

## **Performing Perfection: A Dramaturgical and Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Gen Z's Idealized Self-Presentation on Instagram and TikTok**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates how Generation Z constructs idealized digital identities on Instagram and TikTok by integrating dramaturgical analysis with multimodal discourse analysis. Using a qualitative exploratory design, forty publicly accessible posts were purposively selected and examined to identify the multimodal resources visual, textual, and audiovisual employed in self-presentation practices. The findings indicate that Instagram functions as a visually curated frontstage, where users craft aspirational identities through coherent aesthetic patterns, stylized compositions, and global–local aesthetic expressions such as *clean girl*, *old money*, and locally adapted categories like *cewek bumi*, *cewek kue*, and *cewek mamba*. TikTok, by contrast, serves as a platform for fluid, expressive, and dynamic identity performances shaped by rhythmic editing, gesture, facial expressivity, and engagement with viral audio trends, resulting in a structured form of spontaneity.

The cross-platform analysis reveals that Generation Z strategically differentiates their self-presentations: Instagram facilitates stable and idealized identity constructions, while TikTok enables adaptive, experimental, and performative identity display. The study extends existing theoretical frameworks by demonstrating how dramaturgical notions operate within algorithmic and multimodal environments and by proposing the concept of cross-platform dramaturgy to explain contemporary identity work. These findings highlight the interplay between platform affordances, aesthetic norms, and generational digital habitus in shaping identity production. The research offers important implications for digital communication scholarship, youth culture studies, and digital literacy initiatives, emphasizing the need to conceptualize identity as a multimodal, context-dependent, and platform-mediated performance in contemporary social media ecosystems.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; digital identity; self-presentation; dramaturgy; multimodal discourse analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, social media has emerged as the primary arena through which young people construct, manage, and publicly perform their identities. Generation Z, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, demonstrates an intensive engagement with social media platforms both globally and within Indonesia, positioning them as key actors in today's digital communication culture. Recent reports consistently indicate that social media remains the dominant medium for Gen Z not only for media consumption and entertainment but also for social interaction, self-expression, and identity exploration (Chang & Chang, 2023; Nabila, 2025).

In Indonesia, data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) indicate that internet penetration has reached 80.66% of the population, with Generation Z representing the most dominant demographic segment among internet users. This generational cohort not only constitutes the majority of digital participants but also drives the transformation of communication patterns, content creation, and online cultural practices within the national digital ecosystem (Admin, 2025). According to a survey processed by Katadata based on the APJII report, 51.9% of Indonesian Generation Z regularly access Instagram, making it the most frequently used social media platform among this demographic group. This finding highlights Instagram's dominant role in shaping Gen Z's online engagement, self-presentation, and cultural participation within Indonesia's rapidly expanding digital landscape (Adi, 2024). These facts demonstrate that the social, aesthetic, and even existential dimensions of Gen Z's everyday life are deeply intertwined with social media, positioning this generation as an ideal subject for examining self-presentation and digital identity construction.

The classical dramaturgical theory proposed by Erving Goffman remains highly relevant for understanding this phenomenon. Goffman (1959) argues that in social interactions, individuals "perform" the self on the front stage, while preparing and managing these impressions in the back stage of private settings. This conceptual distinction between public performance and backstage preparation offers a powerful framework for analyzing how identity is strategically constructed, curated, and negotiated in digital environments (Hogan, 2010; Miguel et al., 2023; Schmidt & Deppermann, 2023). Although Goffman's framework was originally developed to explain face-to-face social interactions, a growing body of contemporary research has adapted his dramaturgical model to social media contexts, where the "stage" has become digital, public, continuous, and multimodal. These adaptations highlight the ways in which online platforms transform impression management into a perpetual performance mediated by technological affordances and networked audiences.

Gen Z's use of social media is not merely textual, but profoundly visual, audiovisual, and multimodal. A multimodal discourse analytic approach reveals that meaning and identity are constructed through the interplay of images, text, video, sound, gesture, and visual editing rather than through linguistic expression alone. This perspective underscores the integrated semiotic nature of digital communication, in which multiple modes collectively shape how individuals

perform and negotiate their identities online (Abidin, 2016). Across various contexts, including Indonesia, research indicates that young people utilize TikTok as a performative space to express the self, pursue popularity, and gain social acceptance through performances that align with trending aesthetics and audience expectations. This platform functions as a dynamic arena of identity negotiation, where visibility and recognition are achieved by adapting to algorithmic logics and participatory cultural norms (Conte et al., 2024; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2023; Virós-Martín et al., 2024).

Conversely, behavioral research on generational trends reveals that Generation Z globally spends a substantial amount of time on social media each day, positioning these platforms as the primary spaces for entertainment, information seeking, and identity formation. This sustained engagement underscores the centrality of social media in shaping how Gen Z experiences the world, negotiates belonging, and constructs the self within a digitally mediated environment (Gasparello et al., 2025; Martínez-Estrella et al., 2023; Nabila, 2025). In the Indonesian context, Generation Z frequently uses social media to negotiate lifestyle, identity, and aspiration, blending global aesthetics, viral trends, and local realities. This process of cultural hybridization reflects how young users appropriate global digital cultures while rearticulating them within locally situated meanings and value systems. Through such practices, social media becomes a site where global modernity and local identity continuously intersect and co-produce new cultural forms (Fadillah, 2025; Helmi et al., 2023; Jayaputri & Aziz, 2024).

