

Crafting Identities: Instagram's Role in Self-Representation among Sociology Students at Malikussaleh University with Dual Accounts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines social media Instagram as a student self-representation tool. This study focuses on images displayed by students of the Sociology study program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh on Instagram accounts. The theoretical perspective used in this study is a process in which (meanings) are produced using the (language) proposed by Stuart Hall. The method used in this study is a qualitative research method with descriptive analysis through observation, interviews, and documentation to describe and obtain information that students do to represent themselves through Instagram social media. The findings from this study indicate that students use two Instagram accounts to express themselves differently and show a different side of themselves. The images on the two Instagram accounts can vary depending on the purpose and context they want to convey. The images built by students on two Instagram accounts are intellectual, self-image through photography, motivator images, and fashion and lifestyle images. Self-representation of students on two Instagram accounts is a way for students to present or express themselves to other Instagram users through photos, videos, captions, profile descriptions, and posts that reflect their interests, personalities, and daily life activities. The forms of self-representation on Instagram are representation of self-image on social media, representation of students with natural scenery themes through photography, representation of active students outside of academics, representation of students active in campus activities, and representation of inspiring students on social media.

Keywords: Representation, Image, Student

1. INTRODUCTION

Users can share videos and photographs with ease on the Instagram platform. Instagram is a social network where users may share their images and videos that they have taken and processed with different digital effects. Because it's so quick and simple to share events, the name "Instagram" itself is derived from the word "instant," which was once associated with the Polaroid camera, which was also known as "instant photos." Additionally, Instagram's "gram" word is derived from "telegram," reflecting the quick and effective means of informing others [1].

The social networking site Instagram makes it simple for people to express themselves and show off their creativity. Instagram offers a range of distinctive and captivating functionalities that function as a medium for individuals to showcase their identities and

personalities. As a result, this platform allows users to freely express themselves and engage with the outside world. Instagram is a social networking platform that lets people engage and talk without time or location restrictions. Instagram is a widely used social networking platform that provides several interesting features, including reels, IGTV, direct messaging, instastory, and more. By following other accounts, users can communicate with one another and exchange images and videos [2].

An individual's presentation or self-representation on the social media platform Instagram can be understood as the content they submit to their account. This is known as representation. Images, movies, descriptions, hashtags, and user interactions can all be used as examples of this portrayal. Instagram is strongly linked to the self-portrayal that its users create. In order to develop the ideal online persona, Instagram users can

choose which images, videos, or stories to post on their social media profiles.

According to Stuart Hall [3], representation is the process of using words to describe or illustrate a topic through the use of actual or imagined objects, people, or events. The act of representing something meaningful to someone else through words is known as representation. All meanings that are communicated are produced by different language systems, and each meaning is molded or impacted by the representational system that is employed. This phenomenon occurs not only when spoken language is used, but also when images, photos, videos, and other forms of communication are used. A culture's meanings are always connected to and comprehended through the different languages that its members speak [3].

By enabling features like comments, direct messages, and user tagging, Instagram promotes cross-cultural communication in this way. Intercultural interactions are strengthened by these qualities, which let users communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds. In "Cultural Intermediaries: How Instagram Mediates Interculturality," author Crystal Abidin describes how Instagram offers a platform for cross-cultural communication and global cultural exploration. Also covered by Abidin is the impact Instagram may have on users' perceptions of their own identities and cultures. According to Abidin, Instagram serves as a cultural mediator, influencing both trends and ways of life [4].

The emergence of the culture of sharing photos or videos and self-disclosure in the digital era arises and is influenced by various factors, one of which is the advancement of social media that allows users to easily share various content on their Instagram accounts. This phenomenon has led to a cultural shift where the boundaries between private and public spaces become increasingly blurred. For example, when someone posts a status on Instagram stories, anyone, anytime can tell a story about the daily life of a person who has an Instagram account, as in two-way communication interactions, cannot be restricted to the recipient of the status. Because anyone has the right to read that status and comment on the status post even to people outside the friend circle of the Instagram account owner.

Self-image, considered as a self-representation, is constructed by the culture that grows within one's environment. Gradually, this culture will develop and form an image of oneself. Self-image, or image, that is built by students on their Instagram social media accounts is how students present themselves through the content shared on their Instagram accounts. This image can reflect their personality, values, interests, and lifestyle, and can influence others' perceptions of them.

The self-image referred to on Instagram can stem from the posts they share on the Instagram platform, the content they share from other accounts, and their interactions with followers or friends on Instagram. A person can choose the content they want to share on their Instagram account, such as selfies, campus atmosphere photos, food photos, vacation photos or videos, and photos of organization activities or other activities [5].

