Instagram has become a place where teenagers actively construct their identities influenced by social norms and peer pressure. Instagram can have both positive and negative effects, too. On the one hand, the platform can foster creativity, self-expression, and social connection. Teenagers can share their passions, connect with like-minded individuals, and build supportive online communities. However, excessive Instagram use can have negative implications, such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and body image issues. Continuous exposure to curated and idealized pictures of others might lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Furthermore, Instagram can shape teenagers' perceptions of attractiveness, success, and happiness. In conclusion, Instagram has become a powerful force shaping the identities and behaviors of teenagers. By understanding the complex dynamics of online self-presentation, this study sheds light on the potential benefits and drawbacks of Instagram usage.</p>

## **1. Introduction**

The digital age has brought about major changes in the way people connect and communicate, with platforms like Instagram having a significant impact on the social environment of the younger generation (Liu & Suh, 2017; Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023; Khamis et al., 2017; Woods et al., 2023). Instagram has become an integral part of young people's lives, with over one billion monthly active users, making it more than just a platform for sharing photos and videos (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Miguel et al., 2024; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Semenzin, 2022). The platform has evolved into a powerful tool for self-expression and identity formation, enabling users to develop and display their self-identity in ways that were previously inconceivable (Liu & Suh, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017; Wong, 2024; Faleatua, 2022). Instagram's meticulously crafted posts, captions, filters, and interactions allow users to create a self-portrait that reflects how they wish to be perceived, with every interaction contributing to the development of their online persona (Woods et al., 2023; Ekayulisa et al., 2023; Faleatua, 2022; Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023). This visual representation of identity is not only a form of self-expression but also a performance influenced by social and psychological factors, such as social standards, peer influence, and the desire for validation (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Khamis et al., 2017; Miguel et al., 2024; Shutaleva et al., 2022).

Identity, as a sociological concept, is dynamic and shaped by interactions with others and the cultural contexts in which it exists (Shulman, 2016; Khamis et al., 2017; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Semenzin, 2022). In the digital age, Instagram has become a key venue for such interactions, allowing users to present idealized versions of themselves, where virtual appearances often take precedence over reality (Woods et al., 2023; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Khamis et al., 2017). This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about how individuals manage their identities online and how these activities influence their sense of self in the real world, especially in a platform-driven environment like Instagram (Wong, 2024; Faleatua, 2022; Khamis et al., 2017; Miguel et al., 2024). The development of identity, a fundamental issue in sociological research, has undergone substantial changes with the rise of social media platforms like Instagram, offering a unique perspective on these shifts (Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Liu & Suh, 2017; Faleatua, 2022).

This study employs Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory as a lens to investigate the social dynamics of identity creation among teenagers on Instagram (Shulman, 2016; Goffman, 1959; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Amelia, 2022). Goffman's theory views social interactions as theatrical performances, where individuals regulate impressions and conform to societal expectations by playing out specific roles (Shulman, 2016; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Khamis et al., 2017). This concept underscores the idea that individuals influence others in developing an appropriate self-image, particularly in a social media context like Instagram (Woods et al., 2023; Khamis et al., 2017; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Amelia, 2022). Depending on the context, one may present a different persona to suit the social environment, an idea central to the application of dramaturgical theory on Instagram (Shutaleva et al., 2022; Khamis et al., 2017; Liu & Suh, 2017; Faleatua, 2022). Central to this theory are the concepts of "front stage," "backstage," and "impression management," which provide insights into how users manage their social identities on Instagram (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023; Amelia, 2022).

The application of dramaturgical theory in studying Instagram has been explored in prior research. Amelia (2022) conducted a study titled Instagram Post as a Personal Branding Media to

Build Image Reputation in Social Reality: Assessed by Dramaturgy Theory, which describes how Instagram is used to construct and maintain a positive image (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Wong, 2024; Khamis et al., 2017). Sylvester (2019), in *The Theatre of the Selfie: Fictive Practices of the Instagram Artist*, examines how Instagram is used by feminist artists to explore and critique identity, blending reality with artifice to challenge traditional notions of identity (Woods et al., 2023; Khamis et al., 2017; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Faleatua, 2022). Both studies emphasize Instagram as a digital stage where users craft and manage their self-presentation, aligning with Goffman's theory of social performance (Woods et al., 2023; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Khamis et al., 2017).