Although the literature on identity formation in social media has grown substantially, there remains a notable lack of studies that explicitly combine Goffman's dramaturgical framework with multimodal discourse analysis, particularly within comparative investigations across major platforms that possess distinct technological affordances, such as Instagram and TikTok. Most existing research focuses on a single platform or relies on simplistic visual or textual analyses, without addressing the complex multimodal dynamics and platform-specific logics that structure user interactions and meaning-making processes. Therefore, this study identifies a critical conceptual and empirical gap: the need for research that integrates dramaturgy, multimodality, and cross-platform analysis in the context of Generation Z's digital self-presentation. Such integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of how identity performances are discursively and technologically shaped across different social media environments.

Building upon this identified gap, the present study aims to explore how Generation Z constructs and performs idealized selves across two popular social media platforms Instagram and TikTok by employing an integrated dramaturgical and multimodal discourse analytical approach. Specifically, the research investigates how visual, textual, and audiovisual elements converge to shape idealized identity representations, and how the distinct affordances of each platform influence users' self-presentation strategies. Through this framework, the article seeks to make both theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of digital identity aesthetics, impression management, and the performative dynamics of Gen Z's selfhood within the global-local media environment. This analysis not only advances the integration of dramaturgical and

multimodal perspectives but also enriches understanding of how young users navigate the intersections of technology, culture, and identity performance in contemporary digital discourse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Dramaturgy and Digital Self-Presentation**

The dramaturgical framework introduced by Erving Goffman (1959) has long served as a foundational lens for understanding self-presentation in mediated and digital environments. Dramaturgy emphasizes the management of impressions through the distinction between frontstage and backstage behavior, illustrating how individuals perform particular versions of the self before an audience. In the era of social media, this framework has undergone a fundamental transformation, as the “stage” of interaction now unfolds within a digital public sphere that is continuous, multimodal, and algorithmically surveilled. The fluidity of boundaries between visibility and privacy, performance and authenticity, renders digital self-presentation a complex interplay of social display, technological mediation, and audience negotiation (Hogan, 2010).

Contemporary research demonstrates that social media users strategically perform and curate their online selves to align with social expectations, community norms, and platform-specific characteristics. Such performances reflect a process of adaptive self-management, where individuals continuously negotiate visibility, authenticity, and acceptance within digitally mediated spaces (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Souza et al. (2015) Studies have found that Instagram users actively manage their visual personas through the use of filters, image composition, and specific aesthetic conventions to maintain a consistent and desirable self-image. This practice exemplifies a form of visual impression management, in which curated aesthetics serve as both a personal expression and a social performance aligned with platform norms. Meanwhile, Lee (2017) reveals that individuals often develop distinct personas across different social media platforms, demonstrating a form of dramaturgical flexibility in navigating digital spaces. This finding highlights how users adapt their self-presentations to the unique affordances, audience expectations, and cultural logics embedded within each platform, thereby performing identity as a context-dependent and fluid construct.

In the context of Generation Z, digital dramaturgy has become increasingly complex, as this generation has grown up in environments where the performativity of identity is normalized through photos, short-form videos, and multimodal narratives. Gen Z users frequently employ dramaturgical strategies such as curated authenticity, the idealized self, and conceptualized personas to achieve social acceptance and digital visibility. These practices illustrate how self-presentation among Gen Z is not merely expressive but also deeply strategic and aestheticized, shaped by the intertwined logics of social validation and algorithmic amplification (Conte et al., 2024; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2023; Virós-Martín et al., 2024).

## **Idealized Identity, Aesthetic Labor, and Youth Online Culture**

The idealized self refers to the deliberate effort to present a version of oneself that aligns with prevailing social and aesthetic standards. Within digital culture, this concept is profoundly shaped by the notion of aesthetic labor a form of emotional and visual work through which individuals construct identity via appearance, style, and digital aesthetics. This process illustrates how the pursuit of the ideal self on social media is not merely expressive but also labor-intensive, involving continuous curation and affective engagement to maintain a desirable public image (Yuhsin Kung et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

On Instagram, the idealized self is constructed through visual consistency, encompassing elements such as color aesthetics, skin tone, photo composition, lifestyle representation, and other stylistic features perceived to enhance social appeal. These visual strategies function as forms of aesthetic signaling, allowing users to project coherence, desirability, and cultural capital within the platform's visual economy (Abidin, 2016). In contrast, on TikTok, the idealized self is performed through embodied and audiovisual expression, including body movements, facial expressions, music selection, video transitions, and alignment with trending formats. These performative elements transform self-presentation into a form of participatory spectacle, where visibility and social validation are achieved through rhythm, creativity, and algorithmic resonance (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, Fadillah (2025) finds that adolescents use TikTok as a medium to enhance self-esteem and negotiate social identity through active participation in visual and audio trends. This engagement illustrates how digital performativity operates not only as entertainment but also as a means of constructing belonging, recognition, and agency within contemporary youth culture. Helmi et al., (2023) further notes that participation in TikTok trends functions as a form of social belonging, wherein adolescents construct digital validation through performances that are “creative yet normative.” This dynamic reflects the paradox of platform culture, where individuality and conformity coexist, allowing users to express uniqueness while adhering to shared aesthetic and behavioral codes that sustain collective visibility.

