

DIGITAL SELF-PRESENTATION AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION AMONG MIGRANT STUDENTS OF JAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY THROUGH INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, social media plays a vital role in how individuals build and display their identities, particularly among Generation Z. This study explores how migrant students employ Instagram's multiple account features as a means of managing impressions, forming interpersonal connections, and navigating cultural adaptation. Drawing on Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, the research examines frontstage and backstage behaviors within digital environments, highlighting how public and private expressions reflect broader cultural and emotional dynamics. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and digital content observation. The findings reveal that while public accounts reflect aspirational self-representations aimed at social validation, private spaces serve as emotional outlets that enable authenticity and interpersonal closeness. This demonstrates how digital platforms function as arenas for cultural negotiation and identity work, underscoring the interpersonal complexities of digital communication.

Keywords: *Impression Management, Interpersonal Communication, Cultural Adaptation, Digital Identity, Instagram*

Abstrak

Di dunia yang saling terhubung saat ini, media sosial memainkan peran penting dalam cara individu membangun dan menampilkan identitas mereka, terutama di kalangan Generasi Z. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa perantau memanfaatkan fitur multiakun di Instagram sebagai sarana untuk mengelola kesan, membentuk hubungan interpersonal, dan menavigasi proses adaptasi budaya. Dengan menggunakan teori dramaturgi Erving Goffman, penelitian ini menelaah perilaku front stage dan backstage dalam lingkungan digital, serta menyoroti bagaimana ekspresi publik dan pribadi mencerminkan dinamika budaya dan emosional yang lebih luas. Melalui pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi konten digital. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akun publik mencerminkan representasi diri yang bersifat aspiratif dan ditujukan untuk mendapatkan validasi sosial, sedangkan ruang privat berfungsi sebagai wadah emosional yang memungkinkan keaslian dan kedekatan interpersonal. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa platform digital berfungsi sebagai arena negosiasi budaya dan pembentukan identitas, yang menegaskan kompleksitas interpersonal dalam komunikasi digital.

Kata kunci: *Manajemen Kesan, Komunikasi Interpersonal, Adaptasi Budaya, Identitas Digital, Instagram*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, social media has evolved into a central medium for daily interaction, particularly among Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), who have mastered platforms such as Instagram to construct personal identities and social narratives in virtual spaces (Neufeld-Wall, 2023). For students who migrate from one region to another for their education, Instagram functions not only as a communication platform but also as an avenue for maintaining interpersonal ties and managing cultural adaptation, academic pressure, and emotional distance from home (Rejeki et al., 2020). This dynamic reflects broader communication patterns observed in digital communities and fan cultures. For example, a study by Putri and Fazli (2024) on K-Pop fandoms demonstrates how social identity profoundly influences collective conformity and interpersonal belonging.

In the Indonesian higher education context, educational migration represents more than physical relocation; it involves a profound process of social, emotional, and cultural adjustment. Students who migrate to metropolitan centers such as Jakarta often encounter significant differences in communication styles, social norms, academic expectations, and interpersonal dynamics compared to their regions of origin. Jakarta, as Indonesia's political, economic, and cultural hub, embodies a fast-paced, competitive, and highly mediated social environment. For migrant students, adapting to this urban ecosystem requires not only behavioral flexibility in offline interactions but also strategic self-presentation in digital spaces (Adelia et al., 2025). Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, become critical tools through which students negotiate belonging, visibility, and legitimacy within their new social environments while maintaining symbolic ties to their hometown communities.

Generation Z's deep integration with social media intensifies this process. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z students experience identity construction as an ongoing, publicly mediated practice shaped by constant feedback, algorithmic visibility, and peer comparison. Instagram's visual orientation amplifies the pressure to appear socially competent, emotionally resilient, and culturally adaptable. For migrant students, this pressure is compounded by the expectation to demonstrate success and independence to audiences back home, who often view migration as a marker of ambition and upward mobility. Consequently, Instagram operates as both a bridge and a battleground—facilitating connection while simultaneously imposing performative demands that shape how students narrate their migrant experience.

When individuals identify with a shared cultural or social group, they develop a stronger sense of unity and behavioral alignment. The study found that social identity contributed to 56.3% of conformity among K-Pop fans—illustrating how communal belonging shapes personal expression and social participation.

These insights reveal that social identity functions as a cornerstone of both interpersonal and cultural communication within digital environments. In university contexts—especially for students navigating unfamiliar cultural settings—Instagram operates as both a performative arena and a psychological outlet. This dual function allows users to maintain relationships, communicate belonging, and negotiate intercultural identities simultaneously. Such complexity warrants deeper examination through communication frameworks that bridge personal and cultural dimensions.

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959) provides an analytical foundation for understanding these dynamics, suggesting that social interaction mirrors theatrical performance. Individuals present idealized versions of themselves in public, or the "frontstage," while preserving authentic expressions within private or "backstage" settings. In online contexts, this distinction manifests through the use of multiple accounts and curated audience segmentation (Affandi & Putri, 2021). Goffman's ideas underpin this study by clarifying how interpersonal performance and cultural adjustment intertwine within digital self-presentation, revealing ongoing tension between authenticity and social expectation.