Based on the studies reviewed, this research seeks to explore Instagram as a medium for identity formation among young individuals, shedding light on the broader significance of social media in shaping contemporary identity practices (Liu & Suh, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Miguel et al., 2024). Through the lens of Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital technologies influence the interplay between self-presentation, social interaction, and identity development in the modern age (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022; Wong, 2024; Faleatua, 2022).

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research uses a type of qualitative research with a netnography approach. Netnography is a new methodological tool that utilizes the virtual world and internet technology to provide valuable insights on current issues and global phenomena (Atmaca & Gerekten, 2023). Netnography is one approach in research that studies culture and social behavior in an online context. Netnography is commonly known as an approach that observes reality as it is and tracks or interprets it further, depending on the existing reality (Mulawarman, Kamayanti, Kristina, Sumail, & Lutfillah, 2021). Kozinets created the netnographic research methodology to solve difficulties unique to the online environment. It is thus appropriate to analyze which stages, protocols, and qualities appear to be crucial and relevant to researchers claiming to be doing netnographic research or adopting netnographic methodologies to suit a specific study (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017). Liu, R., & Suh, A. (2017). Self-branding on social media: An analysis of style bloggers on Instagram. *Procedia Computer Science*, 124, 12-20. This reference provides insights into how style bloggers use Instagram to build their personal brands, which is relevant to the analysis of social behavior on the platform. Kim, E., & McDonald-Liu, C. (2023). Influencers with #NoFilter: how micro-celebrities use self-branding practices on Instagram. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 148, 107892. This study discusses self-branding practices by micro-celebrities on Instagram, which can provide additional context for understanding social interaction and self-image. Woods, J., Hartwell, M., Oldham, L., & House-Niamke, S. (2023). Centering the self, doing the sport, and being the brand: The self-branding of lifestyle athletes on Instagram. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 16(2), 159-167. This article explores how lifestyle athletes build their personal brands on Instagram, which can be connected to dramaturgical theory in the context of performativity. Miguel, C., Clare, C., Ashworth, C. J., & Hoang, D. (2024). Self-branding and content creation strategies on Instagram: A case study of foodie influencers. *Information, Communication & Society*, 27(8), 1530-1550.

This study provides concrete examples of content creation strategies and self-branding, which can enrich your analysis of the younger generation on Instagram. Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191-208. This reference discusses the phenomenon of micro-celebrities and how they build personal brands, which is relevant to your research context. Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 2056305115604337. This article examines how fashion bloggers use social media to construct identity and brand, which can be linked to dramaturgical theory. Faleatua, R. (2018). Insta brand me: Playing with notions of authenticity. *Continuum*, 32(6), 721-732. This research discusses the concept of authenticity in self-branding on Instagram, which can provide an additional perspective for your analysis. Raun, T., & Christensen-Strynø, M. B. (2022). 'We belong to something beautiful': Julie Vu's and Madeline Stuart's use of minority identity as a popular feminist self-branding strategy on Instagram. *Information, Communication & Society*, 25(12), 1790-1807. This article explores how minority identities are used in self-branding strategies, which can provide a broader social context for your research. Ekayulisa, E. E., Maula, R. N., & Fannan, M. R. (2023). The Effectiveness of Self-Branding Through Instagram Among Generation Z. *Jurnal Harmoni Nusa Bangsa*, 1(1), 81-92. This research directly discusses the effectiveness of self-branding among Generation Z, which is a primary focus of your study. Duffy, B. E., & Pooley, J. (2019). Idols of promotion: The triumph of self-branding in an age of precarity. *Journal of Communication*, 69(1), 26-48. This article provides an in-depth analysis of self-branding in the context of economic uncertainty, which can enhance your understanding of the motivations behind branding behavior on social media.