## **Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) in Social Media**

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an analytical approach that examines how meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes including images, text, sound, gesture, color, and spatial design. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic features, MDA investigates how these modes cooperate, overlap, and reinforce one another to produce coherent communicative messages within specific social and cultural contexts (Jewitt et al., 2016). This approach is particularly relevant in the era of social media, as platforms such as Instagram and TikTok rely fundamentally on multimodality as the core basis of communication. These platforms integrate visual, textual, and auditory modes to construct meaning, shaping how users express identity, emotion, and social belonging through layered semiotic interactions.

On Instagram, photos, filters, poses, colors, composition, facial expressions, and captions operate simultaneously to construct representations of identity. These multimodal elements function interdependently, combining aesthetic, affective, and linguistic resources to produce a cohesive self-narrative that aligns with both personal branding and platform-specific visual culture (Yuhsin Kung et al., 2025). Captions serve to refine or contextualize visual meaning, while emojis and user comments may reinforce or alter audience interpretation. These textual and affective layers extend the communicative reach of an image, transforming static visuals into dynamic sites of negotiation where meaning is continuously co-constructed between creators and viewers. Wilska et al., (2023) the study finds that adolescents construct aspirational identities through visual symbols such as aesthetic poses, fashion styles, and visual elements that align with global trends. These visual practices signify a desire to project modernity and social mobility, reflecting how digital self-presentation intertwines personal aspiration with transnational aesthetics in contemporary youth culture.

On TikTok, multimodality becomes even more pronounced, as videos integrate visual imagery, audio, music, rhythmic editing, gestures, on-screen text, and digital effects. This interplay of semiotic resources generates a densely layered communicative form, where meaning emerges dynamically through synchronization between sound, movement, and visual rhythm, reinforcing the platform's performative and participatory nature. Cervi & Divon (2023) and Divon & Eriksson Krutrök (2024) scholars emphasize that music and bodily expression possess significant semiotic power in framing user identity. Through rhythm, tone, movement, and gesture, these multimodal elements evoke affective resonance and cultural meaning, positioning the body as both a medium of self-performance and a site of symbolic communication within digital platforms such as TikTok. Zhao & Abidin (2023) the study shows that TikTok performativity is shaped by the interaction among viral music, trending movements, facial expressions, and voice, collectively producing a distinct "performative aesthetic" characteristic of Generation Z. This aesthetic is defined by spontaneity, repetition, and algorithmic visibility, where creative expression and social imitation converge to form recognizable patterns of digital self-performance.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) also enables a critical examination of the values and ideologies embedded within digital content. By uncovering how visual, textual, and auditory elements convey power relations, moral narratives, or cultural hierarchies, MDA provides an analytical framework that bridges semiotic analysis with social critique revealing how digital communication both reflects and reproduces broader ideological structures. Zhao & Abidin (2023) the analysis demonstrates how narratives of beauty and social status are articulated through visual representations on social media, thereby reinforcing particular cultural and gendered norms. These visual discourses not only aestheticize social hierarchies but also normalize aspirational ideals that link physical appearance with moral value and social legitimacy in digital spaces. Cervi & Divon (2023) and Zhao & Abidin (2023) the findings reveal that TikTok users often construct a form of "performed authenticity" through the strategic combination of audio, gesture, and video editing, which paradoxically becomes the new standard

of digital authenticity. This phenomenon highlights how authenticity in digital culture is less about spontaneity and more about the aesthetic performance of realness carefully crafted yet perceived as natural within platform-specific conventions.

Accordingly, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is essential to this study as it enables a comprehensive examination of:

- 1) How visual, textual, and auditory elements collectively construct the idealized self and identity performance;
- 2) How multimodality is strategically employed by Generation Z to manage impression and self-presentation across platforms; and
- 3) How digital aesthetics are shaped by the interplay between platform affordances and generational culture, reflecting the socio-technical dynamics of online identity formation.

### **Platform Affordances and Cross-Platform Identity Performance (Instagram vs TikTok)**

Platform affordances refer to the technological features and design logics that enable or constrain how users behave, communicate, and interact within digital environments. These affordances shape not only the modes of expression available to users but also the social norms, aesthetic practices, and interactional dynamics that emerge across platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Dvir-Gvirsman et al., 2024; Yang & Zhang, 2023). Instagram offers affordances such as a static feed, grid-based curation, and stable visual aesthetics, making it an ideal space for constructing a highly curated and “perfected” self-image. The platform’s interface privileges visual harmony and consistency, encouraging users to perform identity through controlled composition, color coordination, and stylistic coherence features that reinforce the cultural value of visual perfection (Wunderlich & Zillich, 2025).

In contrast, TikTok operates through an algorithmic, dynamic, and trend-driven “For You Page (FYP)”, where visibility is shaped by audio-visual virality and participatory engagement. This design fosters a mode of identity that is fluid, expressive, and performative, as users continuously adapt their self-presentation to the platform’s algorithmic rhythms and the ever-changing logic of viral culture (Abidin, 2016).