Self-image is a general representation of oneself or the view we create for ourselves, and it is not the same as the actual reality. Self-image shapes our personality, behavior, decision-making, and body appreciation. Through the Instagram social media platform, individuals can build their self-image by posting their photos in a well-known place or in a middle to upper-middle-class setting. Even though, in reality, there are many individuals in the lower social strata who often style or take photos in a middle-class to upper-middle-class setting, then present themselves in a way that makes them seem more attractive. They then upload these photos to Instagram to gain many likes and followers, creating a hyperreality of themselves [2].

The form of self-image through the Instagram social media platform indicates a desire to maintain a presence by sharing daily activities through photos and videos. This concept can be referred to as an individual's effort to gain recognition for their existence. Interpersonal interaction becomes a crucial part of this existence. However, the presence of social media has transformed the meaning of existence towards self-presentation in order to seek recognition from the public audience [6].

In this case, the image constructed by sociology students on their two Instagram accounts can vary depending on the goals and context they want to convey. However, in general, the image reflects the student's identity and personality, as well as the messages or values they want to convey to other Instagram users. Sociology students build their image on the two different accounts, distinguishing the main account as public and the second account as private. The public account is used to showcase photos or videos to other Instagram users and to interact with friends, acquaintances, family, and others. Meanwhile, the private account is used to post photos and videos that present their image to other Instagram users in a more secluded manner, meaning not everyone can see all the daily activities displayed by the student on their Instagram account. From these two Instagram accounts, it is evident that sociology students represent or present themselves differently, which can influence how others perceive and understand them. Hence, these students feel the need to have two accounts. Sociology students find it important to portray a positive impression to their followers, but in reality,

they also want to present a favorable impression to the followers of their other accounts. Additionally, they also want to express their true selves to their closest people. Therefore, they create a second account with the intention of displaying a different side of themselves (Initial interview findings, March 11, 2023).

Based on the above descriptions, the author aims to investigate "Crafting Identities: Instagram's Role in Self-Representation Among Sociology Students at Malikussaleh University with Dual Accounts" because, in addition to being intriguing for research, Sociology Program students represent or showcase themselves on the Instagram social media platform in diverse ways.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW; THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this research, the researcher employs the theory of representation proposed by Stuart Hall. In Hall's concept of representation theory, he describes a process where meaning is generated through the use of language. Representation is the result of constructing meaning in the human mind through language. This reflects the relationship between concepts and language that transform real objects, individuals, or even events into representations in the form of fictional objects, individuals, or events. Representation can be seen as how we use language to convey something meaningful to others [3].

Representation is a crucial study in cultural studies; it can be interpreted as the bridge between us and the world. Through representation, we can see how the world is presented, both in political, economic, social, cultural, and ideological aspects. Barker argues that the largest part of cultural studies revolves around questions of representation, namely how the world is constructed and socially represented to and by us. The main element of cultural studies can be understood as the study of culture as a practice of representation [7].

Simply put, representation can be understood as the activity of re-presenting, embodying something, creating an image, or a way of interpreting what is given in the depicted object or text. The text here can take various forms, such as writing, images, real-life events, and audiovisuals. The concept of representation is used to describe the expression of the relationship between text and reality. In simple terms, representation is the process of using language by cultural members to produce meaning. Language in this context is defined as any system that uses signs, whether verbal or non-verbal. The purpose of a sign can be said to be representation, which is to depict, imitate, imagine, and connect [8].

Hall states that there are three approaches used in representation, 1). Reflective approach, where meaning is produced by humans through ideas, media objects, and real experiences in society. Meaning lies in the intended objects (people, events, etc.). 2). Intentional approach, where both spoken and written language give unique meaning to each of their works. Language is the medium used by speakers to communicate meaning in specific things referred to as unique. Meaning is given or created by the speaker, involving a form of meaning engineering. 3). Constructionist approach, where speakers and writers choose and assign meaning to the message or work (objects) they create [3].

In Hall's view, representation is the process of constructing and articulating meaning in culture, media, and society. He developed the concept of encoding-decoding in media and cultural analysis, explaining how messages conveyed through media or culture are interpreted by the public [3]. According to Stuart Hall [9], the encoding-decoding process consists of three stages: 1). Encoding, where messages conveyed through media or culture are encoded by the producer or message maker. In this process, the producer selects language, images, and symbols to convey the message according to their goals and perspectives. 2). Decoding, where the messages conveyed are then deciphered by the public or message recipient. In this process, the public attempts to understand and give meaning to the received message according to their views and contexts. 3). Re-Encoding, where the public receiving the message can then produce new messages based on their interpretation of the received message.

Stuart Hall [9], identifies three forms of decoding: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Dominant decoding occurs when the conveyed messages are passively accepted and align with the producer's understanding of the message. Negotiated decoding occurs when the conveyed messages are accepted in a modified or altered form according to the recipient's understanding and context. Meanwhile, oppositional decoding occurs when the conveyed messages are rejected or given a meaning contrary to the producer's viewpoint. Thus, Hall's representation theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how messages in culture and media are produced, conveyed, and received by the public in society.

