

Digital Identities and Aesthetic Expression: Uncovering Young Indonesians Argumentation in Filter Usage on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

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This study delves into the diverse motivations and impacts of Instagram filter usage among young Indonesians, focusing on how these digital tools influence self-representation and social interaction within the digital sphere. While Instagram filters are traditionally viewed as aesthetic enhancements, this research highlights their broader roles, including entertainment, education, and personal branding. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this paper collects data through interviews and netnography, employing snowball sampling to gather in-depth insights from eight young Instagram users. Findings indicate that young people use filters not only for visual enhancement but also for fun, educational engagement, and the expression of personal traits like humor and intelligence. This usage underscores young people's agency as active consumers, manipulating digital tools to craft their public personas and navigate social media spaces. This study underscores the need for further quantitative research to explore the widespread patterns of filter consumption among youth, aiming to enrich the understanding of digital identity formation in a globalized context.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, the proliferation of modern technologies is notably advancing. Among these, social media has emerged as a particularly prevalent tool among youth. This platform facilitates digital interaction and the dissemination of information, opinions, experiences, and insights, serving as a vital social conduit (Ausat, 2023; Azzaakiyyah, 2023; Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009; Mayangsari & Salim, 2021; Mude & Undale, 2023). Moreover, social media now stands as a primary channel for public information access, positioned alongside traditional outlets like television and other forms of mass media (Xing, Wang, Qiu, Li, & He, 2022; Lee Ludvigsen & Petersen-Wagner, 2023; Reilly & Gordon, 2023). The dynamics of online interactions and the breadth of information flow on these platforms offer a more expansive network reach compared to conventional mass media, underscoring a shift towards a more interconnected media landscape (Wei & Meng, 2021; Ali, Khan, Wang, & Wang, 2024; Ferdinandus & Alvin, 2023).

Social media has transcended its role as a mere facilitator of information access and social interaction, evolving into a critical platform where individuals curate their identities and establish their social status online. This digital space serves not only for interpersonal connections but also as a stage for self-presentation and social stratification (Marwick, 2010; Cho, Cannon, Lopez, & Li, 2024; Salim et al., 2022; Hruska & Maresova, 2020; Lehner, 2021; Yates & Lockley, 2018). In this context, Chou and Edge (2012) conducted a noteworthy investigation into the effects of social media use among university students in the United States. Their findings highlight a nuanced consequence of social media engagement: students who frequently used platforms such as Facebook experienced heightened feelings of envy and perceived disparities between their lives and those of their peers, particularly in response to posts depicting vacations, shopping trips, and other leisure activities (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Building on Andrew's (2013) notion of a "dual reality" in social media, it becomes apparent that not all content shared on these platforms reflects the truth. Often, the realities presented may be contrived or exaggerated, creating a distorted perception of actual life experiences. Moreover, social media wields considerable influence in fostering addictive behaviors among users, notably through the phenomenon known as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). This condition manifests as a psychological state where individuals fear missing important events and experiences, a feeling exacerbated by seeing others post about their ostensibly valuable experiences, which they themselves might not share.

In 2020, the global count of social media users reached approximately 3.6 billion, a number expected to rise further (Clement, 2020). Specifically in Indonesia, data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) indicated that as of June 2022, internet usage had surged to 210.03 million, marking an increase of 6.78 percent from the prior period (Bayu, 2022). This rise underscores the critical role of social media as a primary vehicle for satisfying informational needs among Indonesians. The APJII survey further reveals that a significant majority of internet users in Indonesia are young people, with this demographic representing about 90 percent of users in June 2022. Echoing this trend, Miller (2016) discusses the particular affinity young individuals have for social media, noting it as a prevalent medium for expression and alleviating boredom among the youth (Miller et al., 2016).

Social networking sites serve a multifaceted role in modern communication. Individuals often utilize these platforms to alleviate boredom, share content, and disseminate messages—ranging from promoting virtuous acts (Ar-Ridho, Rubino, & Madya, 2023) to the propagation of misinformation or hoaxes. A notable instance is highlighted in Nisa's (2018) study, which examines how young Muslims use Instagram. This platform becomes a venue for expressing religious identity and for engaging in da'wah—efforts to teach and expand the understanding of Islamic practices among Muslims. Users curate their presence by incorporating religious symbols into their posts, thereby affirming their identity and existence as Muslims (Nisa, 2018). Furthermore, these networks act as arenas for personal branding, where users strategically post positive aspects of themselves to attract approval and likes from others. However, this self-presentation is constrained by the social norms prevalent on these media platforms (Uski & Lampinen, 2016).