Lee (2017) The study finds that users strategically adjust their personas across different platforms in response to the distinct affordances, expectations, and social norms embedded within each. This cross-platform adaptation demonstrates users’ awareness of platform-specific cultures, where identity performance is negotiated through varying conventions of visibility, authenticity, and interactional style. Research reveals a consistent pattern: adolescents perform aesthetic perfection on Instagram, while on TikTok they express themselves in ways that are freer, humorous, and performative. This contrast illustrates how platform affordances shape differentiated modes of self-presentation Instagram privileging visual curation and aspirational aesthetics, and TikTok fostering spontaneity, irony, and affective engagement through participatory performance (Conte et al., 2024; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2023; Virós-Martín et al., 2024).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach with an exploratory design to examine how Generation Z constructs idealized self-presentations on Instagram and TikTok. This approach was chosen because digital self-presentation is inherently contextual, multimodal, and cannot be reduced to numerical variables, thus requiring an analysis of the visual, textual, and performative layers of meaning. Two analytical frameworks are applied integratively: Dramaturgical Analysis, which emphasizes impression management through the concepts of frontstage and backstage (Hogan, 2010; Miguel et al., 2023; Schmidt & Deppermann, 2023). In addition, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is employed to examine how meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual, textual, auditory, and gestural elements. This analytical lens enables a deeper understanding of how different semiotic resources co-articulate to shape identity representation, affective expression, and communicative intent within digital media environments. (Jewitt et al., 2016). The combination of these two analytical frameworks aligns with contemporary research trends that employ multimodality to investigate identity construction on visual- and video-based digital platforms. This integrative approach reflects the growing scholarly recognition that online self-presentation operates through both discursive performance and semiotic materiality, bridging the social dynamics of impression management with the multimodal processes of meaning-making (Abidin, 2016; Zhao & Abidin, 2023).

The research corpus was constructed using a purposive sampling technique, selecting content based on its relevance to the phenomenon of idealized self-presentation. A total of 40 posts were analyzed, comprising 20 Instagram uploads and 20 TikTok videos that met specific inclusion criteria. Instagram content was selected for its representation of curated aesthetics such as *clean girl*, *that girl*, and *old money aesthetic* styles, characterized by consistent use of filters, color tones, and photographic composition. TikTok content, by contrast, was selected for its participation in viral music trends, embodied performances (gesture and facial expression), on-screen text, video transitions, and audiovisual effects that exemplify performative expressions of youth identity. The analysis prioritized depth of multimodal interpretation over sample size, following established qualitative research guidelines that emphasize the richness and interpretive quality of visual and video data analysis. (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024). All data were collected from publicly accessible accounts, allowing for analysis without violating user privacy or breaching ethical standards. The study adhered to the ethical principles of digital media research, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was disclosed and that all content analyzed was already available within the public domain.

The units of analysis in this study encompass all multimodal elements that contribute to the construction of digital identity. For Instagram, the analytical focus includes visual composition, facial expressions, body posture, color palette, filters, and textual components such as captions, emojis, and hashtags. For TikTok, the analysis extends to audiovisual elements including music, background sound, video rhythm, movement synchronization, on screen text, visual effects, and transitions. This multimodal approach enables the researcher to capture the

interplay among semiotic modes that collectively construct idealized self-representations across the two platforms. (Zhao & Abidin, 2023).

The analytical process was conducted through four interrelated stages. First, the researcher engaged in data immersion by repeatedly observing all selected content to develop a comprehensive understanding of the social context and visual aesthetics embedded in each post or video. Second, a process of multimodal coding was performed to identify and categorize visual, textual, and auditory elements following the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). This stage allowed for the systematic mapping of semiotic resources and their contribution to identity construction within platform-specific contexts (Jewitt et al., 2016). Third, the researcher mapped the findings through a dramaturgical lens, identifying various impression management strategies and distinguishing between frontstage and backstage performances evident in each content sample. This stage provided insights into how users curate visibility and manage authenticity within the performative spaces of Instagram and TikTok. Fourth, a cross-platform comparative analysis was conducted to examine the differences in self-presentation strategies shaped by the technical affordances and cultural logics of each digital platform. This comparative procedure follows the principles of cross-platform research as suggested by recent studies in digital media scholarship (Lee, 2017).

Ethical standards for this study were fulfilled in accordance with the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). The research adhered to principles of ethical data use, including the analysis of publicly accessible accounts, the anonymization of user identities, and the restricted reproduction of visual materials to ensure that all content remains within an academic context. This approach guarantees that the study was conducted ethically, without violating user privacy or intellectual property rights associated with digital platforms.

## FINDINGS

### **Instagram as a Curated Aesthetic Space and Site of Idealized Self-Presentation**

Findings indicate that Instagram functions as a primary space for Generation Z to construct and display curated, visually idealized identities. The content shared typically exhibits a clean, orderly, and consistent aesthetic, achieved through deliberate visual composition, color tone selection, filter use, and grid harmony. Dominant stylistic categories such as *that girl*, *clean girl*, *old money*, *coquette*, and *soft girl* serve as visual representations of aspirational identity reflecting how Gen Z negotiates belonging, taste, and digital self-worth through aesthetic coherence.