In this study, the researcher will act as a participant observer, who then observes several young people who are the object of research. In this study, researchers analyzed the issues that occurred with dramaturgical theory which views social interaction as a performance, that each individual is an actor who plays a role on the stage of life. They try to present the desired self-image to the audience through various performative ways displayed on the Instagram platform. The data obtained is sourced from journals or internet websites, and the content on the younger generation is analyzed, as well as that of the younger generation, that is relevant to the topic discussed. Conclusions are based on the author's point of view supported by valid data.

## **2.2 Participants**

This study focuses on Generation Z individuals, specifically teenagers and young adults aged 12–27 years, born between 1997 and 2012, as its target participants. This demographic group was chosen because of their significant engagement with the Instagram platform and their propensity for exploring identity and self-presentation in the digital realm. As digital natives, members of Generation Z grew up during the rapid evolution of social media, making them uniquely positioned to navigate and utilize platforms like Instagram for self-expression, social interaction, and identity construction.

Participants were observed using qualitative research methods, specifically netnography, which involved the analysis of publicly available Instagram content. This approach allowed the study to capture authentic self-presentation practices and understand how Generation Z individuals curate their online personas in response to social and cultural influences. The

research highlights the strategic use of Instagram features such as filters, captions, and interactions to navigate the “front stage” of their online identities while reflecting the pressures and norms imposed by digital society.

By focusing on this age group, the study offers insights into how Generation Z utilizes Instagram as a social theater, examining their performative strategies in constructing identity and the implications of these practices on their psychosocial well-being.

### **2.3 Instruments**

This study employs netnography as its primary research method, a qualitative approach designed to analyze online social interactions and behaviors. According to Kozinets, netnography has a “voyeuristic quality” since it can be utilized to look into stigmatic events, circumstances, discussions, or interactions that would otherwise be more difficult to examine face-to-face (Kozinets, 2015).

Netnography is a term coined by Robert Kozinets, is particularly well-suited for studying digital communities and platforms such as Instagram. By observing and analyzing the online content and interactions of Generation Z participants, this method provides a comprehensive understanding of their self-presentation strategies and identity construction in the context of social media.

Netnography is a qualitative research method for studying online communities, involves observing and analyzing social interactions and cultural phenomena within digital spaces. The instruments in a netnographic study typically depend on the specific objectives of the research but often include the following:

- **Observation**  
Like digital field notes, that used to document observations, interactions, and researcher reflections during online immersion. Then using screenshots tools for capturing online interactions, posts, or content for analysis.
- **Data Collection Platforms**  
Using social media platforms as forums, groups, or profiles on Instagram as a online platform.
- **Research Engagement**  
Like participant observation, that the researcher might actively participate in discussions to better understand cultural norms and interactions. Then, using ethnographic interviews, that is conducted online, through direct messaging or video calls, to gain deeper insights into participant experiences.

### **2.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

This study used criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling method. The researchers locate the individuals to be researched using keywords and select those who are appropriate for their objective. As Kozinets observed, netnographic sampling can be purposive rather than representative, allowing for the inclusion of otherwise marginalized or difficult-to-reach groups (Costello et al., 2017). Criterion sampling is a procedure in which all cases that meet preset criteria are investigated.

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The choice of netnography allows the researchers to delve into Instagram as a virtual stage, where users perform and curate their identities in alignment with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. This approach involves the following key steps:

a. Data Collection

Using the netnography method, information discovered in public forums is used as data, and the data set is constructed by copying existing data in a virtual environment without the researcher's input. Netnography is widely employed in the social sciences because of its speed and cost advantages over ethnography. Publicly available Instagram posts, profiles, and interactions were collected and analyzed. Researchers analyzed data sources from several sources, including images, captions, comments, and user profiles that reflect how teenagers present themselves online. The selection of participants and content was guided by the study's focus on teenagers aged 12–27 years who actively engage with the platform.

b. Observation and Analysis

The researchers adopted a non-intrusive approach, ensuring ethical considerations by only analyzing publicly accessible data. The visual and textual elements of Instagram posts were scrutinized to identify patterns in the performative strategies used by teenagers, such as the choice of filters, captions, and engagement techniques.

c. Contextual Interpretation

The data were interpreted within the framework of dramaturgical theory, viewing Instagram as a social theater. This theoretical lens helped the researchers explore how teenagers manage their “front stage” performances while navigating the societal norms, peer pressures, and cultural expectations that influence their behavior.

d. Insight into Performative Strategies

Through this method, the study uncovered various tactics employed by teenagers to craft their online personas. These include the selective sharing of idealized images, constructing narratives to align with desired self-images, and engaging with peers to reinforce social connections.