This article delves into the dynamic engagement of young people with social media, focusing specifically on Instagram. The platform's appeal among this demographic underscores their role as active media consumers (Malik, Berggren, & Al-Busaidi, 2022). Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has established itself as a favored social networking site among youth, primarily used as a means for audio-visual communication. This popularity is partly due to the platform's ability to facilitate personal expression and identity through various multimedia elements (Huang & Su, 2018; Markivska, Siruk, Durmanenko, Redchuk, & Tarasyuk, 2020; Quesada, 2023). Instagram allows users to interact, share photographic stories, post updates, and distribute video reels, all enriched with interactive features such as comments, likes, hashtags, direct messages, and a range of filters (Kertamukti, Nugroho, & Wahyono, 2019; Maclean, Al-Saggaf, & Hogg, 2022). Despite its widespread use as a photo-sharing application, the academic exploration of Instagram, particularly in terms of filter usage and follower characteristics, remains relatively underexplored (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014; Sofyan & Putri, 2021).

This discussion highlights several studies exploring the use of photo filters on social media, revealing diverse perspectives and implications. Kleemans (2016) contends that the use of filters can have detrimental effects, particularly among female users who often utilize these tools for social comparison (Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat, & Anschutz, 2018). This finding is juxtaposed with Sullivan's (2014) research, which examines the influence of celebrities on filter usage. He notes that young female users are likely to emulate celebrities who frequently use filters or photo retouching techniques, thereby setting a benchmark for photo quality (Sullivan, 2014). On a different note, Leclercq (2016) presents a more utilitarian view, suggesting that filters are primarily employed to enhance photo aesthetics. These enhancements may include adjustments to colors, lighting, or the addition of overlay stickers such as sparkling eyes, flower crowns, and cat faces, thus allowing users to creatively modify their visual presentation.

Manovich (2013) defines a filter as a feature that alters image data or generates new data to create specific visual effects on photographs. Building on this concept, Tiggemann & Anderberg (2020) critically examine the notion of filters, equating their use to the presentation of a 'fake' reality on social media. They describe a dichotomy of "Instagram vs Reality," where Instagram represents an idealized, often unrealistic image of life, starkly contrasting with the unfiltered reality. Filters facilitate this by allowing users to compare themselves with these idealized portrayals, which often distort their actual conditions (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). In response to such trends, Fardouly & Rapee (2019) argue that for some individuals, posting photos that reflect a more realistic and unembellished appearance proves to be more beneficial than those manipulated by filter features, promoting authenticity over alteration.

While the normative implications of using filters—whether positive or negative—are not the focus of this article, it seeks to elucidate the phenomenon of filter usage among the youth. An interesting study by Zhe Wu (2020) examined how Instagram filters are processed by Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), specifically trained on the ImageNet database. The findings indicated that filters can significantly alter the feature map generated by CNNs compared to the original image. To address these alterations, Wu et al. (2020) introduced a "De-stylization" feature aimed at reversing the changes made by filters to bring the images closer to their original state. CNNs, a type of deep learning neural network, are

widely utilized in image recognition and processing fields and are instrumental in analyzing and enhancing the aesthetics of images used on social media (Kinli, Ozcan, & Kirac, 2021).

Ferwerda et al. (2016) explored the usage of Instagram filters as a means of personal expression directed at an audience. Their research is particularly fascinating as it delves into how the choice of photo filters can reflect the personality traits of users. By analyzing the relationship between image features and individual personalities, they demonstrated that it is possible to infer aspects of a person's character from their social media behavior. This finding underscores the role of filters not only as aesthetic enhancements but also as tools for self-representation and identity expression. The study highlights the nature of young people as active participants in the digital space, who utilize social media not merely for social interaction but also for personal expression through its various features (Ferwerda, Schedl, & Tkalcic, 2016).