The *clean girl* and *that girl* trends emphasize ideals of perfection, order, health, productivity, and self-discipline. The analyzed photos commonly depict morning routines, healthy diets, minimalism, exercise practices, and “no-makeup makeup” aesthetics, all of which signify an ethic of control and aspirational well-being. By contrast, the *old money* trend projects a quiet luxury aesthetic, characterized by classic fashion, neutral color palettes, and environments

associated with elite social status. Together, these aesthetic typologies reflect how Gen Z articulates virtue, class, and taste through the disciplined visual language of self-presentation.

At the local level, Indonesian Gen Z has developed distinctive aesthetic categories such as *cewek kue* (colorful and playful), *cewek bumi* (earthy and natural), and *cewek mamba* (dark and minimalist). These styles illustrate how youth audiences appropriate and localize global aesthetic trends through recognizable color codes, fashion choices, and visual symbols. Such representations reveal that Instagram is predominantly used to construct idealized personas that are stable, orderly, and visually coherent, where aesthetic refinement functions as a form of social legitimacy within digital peer cultures.

### **TikTok as a Performative Space of Spontaneity and Fluid Selfhood**

In contrast to Instagram's curated visual stability, TikTok reveals a more dynamic, expressive, and fluid mode of identity performance among Generation Z. The analyzed content demonstrates the use of music, video rhythm, synchronized movements, viral audio trends, and rapid editing styles that collectively emphasize performative expression. Identity on TikTok is often enacted through action, bodily movement, facial expression, and participation in popular trends, highlighting how self-presentation becomes an embodied and participatory practice shaped by algorithmic culture.

Findings further reveal that TikTok serves as a space for seemingly authentic self-expression, yet such authenticity is often mediated through editing, scripting, and structured performance. Video genres such as POV (point of view) clips, glow-up transformations, GRWM ("Get Ready With Me"), and day-in-my-life vlogs depict everyday routines presented through visually appealing formats that conform to current trend logics. This dynamic illustrates the paradox of curated authenticity, where self-expression appears spontaneous but is simultaneously shaped by aesthetic norms, editing conventions, and participatory performance culture.

The findings also reveal that TikTok fosters identities that are "planned yet appear spontaneous." The use of viral audio tracks, rapid transitions, and visual effects indicates that users carefully consider technical features and trend dynamics before uploading their content. This demonstrates that TikTok operates as a performative arena where identity construction is deeply mediated by patterns of visual rhythm, sound synchronization, and video tempo, reflecting the platform's dependence on algorithmically driven aesthetics.

### **Cross-Platform Selfhood: The Curated Self on Instagram and the Performed Self on TikTok**

The findings reveal a clear distinction between the personas constructed on Instagram and TikTok. On Instagram, users maintain a more stable and curated identity, emphasizing perfection, coherence, and aesthetic consistency. Photographs are carefully selected with attention to color harmony, composition, and thematic visual coherence, reflecting a deliberate effort to construct an idealized, visually disciplined self.

In contrast, identity on TikTok is more experimental and rapidly shifting. Generation Z users display greater openness to trying new trends, showcasing elements of humor, vulnerability, and spontaneous expression that are less visible on Instagram. The findings indicate that a single individual may perform distinct personas across platforms a “perfected” version on Instagram and a more playful, expressive, and dynamic self on TikTok. This contrast underscores the platform-contingent nature of identity construction, where affordances shape how authenticity and self-expression are enacted within different digital environments.

The findings indicate that Generation Z strategically employs the two platforms in distinct ways: Instagram functions as a curated “frontstage” space, where self-presentation is controlled, polished, and visually coherent; whereas TikTok operates as a performative arena that is more fluid, adaptive, and responsive to viral trends. This duality underscores the platform-dependent dramaturgy of digital identity, in which individuals navigate between aesthetic discipline and performative spontaneity across different social media environments.

### **Performing the Idealized Self: Multimodal Strategies of Digital Identity Construction**

The multimodal analysis reveals that Generation Z constructs idealized identities through an integrated combination of visual, textual, and audiovisual resources. Visually, dominant elements include color aesthetics, composition, filters, facial expressions, camera angles, and clothing styles. On Instagram, multimodal strategies primarily emphasize static visual aesthetics, characterized by:

- a. symmetrical composition;
- b. deliberate object arrangement;
- c. pastel or neutral color tones;
- d. minimalist captions;
- e. selective emoji use to soften messages; and
- f. consistent visual narratives across the feed.

These compositional choices collectively reinforce a sense of coherence, restraint, and aesthetic discipline, positioning Instagram as a platform for the performance of the curated and idealized self.

On TikTok, multimodal strategies are heavily dependent on audio and rhythmic components, including:

- a. The use of viral music to frame emotion and mood;
- b. bodily movement synchronization;
- c. exaggerated facial expressions to enhance affective engagement;
- d. on-screen text guiding viewers’ interpretation; and
- e. visual effects that amplify specific identity performances.