Stuart Hall's representation theory can be applied to the use of social media, as through the use of social media, individuals can produce and receive social representations related to everyday life. In the context of social media, messages or information are presented in various formats, including text, images, and videos, which are considered social representations that can

influence our perspectives and understanding of social reality [3].

Stuart Hall in his representation theory explains that through the process of representation, reality is symbolically represented, carrying its own meaning. This representation theory encompasses three approaches: first, the reflective approach, which views reality as a mirror reflecting the actual state of affairs. Second, is the intentional approach, which involves the use of language to express meaning from one's perspective, such as an artist or writer. Third, the constructionist approach, where a particular language or system is used to represent self-concepts with the aim of interpreting that language, not only constructing meaning through the representational system [3].

Users of social media can produce messages or information in the form of posts, comments, or videos, which are then disseminated and received by other users. The encoding process in this case is influenced by the social, political, and cultural context of the social media user, such as their political views, religion, or beliefs. Meanwhile, the decoding process is influenced by the social, political, and cultural context of the message recipient, as well as individual experiences and perceptions of different social realities. In using Instagram social media, Stuart Hall's representation theory can be applied to understand how Instagram users produce and receive social representations constructed through the platform. For example, on Instagram, users can produce social representations through the content they upload, such as photos, videos, or short stories. These social representations can encompass various aspects, such as beauty, lifestyle, or political opinions [9].

Stuart Hall's representation theory states that cultural representations are produced through the process of interpretation and encoding performed by the representation maker. These representations can influence society's perception of a particular group or individual and can shape one's identity and self-image. Through the context of Instagram social media, Hall's representation theory can be linked to how students use this platform to represent themselves through the posts and content they share [3].

The author uses this theory due to its relevance to the research. In representation theory, it is evident that the process of meaning formation involves the use of language. Representation is the process of constructing and articulating meaning in culture, media, and society. The concept of encoding-decoding in media and cultural analysis, explains how messages conveyed through media or culture are interpreted by the public. This is relevant to the research conducted by the author regarding Instagram Social Media as a Tool for Student

Self-Representation, where Sociology students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Malikussaleh University represent or display their self-image through photos or videos of their daily activities on other Instagram accounts.

Based on the above explanation, Stuart Hall explains that social media affects how students represent themselves on their Instagram social media accounts. Sociology students can use Instagram as a medium to represent or display their self-image to followers and other Instagram users. In this case, Sociology students with two Instagram accounts can be described as different forms of self-representation within one individual. For example, a student may have one Instagram account that portrays their casual self, while another.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method [10], which aims to provide a comprehensive description of the image constructed by students on two Instagram accounts and the self-representation displayed by students on these accounts. The research was conducted at the Sociology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Malikussaleh University. Key informants consist of five active users of Instagram social media from the Sociology program. Data collection techniques in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques involve data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Use of Two Instagram Accounts by Students

Generally, Instagram users have two accounts that can be distinguished as the first account or commonly referred to as the primary account, and the second account. The first account is the personal account created when the user first starts using Instagram. The second account, on the other hand, is another account owned by the user. Based on the author's observation, the main account typically contains the best and ideal version of the user. The first account has followers known within the closest social circle, such as family, close friends, and acquaintances, as well as unknown individuals. The posts on the second account include random photos, trend videos, emotional videos, and text or video expressions. Based on the author's observation, the second account is used as a medium to present oneself, express oneself, or to showcase the user's existence on Instagram. Therefore, what is displayed on the second account reflects an identity that strongly represents the user. For instance, sociology students in

the Sociology program use two Instagram accounts because they want to present or represent themselves differently on both of their Instagram accounts.

Based on the overall interview results, it is evident that the use of two Instagram accounts by students serves the purpose of separating followers between the primary account and the second account. By using two Instagram accounts, students can express themselves more freely and comfortably while maintaining privacy in sharing their daily activities. Students feel more comfortable and free to share photos and videos on the second account without worrying about how others perceive them. In addition, students create two Instagram accounts with the intention of expressing themselves differently and showcasing another side of themselves. As a result, these students can express themselves more openly and separate their more open personal life content on the second account while maintaining privacy on the primary account.

In this context, there is a connection with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which suggests a process of encoding and decoding. Encoding refers to the messages conveyed through media or culture being encoded by the producer or message creator. Similarly, sociology students in the Sociology program, when using two Instagram accounts, engage in encoding when they choose language, select photos or videos, and use symbols to convey messages through captions, photos, and videos posted on their Instagram accounts. Students choose words, construct sentences, and select images or photos they believe represent the message they want to convey. In the decoding stage, Instagram users who view the account will try to understand the message conveyed by these students. Instagram users will give meaning to the received messages based on their own contextual perspectives.