This article aims to enrich the existing body of research by examining the representation and utilization of filter features by young people on platforms such as Instagram, including their applications in taking pictures, creating video shorts on YouTube, and producing Reels. It posits that the use of filters on Instagram contributes significantly to the construction of young people's self-images, reinforcing their roles as active consumer subjects within the digital ecosystem. The research is guided by two principal questions: First, how do young people engage with and utilize filters on Instagram? Second, how do they interpret the effects of these filters on their personal and social presentations? Addressing these questions is crucial as the usage of social media reflects not merely a shift in the mode of social interaction from physical to virtual spaces but also underscores more intricate interactions. Young people are not only presenting themselves in straightforward manners on social media; they are actively constructing and manipulating their self-images through the filters provided by these platforms. The global relevance of this phenomenon is highlighted by a survey from ParentsTogether in 2021, which found that approximately 87% of young people in the United States have used filters on social media. Given this widespread engagement, the study of how young people perceive and consume these filters gains additional significance, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of digital identity and interaction (ParentsTogether, 2021). This research seeks to deepen the understanding of these dynamics, contributing to the broader discourse on digital media's impact on youth culture and identity formation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on data gathered through in-depth interviews with eight individuals who actively use filters on Instagram. The selection of informants was facilitated using the snowball sampling technique, a method that leverages existing social networks to identify potential study participants (Makwana, Engineer, Dabhi, & Chudasama, 2023). The process involved several stages: Initially, the researcher identified young Instagram users who regularly employ filters. Subsequently, the researcher traced these individuals' connections to locate friends who also use filters actively, thus expanding the pool of informants (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). Once potential informants were identified, the researcher initiated communication to explore their perspectives and experiences concerning filter usage. This approach not only facilitated the gathering of rich, qualitative data but also allowed the researcher to apply the principles of snowball sampling effectively by utilizing existing friendship links (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). In addition to conducting interviews, the researcher engaged in observation of the informants' social media profiles. This provided supplementary data that enriched the understanding of how filters influence self-presentation and identity construction online. This method of integrating online observation is referred to as netnography, a technique that offers deep insights into the cultural context and meanings of online community behaviors (Kozinets, 2019; Irawan, 2022). The eight informants in this study were carefully chosen to represent a diverse range of experiences and perspectives on the use of Instagram filters, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Table Research Informants			
	Name	Gender	Age	City
1	Revika	Female	23 Years Old	Pekanbaru
2	Ranti Eka	Female	21 Years Old	Pekanbaru
3	Lilla	Female	21 Years Old	Pekanbaru
4	Putri	Female	20 Years Old	Pekanbaru
5	Khairunnisa	Female	21 Years Old	Pekanbaru
6	Kurniady	Male	23 Years Old	Riau
7	Nanda Pratama	Male	21 Years Old	Riau
8	Imam Riady	Male	21 Years Old	Riau

Table 1 outlines the profiles of the eight informants involved in this research. These individuals were selected for interviews based on their active use of Instagram filters, aligning with the study's focus on understanding the phenomenon of filter usage among young people. The duration of the interviews was not standardized but was instead adjusted according to the depth and relevance of the information provided by each informant. During the interview process, the informants were first asked for their consent to participate and answer the questions posed by the researchers. This ethical consideration ensured that all participants were willing and informed about the nature of the study and their role in it. Additionally, the researchers utilized the opportunity to gather further data by observing and collecting information from the informants' social media accounts. This included analyzing how the informants use filters, which enriched the data set and provided a more nuanced understanding of their social media behavior.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Young People, Globalization, and Social Media in Indonesia

The influence of globalization is unmistakably present in the daily lives of Indonesians, prominently through the advent of social media, a direct outcome of global cultural exchanges (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Social media platforms enable interactions with individuals who are geographically distant, effectively shrinking the world into a tightly interconnected community. According to Marwick (2010), social media serves as a platform for online self-representation, where individuals can enhance their social status through strategic self-presentation. Uski and Lampinen (2016) further elaborate on this dynamic, noting that social media users constantly navigate the delicate balance between their personal self-presentation goals and the perceived expectations of their audience. This ongoing negotiation shapes not only individual identities but also influences social interactions on these platforms. The findings from this research align with and extend the theories proposed by previous scholars, underscoring that social media transcends simple virtual social interaction; it also acts as a medium for self-expression and identity construction. Tracing the evolution of social media, we see its roots in earlier technologies that shaped communication. In the 1950s, the Phreaking Era marked the beginning of exploratory interactions with telecommunications systems, where enthusiasts manipulated phone systems to make free calls, a precursor to modern hacking. This era paved the way for more structured systems like the Bulletin Board System (BBS) in 1979, developed by Ward Christensen. The BBS allowed people to post messages and interact through a server-based system operated via personal computers, setting foundational concepts for today's social media platforms.