These elements operate in concert to produce embodied and participatory forms of self presentation, where meaning is generated through the coordination of sound, movement, and image. The findings highlight that multimodality functions not merely as an aesthetic layer but as

the core semiotic mechanism through which Generation Z constructs and communicates digital identity.

### **Global–Local Trends and the Formation of Generational Identity**

The findings reveal that Generation Z identity is shaped through the interplay between global trends and local adaptations. Global aesthetics such as *clean girl*, *coquette*, *soft girl*, and *old money* are appropriated and recontextualized within Indonesian cultural settings, giving rise to distinctive aesthetic variants such as *cewek bumi*, *cewek kue*, *cewek mamba*, and the street style performances of *Citayam Fashion Week (CFW)*. These *glocal* reinterpretations demonstrate how Gen Z negotiates cultural hybridity, social belonging, and digital visibility, transforming global visual languages into localized symbols of generational identity.

Local trends such as Citayam Fashion Week (CFW) illustrate how Generation Z reclaims and redefines public spaces as new arenas for fashion, creativity, and identity expression spaces that were previously excluded from mainstream fashion culture. This phenomenon demonstrates a form of cultural agency, where youth transform ordinary urban environments into stages for creative, experimental, and highly visual identity performances. Through these practices, Gen Z not only participates in fashion but also reconfigures the cultural geography of self-representation in Indonesia’s digital and physical public spheres.

Moreover, patterns such as “healing,” “self-growth,” “journaling aesthetic,” and “productive routine” indicate that Gen Z’s identity construction extends beyond visual aesthetics, encompassing the narrative dimension of everyday life. These practices project a desired lifestyle that integrates emotional wellness, discipline, and self-development, forming part of a broader discourse of the idealized, morally attuned digital self. In this sense, visual and narrative modes operate together as performative tools of self-fashioning, through which Gen Z articulates identity not only as appearance but as a story of personal growth and purpose.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Instagram: Curated Frontstage and Idealized Selfhood**

The finding that Instagram functions as a space for curated self-presentation illustrates how concept of the frontstage continues to operate in digital environments Hogan, (2010), Miguel et al., (2023) and Schmidt & Deppermann, (2023). However, this study extends and reinforces Goffman’s dramaturgical framework by demonstrating that the frontstage is now constructed not solely through social interaction but through the visual affordances of digital platforms. Features such as the Instagram grid, filters, color tones, and compositional arrangements operate as technological mediators of impression management, shaping how users curate and stage their identities. Thus, the frontstage has evolved into a digitally engineered visual architecture, where aesthetic coherence and algorithmic visibility determine the parameters of self-performance. This finding aligns with Hogan (2010) argument that social media platforms

mediate self-performance through “exhibition sites” functioning as visual archives. Within this framework, users engage in curated acts of display, where digital traces such as images, captions, and aesthetic arrangements serve not only as expressions of identity but as archival performances of the self. Such mediation underscores the archival nature of the digital frontstage, where visibility, memory, and aesthetic control intersect to shape how Gen Z constructs and maintains an idealized digital persona.

The use of aesthetics such as *clean girl*, *old money*, and *coquette* reflects the dynamics of aesthetic labor a process in which users engage in embodied and affective work to produce an idealized self-image (Yang & Zhang, 2023; Yuhsin Kung et al., 2025). Previous Instagram studies similarly demonstrate how users manage their personas through visual curation, photo-angle selection, and the use of filters. This study extends those findings by revealing how global aesthetic discourses are translated into localized visual expressions such as *cewek kue*, *cewek bumi*, and *cewek mamba*. These patterns exemplify the process of glocalization in the construction of Indonesian Gen Z’s digital identity, where global visual grammars are adapted, hybridized, and re-signified within local cultural contexts.

### **TikTok: Performed Authenticity and Fluid Identity**

The study’s finding that TikTok fosters more fluid and performative identities supports the concept of performed authenticity in digital media scholarship. As Cervi & Divon (2023) observe, TikTok constructs authenticity through a multimodal interplay of gesture, audio, editing, and bodily expression. Building on this framework, the present study extends the concept by demonstrating that Gen Z’s sense of “authenticity” on TikTok is best described as scripted spontaneity a form of performance that appears natural but is subtly shaped by trend-based cultural scripts and algorithmic tendencies. This hybrid mode of authenticity reveals how digital self-presentation is negotiated between performative conventions and algorithmic visibility, blurring the boundary between sincerity and strategy in the age of participatory media.

Furthermore, Abidin (2016) and Zhao & Abidin (2023) emphasize that TikTok identity is constructed through performative actions combining viral music, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. The findings of this study are consistent with their arguments but contribute new insight by revealing how these performative patterns shift rapidly in response to trending formats, producing a form of highly dynamic and temporally adaptive digital identity. This suggests that TikTok performativity is not merely repetitive imitation but a process of continuous identity recalibration, driven by algorithmic exposure, participatory engagement, and cultural trend cycles.

The prevalence of POV, glow-up, GRWM, and day-in-my-life content formats highlights the narrative dimension of TikTok’s identity performance, where users stage everyday life as a serialized form of self-presentation. This finding aligns with Divon & Eriksson Krutrök (2024), who demonstrate how audio, bodily expression, and video rhythm collaboratively frame users’ emotional and affective identities. Together, these multimodal and narrative practices illustrate

that TikTok functions as an affective storytelling platform, enabling Gen Z to articulate identity not only through appearance but through the emotional pacing and narrative rhythm of their digital performances.