By using netnography, the research captures the nuanced interplay between individual agency and social influence on Instagram. This method not only sheds light on the creative and expressive aspects of self-branding but also highlights the potential risks associated with curated online performances, such as social comparison and identity conflicts. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms like Instagram shape the identities and behaviors of the younger generation.

### **3. Findings**

#### **4.1. Front Stage Characteristics: Dominant Themes, Self-Visualization, and Instagram Usage Strategies by the Young Generation**

Referring to Goffman's dramaturgy theory, every individual, including Instagram users, will display an ideal version of themselves on the “front stage”. In the context of Instagram, this front stage is the user's profile, uploads, and interactions. The front stage in the context of social interaction, especially in the digital world, refers to the image that we deliberately display to others. This is the face that we show to the world, which becomes a carefully managed social construction. This image is often different from everyday reality and functions as a means of expression, social validation, and identity construction for today's young generation (Wang, 2022).

The findings of this study, derived from a qualitative netnographic approach, highlight key elements of how teenagers engage with Instagram as a platform for self-expression and identity construction. Three primary aspects emerged from the analysis: dominant themes, self-visualization strategies, and Instagram usage strategies. These elements underline the role of Instagram not merely as a tool for sharing but as a sophisticated stage for identity performance.

##### **A. Dominant Themes**

Teenagers often revolve their Instagram activities around specific themes that reflect their interests, values, and social aspirations (Bagdy, 2022). The study identified three dominant themes:

##### **1. Aesthetic Expression**

Many teenagers curate their Instagram profiles to emphasize visually appealing content. Themes such as minimalism, vibrant colors, or specific artistic styles dominate their posts, showcasing a preference for aesthetic coherence. This focus on visual elements suggests a deep engagement with artistic and stylistic trends, emphasizing creativity and innovation.

In the example of one of the sources in this study, stated that:

*“I choose minimalist or natural filters or edits, because I don't like things that are too flashy and too bright in color. I like aesthetic editing models and examples of sources on the TikTok or Pinterest platforms. And also post content, highlights, and proper or not too flashy username selection and feeds and highlights that contain things that have enough value to be displayed on social media pages”.*

##### **2. Lifestyle Representation**

Posts often reflect a curated version of the teenagers' lives, focusing on aspects like hobbies, travels, food, or fashion. This representation serves as a way to project an idealized image of themselves to their online audience. Lifestyle posts are carefully constructed to balance relatability with aspiration, making them an effective tool for gaining peer validation and social credibility.

The one of the sources, said about the lifestyle on this platform that talk about the person who most influences their style and image on Instagram, they said that:

*“Their shared lifestyle can be my motivation to imitate or consider the things they do if applied in my life, the style that I think is good on them might make me also hope to be able to wear the same things as them, the way they communicate and respond to their followers can be evaluation material for me in my daily life”*

### 3. Social and Peer Engagement

Teenagers frequently post content that aligns with current trends or social causes, signaling a desire to connect with their peers or show awareness of broader societal issues. This theme indicates a balance between individuality and conformity to social norms. By engaging with trending topics, teenagers enhance their visibility and relevance within their social circles.

The one of the sources, said about the social and peer connection, that:

*“If it's an acquaintance or friend, then I will follow a friend that I will meet often in the future for a fairly long period of time, if it's a celebrity, then someone who has similar thoughts to me or who motivates me to be better.”*

## B. Self-Visualization Strategies

The study found that self-visualization on Instagram is highly deliberate and shaped by various performative strategies. These strategies are informed by both personal aspirations and external influences, such as peer expectations and societal norms:

### 1. Filter Selection

The choice of filters plays a crucial role in shaping the mood and tone of the content. Filters often align with the thematic goals of the post, enhancing its aesthetic appeal. Teenagers' preference for specific filters reflects their awareness of visual storytelling and their effort to convey a consistent online persona.