The digital landscape underwent significant transformation with the birth of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991, revolutionizing how people accessed the Internet and interacted online. This period marked the beginning of private internet services that offered computer users unlimited access to a burgeoning online world. The late 1990s introduced the PeerToPeer (P2P) system, exemplified by Napster in 1999, which allowed users to download MP3 songs, showcasing the potential for sharing digital content directly between individuals without the need for central servers. The early 2000s heralded the advent of social networking sites with the launch of Friendster in 2002. Friendster was among the first platforms to allow users to connect and share experiences and interests, setting the stage for more expansive networks. This evolution continued with the introduction of Facebook by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. Initially exclusive to Harvard University students, Facebook expanded access to the general public in 2006, requiring users to be at least 13 years old. By July 2011, Facebook had exploded in popularity, boasting 800 million active users globally, and it became a cornerstone of social media, significantly influencing how people communicate, share information, and present themselves online. This trajectory of technological advancements not only changed the mechanics of personal interactions but also had profound effects on cultural and social dynamics worldwide.

In Indonesia, the evolution of social media has been remarkably rapid, with a wide array of platforms available to users, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram (Sukmayadi, 2019). These platforms have become arenas where young Indonesians engage deeply, utilizing them for a variety of creative expressions such as personal branding, business development, entertainment, and more (Mukhlisiana, 2019). The positive reception of social media among Indonesian youth is noteworthy. Many young people, including several informants from this study, have recognized and harnessed the potential benefits of these digital tools. For instance, Kurniady remarked on the swift growth of social media and its effectiveness in establishing personal and particularly business branding in the digital realm.

"In my view, the development of social media is now very rapid. Why can it be said so, it is because of the effects caused by the media itself. A small example of this social media is branding, branding here aims at sales or promotions that utilize the social media platform itself (Kurniady, personal interview, 2023)."

Echoing Kurniady's insights, Ranti further emphasized the evolution of social media, noting its increasing diversity and accessibility for users.

"Social media has been widely used from teenagers to adults. Social media is an online media that makes it easy for users to participate, share, and socialize. Social media also makes it easier for us to communicate"

and interact. Currently, there are many types of social media that we use, one of which is Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and so on (Ranti Éka, personal interview, January 10, 2023)."

Ranti's observations highlight the wide range of social media platforms available today, each offering unique features and experiences that cater to diverse user needs. Building on this point, Lilla, another informant from our study, points out a specific functionality that has enhanced the way users can engage with each other: the live streaming feature.

"I think the development is very rapid. In the past, if we wanted to see a show, we had to come in person to see it. Now it's easier, without having to come, we can see it on social media (Lilla, personal interview, January 10, 2023)."

The responses from the informants indicate that social media plays a crucial role in facilitating social interactions. Moreover, it emerges from the discussions that for these individuals, social media extends beyond mere social connectivity. It also serves as a vital tool for building self-image and engaging in self-promotion.

B. Instagram and Young People's Consumption

Instagram has significantly influenced young people's approach to digital consumption, largely due to its foundational blend of photography and videography, a concept spearheaded by creators Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom. Both individuals hail from Stanford University, with Krieger noted for his exceptional talent in design and creativity, and Systrom, a former Google employee, bringing his deep understanding of tech applications to the venture (Holmes, 2021). Since its inception, Instagram has not only served as a platform for sharing photos and videos but has also evolved to include a variety of modern features, most notably filters. The introduction of Instagram filters on October 6, 2010, marked a significant milestone for the app, attracting 25,000 users on its first day alone (Nur Fitriatus, 2021).