### Cross-Platform Dramaturgy of Gen Z

The finding that Gen Z performs distinct personas across Instagram and TikTok contributes a significant theoretical advancement by introducing the concept of cross-platform dramaturgy. While Marwick & boyd (2010) conceptualized *context collapse* the merging of multiple audiences into a single performative space this study identifies an inverse phenomenon, which can be termed context separation: the deliberate differentiation of self-presentation based on the affordances, cultures, and expectations of each platform. Through this separation, users strategically manage visibility, authenticity, and social alignment, demonstrating that digital identity is not singular or fragmented but contextually orchestrated across multiple mediated environments.

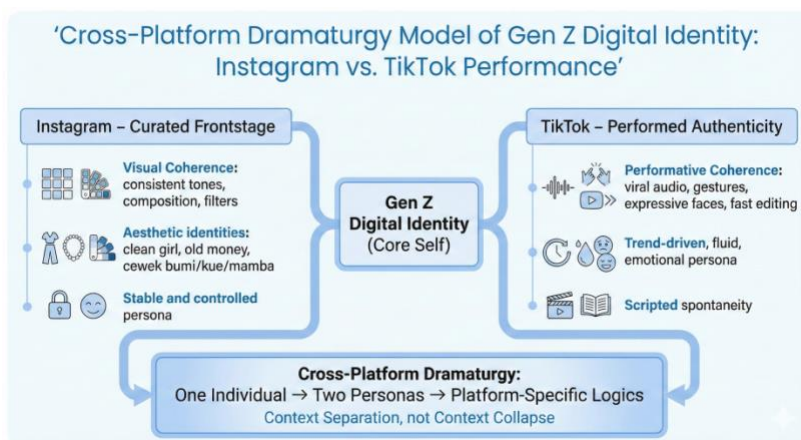


Image 1

These findings reinforce Lee (2017) argument that users cultivate distinct personas across different platforms. However, this study extends that framework by demonstrating that such differentiation is shaped not only by audience dynamics but also by the multimodal and affordance-specific characteristics of each platform. Instagram produces a structured and aspirational identity through visual coherence, curation, and aesthetic discipline, whereas TikTok generates a more performative, fluid, and adaptive identity, driven by trends, algorithmic visibility, and participatory expression. Together, these contrasts illustrate that digital self-presentation is inherently platform-dependent, emerging from the interplay between technological affordances, multimodal expression, and socio-cultural expectations.

In conclusion, this study advances the theory of digital dramaturgy by demonstrating how young people manage their identities within a multi-platform media ecosystem, where each platform operates as a distinct “stage” governed by its own semiotic and performative rules. By situating self-presentation within these differentiated environments, the research highlights that

identity construction in the digital age is not monolithic but contextually negotiated, multimodally expressed, and platform-specific. This reconceptualization underscores the evolving nature of performativity in social media culture where visibility, authenticity, and aesthetic coherence are dynamically shaped by the affordances and logics of each digital space (Hogan, 2010).

### **Multimodal Strategies and the Construction of Idealized Identity**

The findings reveal that multimodality constitutes a central component in the construction of Gen Z's digital identity. This aligns with the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which posits that meaning is produced through the interaction of visual, textual, and auditory modes (Jewitt et al., 2016). However, this study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how platform-based multimodality operates differently across Instagram and TikTok each platform orchestrating its own semiotic configuration and affordance logic that shapes the ways identity is performed, visualized, and interpreted. This suggests that multimodality in the digital era is not universal but contextually mediated by platform architectures, cultural practices, and algorithmic design.

On Instagram, multimodality produces a sense of visual coherence through the interplay of photographic composition, color tone, filters, and bodily pose. This finding aligns with Zhao & Abidin (2023), who demonstrate that visuals and captions function synergistically to construct a coherent narrative of self-identity. Similarly, Yuhsin Kung et al. (2025) show that visual symbols are strategically deployed by youth to negotiate aspirational forms of identity, reinforcing the notion that self-presentation on Instagram is both aesthetic and performative. Taken together, these insights suggest that Instagram's multimodal logic operates as an aesthetic regime, where coherence, curation, and emotional tone collectively shape how Gen Z visualizes and legitimizes the ideal self within a highly mediated cultural space.

On TikTok, multimodality generates a form of performative coherence through the integration of viral music, gestures, facial expressions, and rhythmic video editing. This reinforces Divon & Eriksson Krutrök (2024) observation that music and movement possess semiotic power in framing digital identity, transforming everyday actions into recognizable affective performances. The interaction between sound, motion, and rhythm produces what can be described as semiotic orchestration, where meaning is not merely represented but embodied through audiovisual synchrony. In this sense, TikTok operates as a performative ecosystem, enabling Gen Z to negotiate identity through rhythm, repetition, and embodied expression within algorithmically curated cultural flows.