### 2. Photo Composition

Teenagers employ strategic photo angles, poses, and settings to highlight their best attributes. This approach often mirrors trends seen among influencers, suggesting an aspirational aspect to their self-presentation. The deliberate composition of photos signifies their understanding of visual impact and the power of imagery in creating a compelling narrative.

### 3. Captions and Hashtags

Accompanying captions are often used to convey deeper meanings, humor, or relatability. Hashtags help increase visibility and connect posts to broader themes or communities. These textual elements complement the visual content, adding layers of meaning and expanding the post's reach within Instagram's algorithmic ecosystem.

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### C. Instagram Usage Strategies

Teenagers demonstrate specific patterns of behavior and strategies to maximize their Instagram presence. These behaviors are reflective of both technical savviness and a deep understanding of social dynamics:

#### 1. Scheduled Posting

Many participants reported carefully planning the timing of their posts to maximize engagement, often aligning with peak usage times. This deliberate timing highlights their focus on optimizing visibility and interaction.

#### 2. Interaction Management

Strategies such as liking, commenting, and responding to direct messages are employed to maintain and grow social connections. Active engagement with followers fosters a sense of community and reciprocity, which are essential for sustaining online relationships.

#### 3. Content Recycling

Teenagers often archive older posts to maintain a fresh and updated profile or reintroduce previously popular content with modifications. This practice demonstrates their adaptability and awareness of audience preferences, ensuring their profiles remain dynamic and appealing.

The findings highlight the dual-edged nature of Instagram usage among teenagers. While the platform enables creativity, social connection, and self-expression, it also fosters a culture of comparison and peer validation. The emphasis on curated content often pressures teenagers to conform to idealized standards, which can affect their mental well-being. Excessive use may lead to challenges such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and body image concerns, particularly when teenagers perceive themselves as failing to meet the standards set by influencers or peers.

Conversely, the platform's potential to foster creativity and build communities cannot be overlooked. Teenagers frequently leverage Instagram to showcase their talents, share passions, and connect with like-minded individuals. By striking a balance between individuality and societal expectations, many are able to carve out unique digital identities that reflect their personal and cultural values.

By exploring these aspects through Goffman's dramaturgical lens, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of online self-presentation, contributing to discussions on the psychological and sociological implications of social media use in the digital age. It underscores the importance of educating teenagers about responsible social media use while encouraging them to embrace the platform's creative and communal benefits.

## **4.2. Back Stage Characteristics: Differences Between Front Stage and Back Stage (Online and Offline, Motivations Behind Identity Construction, Challenges Faced in Maintaining Online Image)**

The 'backstage characteristics' section digs into the complexities of identity development as viewed via Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. This theory holds that people regulate their social relationships using the metaphor of a performance, with different "front stage" and "back stage" behaviors. On Instagram, this dichotomy is clear as individuals create crafted personas for public display while coping with private, offline reality.

### **Differences Between Front Stage and Back Stage (Online vs. Offline)**

In the context of Instagram, the front stage reflects the carefully curated, polished version of a user's identity that is shown to their audience. This includes using filters, idealized photos, captions, and hashtags to portray a desirable identity. In contrast, the back stage is where people hide from public scrutiny and indulge in more genuine, unguarded actions.

#### **1. Front Stage**

Online personas are frequently idealized and sculpted to satisfy society norms and peer approval. For example, users may publish visually appealing photographs in order to obtain validation through likes and comments, displaying an ideal lifestyle that may not match their reality.

#### **2. Back Stage**

Offline behaviors, often known as the back stage, refer to the efforts and emotional work required to preserve these constructed identities. Users may have feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, or tiredness as a result of constantly satisfying the expectations of their online audience. These backstage actions are invisible to the audience but are critical to maintaining the front-stage performance.