Paul Webster's observations highlight Indonesia's prominent role in the global Instagram landscape. Since its inception, Indonesia has consistently led in terms of user engagement with the app. By January 2016, approximately 89 percent of active Instagram users in Indonesia were aged between 18 and 34 years, reflecting a youthful demographic actively engaging with the platform. Notably, these users were predominantly female, accounting for 63 percent of that user base, while males represented 37 percent (Mailanto, 2016). The popularity of Instagram in Indonesia continued to grow robustly, as evidenced by data from Napoleon Cat in October 2022, which recorded 97.38 million users in the country. This marked a 7 percent increase from the previous year and positioned Indonesia fourth globally in terms of Instagram user numbers, behind India, which led to approximately 248.65 million users (Monavia, 2022). This surge in user numbers can be attributed to Instagram's continuous innovations and feature updates, such as the introduction and enhancement of filters.

The findings of Prihatiningsih (2017) support the notion that Instagram is particularly favored among teenagers, who perceive the platform as a vital resource for meeting various needs. These include staying updated with news, expressing their identities, and socializing with friends and family. The appeal of Instagram for teenagers is attributed to its user-friendly interface and its ability to facilitate easy and free interaction within their social circles. Adding a personal dimension to this research, an informant named Revika exemplifies how Instagram serves as a tool for capturing significant moments. The availability of interesting filters enhances this experience, allowing users like Revika to create and share visually appealing content.

Instagram's evolution in updating and enhancing its features to cater to user needs is evident, particularly with the inclusion of sophisticated filters for photos and videos. This focus aligns with the original vision of Instagram's founders, who aimed to create a platform centered around photography and videography. This design philosophy has made Instagram a prime venue for expressing and sharing visual content. Manovich (2017) discusses the significant role Instagram plays in the lives of young people, who use the platform to showcase their aesthetic sensibilities through carefully curated photos and narratives shared in their Instagram stories. This act of sharing is not just about displaying visuals but also about conveying personal ideas and experiences, thereby using the platform as a digital canvas for personal expression. Additionally, Iqani and Schroeder (2015) highlight the concept of the selfie, which has become a fundamental mode of self-representation on Instagram.

The term "Instagramism" captures the essence of highly active Instagram users who frequently engage in activities such as live streaming, creating Instagram stories, and updating their profiles with new content. This behavior underscores the role of Instagram as not just a social media platform but as a dynamic space where young people actively participate in identity formation and expression. Instagram's core concept of photography and videography makes it an ideal platform for the dissemination and consumption of aesthetically pleasing content.

The concept of a "filter" in digital applications, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, involves the process of removing unwanted material or components. Savolainen, Uitermark, and Boy (2022) emphasize this definition in their discourse on filtering as a mechanism for purification or refinement. Meanwhile, Manovich (2013) expands this definition

within the context of digital imagery, describing filters as tools that alter or generate new image data to achieve specific visual effects. Furthering this notion, Youn (2019) points out the practical benefits of filters in the realm of social media. Filters allow users to present themselves in the best possible light, simulating professional-quality photography without the need for a photographer. This capability is particularly valuable in public social spaces like Instagram, where visual presentation can significantly impact personal branding and social engagement. Filters can adjust various aspects of a photograph such as contrast, brightness, and color, enabling users to create highly polished images that reflect their desired persona or aesthetic.

The enthusiasm for filters among young Indonesians is reflected in the responses from several informants in this study. For instance, Ranti Eka highlighted the practical benefits of using filters, underscoring their utility in enhancing the visual quality of images.

“In my opinion, filters are very useful. For example, it saves time and money to upload Instagram feeds, reels, and stories. Then we can adjust our visual appearance according to what we want (Ranti Eka, personal interview, January 10, 2023).”

Ranti Eka views filters as valuable tools that enable individuals to tailor their photos precisely to their preferences, allowing for a level of customization that can enhance personal expression on social media. This sentiment is echoed by another informant, Lilla, who expresses a strong appreciation for the presence of filters on Instagram.

“I like it because we can choose the filter according to our wishes when we want to take a photo (Lilla, personal interview, January 10, 2023).”

Nanda Pratama’s perspective further underscores the value of filters for young social media users, viewing them as a means to make photos significantly more interesting. His consistent use of filters when taking pictures reflects a common approach among many users who rely on these tools to enhance the visual appeal of their content.