4.2. Image Constructed by Sociology Program Students on Two Instagram Accounts

The image constructed by students on two Instagram accounts can vary depending on the objectives and contexts they want to convey. However, in general, the image reflects the identity and personality of the student, as well as the messages or values they want to convey to other Instagram users. Students build their image on two different Instagram accounts, as seen from the posts they share on their Instagram accounts.

Intellectual Image

Intellectualism refers to an individual's ability to acquire, understand, analyze, and apply knowledge and critical thinking in various situations. This includes the ability to think logically, analytically, creatively, and

make informed decisions based on available information. Intellectualism also involves the process of learning and adapting to the environment and challenges faced [11]. Students build their intellectual image on their Instagram social media accounts by posting photos or videos of their organizational activities and following various prominent accounts to get information related to their interests.

According to the interviews, students tend to post photos of organizational activities and other positive activities on their primary account. On the primary account, they focus on building their personal brand and aim to project a positive impression related to their daily activities and campus environment. On the second account, students prefer to post content that is more casual or entertaining, such as sharing thoughts or uploading funny photos or videos. They feel more comfortable posting photos or videos on the second account because only specific people can see those posts.

The findings of this research are related to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which states that intellectual image reflects people's perception of someone's intelligence, knowledge, and intellectual skills. Language and meaning play a significant role in shaping and conveying this image. In organizational activities, students can use language and meaning effectively to build their intellectual image. They can communicate their thoughts and ideas through speeches, achievements, writing, or discussions. A deep understanding of topics related to organizational activities can also enhance their intellectual image. Moreover, how others understand and interpret the language and meaning used by students in organizational activities also affects their intellectual image. The way students communicate, the arguments they present, and the overall impression they give through language can influence how others view and judge their intelligence in the context of organizational activities [3].

Self-Representation through Photography

Photography is a medium that allows individuals to express themselves and showcase their work through photo posts. Photo media is an efficient tool for conveying messages and ideas to others. Photography or the art of taking photos is a versatile tool for documenting valuable moments or significant events in a person's life [12]. For example, students who enjoy natural landscapes capture every moment of it through photography and post them on their Instagram accounts.

Based on the interviews, it is known that on the primary account, the informant often posts photos of their back with a partially obscured face, showcasing natural

landscapes. On the second account, the informant focuses more on posting photos with a clear view of their face. By sharing daily activities, the informant wants to provide an overview of their life to other Instagram followers. By sharing these posts, the informant wants to express their love for nature and also show a mysterious side of themselves (Interview, June 12, 2023).

The findings of this research are related to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which suggests that in photography, students can use photos or videos to represent themselves, express their identity, and convey messages about who they are. Through photography, students can choose how they present themselves, such as choosing poses, backgrounds, objects, and facial expressions to create a visual representation of themselves. The chosen and displayed self-image in the photo reflects the values, interests, personality, and aspirations of the students. Additionally, meaning is also related to how others understand and interpret the photos posted by the students. Other users who view these uploaded photos can judge the self-image of the students based on what they see in the photo [9].

Motivator Image

Motivation essentially comes from the term "motive," which refers to the internal drive or force that compels an individual to act and behave. Motives or inner drives are motivating factors that prompt individuals to take action or work. This motivation originates from within an individual and can be reflected through interests, efforts, and dedication in carrying out an action or activity [13].

Based on the author's observation, students in the Sociology program often post photos or videos with wise words in their Instagram Stories. These quotes are frequently shared or spread by the students on their Instagram accounts, covering topics like love stories, life experiences, and social experiences. In this context, the quotes serve a message: to encourage the reader to become a stronger person in facing life's challenges.

From an interview with one of the informants, it is shown that on the primary account, the informant often posts photos or videos on Insta Stories with quotes that represent their feelings. The goal is to provide encouragement to themselves and hope that their followers read their quotes and perhaps find inspiration in them.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research description and discussion presented earlier, the conclusions are:

The use of two Instagram accounts by Sociology students aims to separate followers on the main account from those on the second account. Utilizing two Instagram accounts, students can express themselves more freely and comfortably while maintaining privacy in sharing their daily activities. The image constructed by Sociology students on their two Instagram accounts may vary depending on the goals and context they wish to convey. The images built on two Instagram accounts include an intellectual image, self-representation through photography, a motivator image, a fashion image, and a lifestyle image. The self-representation of Sociology students showcases or expresses themselves to other Instagram users through various posts shared on Instagram. Self-representation can take the form of photo posts, videos, captions, profile descriptions, and posts that reflect the interests, personality, and daily life activities of the user. The forms of self-representation on Instagram include 1) a means of self presentation and 2) a platform for exploring hobbies.

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