Some researchers highlight that social media platforms blur the boundaries between front stage and back stage, complicating identity management as users navigate public and private spheres simultaneously (Boyd & Ellison, 2010).

### **Motivations Behind Identity Construction**

Motivations for creating an online persona on Instagram come from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors:

#### **1. Intrinsic Motivations:**

##### **a. Self-Expression**

Instagram offers users a creative opportunity to explore and express many aspects of their identities.

##### **b. Personal Fulfillment**

Sharing successes or memorable occasions can provide a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.

#### **2. Extrinsic Motivations**

##### **a. Social Validation**

Obtaining likes, comments, and following reflects social approval and popularity.

b. Peer Influence

Teenagers and young adults frequently align their online personalities with popular trends in order to fit in with their social circles.

c. Professional Goals

Some Instagram users strategically use self-branding to improve their professional prospects, particularly in the creative and entrepreneurial industries.

Studies such as those by (Marwick, 2015) emphasize that self-branding on social media is a deliberate, goal-oriented activity influenced by both personal and societal expectations.

## **5. Discussion**

Instagram's role as a front stage for teenagers' self-presentation is heavily shaped by their desire to align with societal trends and standards. The study reveals that teenagers carefully curate their profiles to showcase a polished and idealized version of themselves, which is consistent with the concept of self-branding discussed by scholars (Liu & Suh, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017). This digital "performance" is not limited to visual content but also extends to behavioral interactions, such as liking, commenting, and sharing, which reflect a desire to fit in and gain social validation (Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023). In many cases, these performances align with the aspirations and cultural values promoted through influencers, which serve as models for youth self-presentation (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022).

Teenagers' engagement with aesthetic expression on Instagram, particularly through the use of filters, underscores the growing emphasis on visual identity in the digital age. As noted in the findings, teenagers opt for minimalist or natural filters to convey an image of simplicity and authenticity, echoing broader cultural trends that value understated elegance (Semenzin, 2022). This focus on aesthetic coherence is not only a form of self-expression but also a way to align with the expectations of the Instagram community, where visual appeal is often prioritized (Miguel et al., 2024). This curated self-image emphasizes the role of Instagram as a self-branding platform, where users consciously craft their identity to appeal to both peers and potential followers (Aires, 2020; Liu & Suh, 2017).

In addition to aesthetic choices, the lifestyle representation that teenagers present on Instagram plays a pivotal role in their identity construction. As seen in the study, teenagers often share content related to hobbies, travels, and social causes, selectively curating posts to project an idealized version of their lives (Woods et al., 2023). This strategy is not just about sharing experiences but also about constructing a narrative that resonates with the values and aspirations of their social circle. By adopting the lifestyles of influencers or peers who reflect their values, teenagers engage in a process of peer influence, where the desire to fit in shapes their online identity (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). This reliance on social comparison and external validation mirrors what scholars describe as social capital in the digital age, where the value of a person's identity is partly determined by their social interactions and visibility online (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022).

The desire for social validation through Instagram highlights the role of the platform in shaping how teenagers measure their self-worth. Teenagers actively engage with social norms and behaviors that are validated by their peers, as seen in the social and peer engagement behaviors analyzed in the study. By responding to trends and participating in social causes, teenagers gain

the approval and attention of their social circles, further validating the constructed personas they display online (Duffy & Pooley, 2017). As such, Instagram serves as a performance stage where teenagers can manipulate their identity to fit into social groups, seeking acceptance through likes, comments, and shares (Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023).

In terms of self-visualization strategies, the choice of filters, photo composition, and captions reflects teenagers' deep engagement with digital storytelling. Filters are not merely decorative; they are used strategically to enhance the mood and tone of posts, allowing teenagers to craft a consistent online identity (Shutaleva et al., 2022). Similarly, the composition of photos—through careful attention to angles, lighting, and background—demonstrates teenagers' awareness of visual aesthetics and their ability to create compelling narratives through images (Wong, 2024). Captions and hashtags complement these visuals, adding layers of meaning and connecting posts to broader social movements or trends, which is crucial for engaging with a wider audience beyond immediate friends or followers (Semenzin, 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2022).