“I also use filters for photos to look interesting, especially with the many filters provided on Instagram (Nanda Pratama, personal interview, November 10, 2022).”

Kurniady offers a different take on the role of filters, viewing them primarily as sources of entertainment and enjoyment. This perspective highlights the playful aspect of filter usage, where the transformation of images serves not just aesthetic purposes but also adds an element of fun to the experience of social media engagement. Moreover, Kurniady suggests that filters can boost confidence by providing users with a means to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance, enhancing their self-esteem when sharing images online.

“I think IG filters are an attraction in themselves because of their uniqueness. I think there are several lessons we get from the many filters, one of which is to make uploads funnier and more colorful. Then it can make posts look more aesthetic and appear more glamorous. It’s all to increase self-confidence and entertainment (Kurniady, personal interview, January 11, 2023).”

Imam Riady’s experience aligns with the perspectives shared by other informants, further emphasizing the role of filters in boosting self-confidence. Imam explicitly states that he uses filters to increase his confidence level when posting on social media. This suggests that for many users, the appeal of filters extends beyond mere visual enhancement. Filters provide a psychological benefit by helping users feel more secure and self-assured in their online presentations.

“My response is that there is no problem. Yes, that’s the reason, I used to lack confidence in myself and when I use IG filters I feel that I look attractive and better, or the term glow up (Imam Riady, personal interview, January 11, 2023).”

Putri’s agreement with Imam reinforces the notion that filters on social media platforms like Instagram play a significant role in enhancing self-confidence, particularly concerning one’s appearance. By using filters, users like Putri and Imam perceive an improvement in their beauty, which translates into greater confidence when sharing images online.

“Using filters makes me confident to upload them on social media and it is the right for users to use the ones that have been provided (Putri, personal interview, January 11, 2023).”

Revika’s viewpoint complements the broader discussion on the utility of filters, emphasizing their role in enhancing the aesthetic value of photos.

“It doesn’t matter because filters only add beauty to photos, they can help beautify photos with different backgrounds (Revika, personal interview, January 10, 2023).”

Kurniady provides a nuanced perspective that broadens the understanding of why people use filters on social media. Contrary to the common assumption that filters are primarily used for enhancing beauty or aesthetic appeal, Kurniady points out that many users engage with filters for purely entertainment purposes.

“I don’t think everyone thinks this way, but there are definitely people who consider filters as part of themselves and their confidence. Although it is a dependency, it has its own positive side. I personally don’t have a problem whether I use a filter or not (Kurniady, personal interview, January 11, 2023).”

Kurniady’s observations underline the versatility of Instagram filters beyond mere aesthetic enhancements. They serve various purposes, including entertainment and playful engagement. Building on this, Khairunnisa introduces another significant aspect of Instagram filters—their educational potential. She notes that filters can incorporate interactive elements like quizzes, math problems, and other educational content, which not only engage users but also serve as tools for learning and knowledge dissemination.

“For myself, the presence of these various filters is quite entertaining and interesting to try. Many of the filters contain elements of entertainment such as funny stickers, or effects that change our faces. So in my opinion this filter contains many positive sides both entertaining, beautifying, and making it easier (Khairunnisa, personal interview, January 11, 2023).”

The perspectives shared by various informants in this paper illuminate the multifaceted uses of filters on Instagram, demonstrating that their application extends beyond simply enhancing the aesthetics of photos or videos. Filters also serve as a source of entertainment and a medium for educational content, such as quizzes and interactive learning experiences. This diverse utility reflects the active engagement of Instagram users who do not passively consume content but actively utilize these features to express themselves, learn, and interact in enjoyable ways. This active consumption aligns with findings by Kinli et al. (2021), who noted that young people specifically use filters to present aesthetically pleasing photos, emphasizing the role of visual appeal in their social media engagement. Similarly, Leclercq (2016) highlights that filters are often used to improve photo quality through enhancements like better lighting and creative overlays, further enriching the user experience on social platforms. These varied uses underscore the role of Instagram users as not just passive observers but as active participants who leverage the platform’s features to craft their public personas, engage with content meaningfully, and even enhance their learning. This dynamic interaction supports the notion posited by Ferwerda et al. (2016) that young people use social media as a space for self-expression and public engagement, effectively using filters as tools to shape how they are perceived and how they communicate within their networks.