Accordingly, this study introduces the concept of platform-specific multimodal identity construction, referring to the ways in which multimodal cues are mobilized differently according to each platform's communicative logic and affordance structure. On Instagram, multimodal resources are employed to achieve *visual coherence* and aspirational self-presentation, while on TikTok, they serve to generate *performative coherence* through rhythm, gesture, and audiovisual

synchrony. This framework highlights that digital self-presentation is not uniformly multimodal but contextually orchestrated, shaped by the semiotic, aesthetic, and algorithmic dynamics unique to each platform. The concept thus advances current discussions in multimodal discourse analysis and digital identity theory by demonstrating that identity is co-constructed through the affordances and semiotic architectures of social media environments.

### **Cultural–Generational Aesthetics and Digital Habitus**

The finding that global and local aesthetics converge within Gen Z’s identity practices enriches and extends the theory of digital habitus. Although Bourdieu did not conceptualize habitus within a digital context, this study demonstrates that generational habitus is now shaped through hybrid aesthetic repertoires that combine *global visual cultures* such as *clean girl*, *soft girl*, *coquette*, and *old money* with *localized aesthetic symbols* like *cewek kue*, *cewek bumi*, and *cewek mamba*. Furthermore, cultural phenomena such as Citayam Fashion Week illustrate how young people translate and localize global aesthetic scripts into public and digital performances, constructing a transcultural aesthetic habitus that bridges aspiration, visibility, and belonging. In doing so, this study contributes to contemporary debates on how digital media mediate classed and cultural dispositions, reframing habitus as a generationally networked and algorithmically visible form of social taste.

The study by Zhao & Abidin (2023) on beauty narratives in social media supports these findings, yet this research extends their framework by revealing how Gen Z constructs internal aesthetic classifications as a form of visual social taxonomy. Rather than merely reproducing dominant beauty ideals, young users create and navigate their own aesthetic hierarchies such as *clean girl*, *cewek bumi*, or *mamba* that signal belonging, taste, and distinction within peer communities. This constitutes a significant theoretical contribution, showing that aesthetics function not only as style symbols but as generational forms of social and cultural capital, mediating recognition, visibility, and symbolic power in digital spaces. Thus, the visual field of social media becomes a site of aesthetic stratification, where cultural legitimacy and identity are negotiated through multimodal performance and algorithmic circulation.

Moreover, the integration of narratives such as *self-growth*, *healing*, and *productive routine* indicates that Gen Z’s digital identity is shaped through an interplay of aesthetics, psychology, and everyday culture. This finding enriches the literature on generational identity by illustrating that digital aesthetics function not merely as style symbols but as affective and existential frameworks through which young people articulate emotional stability, self-actualization, and purpose in mediated life. In this sense, the aesthetic field of social media operates as a site of affective negotiation, where *emotional wellness*, *productivity*, and *authenticity* are visually and narratively encoded into everyday self-presentation. Consequently, Gen Z’s online identity can be understood as a form of affective aesthetic habitus a mode of being that fuses emotion, visual culture, and generational discourse into a coherent yet continually evolving digital self.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Generation Z constructs digital identity through distinct patterns of self-presentation across Instagram and TikTok. Instagram operates as a curated aesthetic space, where the idealized self is performed through *visual consistency*, *aspirational lifestyle cues*, and the fusion of global–local aesthetics such as *clean girl*, *old money*, *cewek kue*, and *cewek mamba*. In contrast, TikTok serves as a performative and fluid arena in which identity is enacted through *viral music*, *bodily gestures*, *facial expressions*, and continuous participation in evolving trends. Together, these platforms reveal how digital identity among Gen Z is multimodally orchestrated, balancing visual discipline with expressive spontaneity under the influence of algorithmic culture and peer validation.

Theoretically, this study extends Goffman’s dramaturgical framework by demonstrating how frontstage performance and performed authenticity operate within multimodal digital contexts. It further advances Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) by showing that multimodality functions differently across photo-based and video-based platforms with Instagram privileging *visual coherence and curation*, while TikTok emphasizes *embodied performance and temporal rhythm*. The emergent concept of cross-platform dramaturgy underscores that Gen Z’s digital identity is multilayered, dynamically negotiated through each platform’s affordance structure, semiotic logic, and participatory culture. Together, these insights reposition dramaturgy as a framework for understanding how multimodal affordances shape the visibility, authenticity, and performativity of self in networked environments.

The findings highlight the importance of digital literacy and generational aesthetic awareness in navigating identity formation within today’s highly visual and algorithmic media culture. Understanding how aesthetic codes, platform logics, and algorithmic visibility shape self-presentation is crucial for educators, policymakers, and cultural practitioners seeking to foster critical and reflective media engagement among youth. However, this study has certain limitations, particularly the reliance on publicly available content and the absence of users’ subjective or experiential perspectives. Future research should incorporate in-depth interviews or digital ethnography to capture the lived and affective dimensions of how Gen Z negotiates and performs digital identity across evolving social media ecosystems. Such approaches would enrich our understanding of reflexive identity work in algorithmically mediated environments and deepen theoretical insight into the affective, aesthetic, and social dynamics of generational digital culture.

Overall, this study affirms that Gen Z’s digital identity is constituted through the intersecting dynamics of aesthetics, performativity, and platform affordances, which collectively shape how young people construct, negotiate, and perform the self within the mediated spaces of social media.

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