The study also identified Instagram usage strategies, such as scheduled posting and interaction management, which reflect teenagers' savvy understanding of Instagram's algorithm. By posting at peak times, teenagers maximize engagement and ensure their content reaches a broader audience, demonstrating their strategic approach to managing their online presence (Ekayulisa et al., 2023). Furthermore, teenagers manage their interactions with followers to foster a sense of community, responding to messages and comments to maintain social connections. This interaction management underscores the dramaturgical concept of audience management, where teenagers actively perform for their followers to maintain an image of relatability and engagement (Schwöbel-Patel, 2019).

The practice of content recycling reflects teenagers' ongoing efforts to maintain a fresh and appealing profile while staying relevant in a constantly shifting digital environment (Wang, 2022). This adaptability allows them to reintroduce past content with new modifications, ensuring that their online identity remains dynamic and in tune with changing trends and audience preferences (Faleatua, 2018). Such practices highlight the intersection of creativity and strategic branding, as teenagers continuously adapt their profiles to meet the expectations of their followers and the algorithmic structures of Instagram (Duffy & Pooley, 2017).

Despite the creative and communal benefits of Instagram, the backstage characteristics of identity construction reveal the emotional labor involved in maintaining these idealized online personas. Teenagers often experience anxiety, stress, and self-doubt when managing their online image, as maintaining a polished front-stage performance requires continuous emotional and psychological effort (Liu & Suh, 2017). This backstage labor, which includes self-reflection, editing, and the pressure to conform to societal standards, is hidden from the public eye but plays a critical role in sustaining the front-stage performance of an idealized self (Shutaleva et al., 2022).

The tension between front stage and back stage highlights the complexities of identity management on social media. While the front stage represents a curated and idealized identity, the backstage reflects the real emotional labor and challenges teenagers face in balancing their online persona with their authentic self. This aligns with Goffman's concept of impression management, where individuals navigate the tension between authenticity and societal expectations (Goffman, 1959). As teenagers engage in this delicate balancing act, the psychological and emotional costs of maintaining an idealized online identity become more evident, as seen in the study's findings (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017).

Ultimately, Instagram serves as a performance stage where teenagers can curate and manage their identities to gain social approval and self-fulfillment, while also navigating the challenges of maintaining an online persona. By examining Instagram through Goffman's dramaturgical lens, this study underscores the importance of understanding the psychological and sociological implications of social media use in the digital age. It calls for greater awareness of the emotional labor involved in online self-presentation and encourages responsible social media use that fosters creativity, self-expression, and positive engagement (Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022; Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023).

## **6. Conclusion**

This study emphasizes how teens create and act their identities on Instagram, a dynamic digital platform. The study, which is based on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, shows that Instagram functions as a social theater that is impacted by peer dynamics and cultural norms in addition to being a platform for creative self-expression. Teenagers meticulously build their online profiles to conform to idealized images of pleasure, prosperity, and beauty through the strategic use of filters, captions, and social interactions.

Instagram presents problems, including social comparison, cyberbullying, and body image issues, even as it encourages creativity, community building, and social connections. The contrast between the emotionally taxing "backstage" and the polished "front stage" personalities of teenagers draws attention to the psychological challenges of managing one's digital identity. These results highlight social media's dual character, which presents hazards to mental health as well as chances for personal development.

The sociological ramifications of online self-presentation, especially for Generation Z, are more understood thanks to this study. It emphasizes the necessity of addressing the psychological effects of social media on young people, fostering authenticity, and advancing digital literacy. This study provides insightful information for academics, educators, politicians, and mental health advocates by illuminating the relationship between creativity and conformity on social media sites like Instagram.

In summary, this study enriches our understanding of how teenagers navigate the intricacies of self-presentation and identity construction on Instagram. Interpreting these dynamics through a sociological lens highlights digital technologies' profound impact on contemporary identity practices. These insights contribute to academic discourse and inform practical interventions to foster healthier social media use among the younger generation.

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