C. Instagram Filters: Building Young People’s Confidence, Existence, and Image

The use of Instagram filters among young people serves various purposes, including enhancing self-confidence, improving photo aesthetics, and providing entertainment. These filters are instrumental in shaping how young individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by their audience. As exemplified in the case of our research informant, Nanda, the use of filters can significantly boost self-image among followers. In the described instance, Nanda’s use of filters on a photo elicited positive feedback from followers, with comments like *“wihh ganteng kali kau bang”* (Wow, you look so handsome, bro). Such remarks can reinforce self-esteem and encourage a more favorable self-presentation on social media. Another follower’s comment, *“Berterima kasihlah kepada filter”* (Be thankful to the filter), highlights the role of filters in enhancing the aesthetic quality of photos, thereby acknowledging their contribution to the improved appearance in images shared online.



Nanda Pratama, Informer Who Uses Filters
Source: Facebook account of Ananda Riski Pratama

Nanda's reliance on filters to gain confidence in his appearance on social media illustrates a common sentiment among many young users: the belief that filters can enhance their perceived perfection in images shared online. This perspective suggests that filters are tools for building self-confidence by improving how individuals present themselves visually in digital spaces. This approach, however, presents an interesting contrast to the findings of Amelia & Wibowo (2023), who emphasize the importance of self-openness and trust in online interactions. According to their research, authenticity—represented by unaltered presentations of oneself—is crucial for fostering genuine connections and trust in online relationships. Self-openness is seen as being truthful about one's appearance and identity, suggesting a conflict between the authentic self-presentation and the altered, often idealized images produced with filters. Despite this apparent contradiction, the use of filters can be viewed as a facilitative tool for many young individuals, boosting their confidence to engage more actively in online spaces. This complex interaction between the desire for authenticity and the confidence gained from enhanced appearances highlights the nuanced ways young people navigate their identities online. Moreover, expanding the discussion beyond aesthetic enhancements, Instagram filters also offer educational content, which broadens their appeal and utility. Filters featuring quizzes and interactive learning tools on topics like history, mathematics, and language provide a playful and engaging way to learn new information.

Filters are often used as learning media by young people, which can affect their self-image. For instance, when someone uses a filter on Instagram and posts it on social media, their followers may assume that they have certain personality traits, such as being smart if they successfully answer the quiz in the filter. Similarly, if someone uses a sticker filter that makes a funny face, others may perceive them as funny and cool. This evaluation is based on user posts using filters and has been provided by Instagram.

The above explanation states that Instagram filters are a tool that young people use to increase their confidence in taking pictures or recording videos on social media. Moreover, it can also help in building their presence and self-image on social media based on the posts they share. Later, their followers can like or comment on the post, which further strengthens the existence and self-image of young people on social media based on the evaluation of their followers.

The research findings suggest that young people's reasons for using filters are not straightforward. While filters are often used to enhance the appearance of photos or videos, some young people use them for educational purposes. Therefore, it may not be necessary to restrict the use of filters among young people. They are capable of making their own choices and should be allowed to do so.

CONCLUSION

Globalization has led to the development of modern technologies such as Instagram filters. These filters allow users to express themselves more vividly. Young people, as active consumers, have diverse reasons for using filters. Some see them as a way to enhance the aesthetic value of their photos or videos while others view them as a new means of creating images, gaining insight, or simply for entertainment. This process of assigning meaning strengthens the position of young people as active consumers of Instagram. Therefore, the study found that young people actively use filters on social media for entertainment, increasing knowledge, and expressing themselves to appear attractive in public spaces. The appearance of filters need not always be considered negative because young people are not passive in their consumption of filters. As previously explained, they have various meanings.

While this study provides an initial basis for determining the position of young people as active consumers of filters on social media, more comprehensive studies are needed using quantitative data. Future researchers should focus on studying this topic through a quantitative approach, collecting survey results to determine the spread of filter consumption patterns on social media, the predominant reasons for using filters, and the backgrounds of young people who use filters the most.

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