Although Goffman's dramaturgical framework predates digital media, its relevance has intensified within contemporary platform-based communication. Social media environments extend dramaturgical performances beyond physical co-presence, allowing individuals to continuously curate impressions for diverse and often overlapping audiences. Unlike traditional face-to-face interaction, digital performances are persistent, searchable, and replicable, transforming impression management into an ongoing process rather than a situational act. For migrant students, this persistence heightens awareness of self-presentation, as online content must simultaneously satisfy peers in their new environment and audiences rooted in their cultural origins.

Furthermore, the affordances of Instagram—such as multiple accounts, Close Friends lists, and story visibility controls—enable users to reconstruct Goffman's front stage and backstage boundaries in digitally mediated ways. These features allow individuals to fragment their audiences and regulate access to different facets of the self. In this sense, Instagram does not merely host performances but actively structures them. The platform becomes a dynamic stage where cultural adaptation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication intersect, making dramaturgical theory a particularly effective lens for analyzing migrant students' digital practices.

Previous research identifies Instagram as a site for self-validation and emotional regulation (Wijaya & Kurniadi, 2022), yet few studies examine how geographically displaced students—who must reconcile their native cultural identity with a new social environment—engage in these processes. Most existing works (Tobing et al., 2023) investigate general student behaviors without considering the cross-cultural negotiations and emotional balancing acts faced by migrant learners. While (Nurmala & Setiawan, 2023) emphasize the importance of projecting success, they overlook how homesickness, interpersonal support networks, and intercultural adaptation influence digital self-presentation. This study addresses that gap by focusing on students from diverse regions, revealing how their experiences merge Goffman's dramaturgical perspective with processes of cultural identity negotiation and interpersonal adjustment.

The pursuit of an idealized online image can also generate psychological strain. Onggono and Virlia (2021) associate intense social media engagement with depressive tendencies, yet overlook how specific digital practices—such as using secondary or "finsta" accounts—serve as interpersonal coping strategies that alleviate stress and support emotional well-being. By analyzing these multi-account practices, this study expands current understandings of how individuals employ digital tools to manage both social impressions and cultural transitions.

Despite extensive research on Instagram use among university students, existing studies largely treat users as culturally homogeneous groups, overlooking the unique

communicative challenges faced by migrant students. Research on second-account practices, impression management, and digital self-disclosure often emphasizes general motivations such as privacy, authenticity, or entertainment, without sufficiently addressing how geographical displacement and cultural transition shape these behaviors. Migrant students occupy a distinct positionality, as they must simultaneously adapt to new social norms while sustaining emotional and symbolic connections to their places of origin.

This study addresses that gap by examining Instagram's multi-account practices as communicative strategies embedded within processes of cultural adaptation and interpersonal negotiation. By foregrounding the experiences of migrant students at Universitas Negeri Jakarta, this research offers a contextualized understanding of how digital self-presentation functions not only as impression management but also as a mechanism for emotional survival, cultural continuity, and relational balance in transitional life phases.

Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the question: How do migrant students utilize Instagram's multi-account features to manage impressions, and what interpersonal and cultural needs drive these practices? Employing qualitative methods, this study explores the motivations, communication strategies, and emotional meanings embedded in their online performances. The findings aim to enrich communication studies by contextualizing Goffman's framework within intercultural and relational dimensions, while offering practical insights for fostering digital empathy and cross-cultural understanding in educational and social environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory, which continues to provide critical insight for analyzing interpersonal behavior within digital environments. Goffman (Josef & Merunková, 2019) conceptualizes social interaction as a form of theatrical performance in which individuals adopt specific roles to convey impressions to their audiences. His distinction between the "front stage" and "backstage" is particularly useful for understanding how migrant students curate their identities across multiple Instagram accounts, differentiating between public-facing presentations and private expressions that are shared only with trusted circles.

In digital environments, dramaturgical performances are complicated by what scholars describe as audience collapse, where multiple social groups converge within a single communicative space. Instagram users must anticipate the interpretations of diverse audiences who may hold conflicting expectations regarding behavior, values, and identity expression. For migrant students, this phenomenon intensifies dramaturgical tension, as cultural norms from their home regions may contrast sharply with those of their new academic and urban settings. Managing these intersecting expectations requires heightened reflexivity and strategic segmentation of self-presentation.

Moreover, the algorithmic nature of Instagram influences which performances gain visibility and validation. Content that aligns with dominant aesthetic norms or socially valued narratives—such as productivity, independence, and urban sophistication—tends to receive greater engagement. This algorithmic reinforcement subtly shapes users' perceptions of acceptable self-presentation, encouraging conformity to platform-specific ideals. As a result, dramaturgical performance on Instagram is not solely interpersonal but also structurally mediated by technological systems that privilege certain identities over others.

Complementing this framework, Impression Management Theory, as discussed by Mehra et al. (2023), emphasizes the strategic dimension of social media behavior. Users consciously select, edit, and share content to influence how they are perceived, navigating the balance between authenticity and idealization. For migrant students, impression management takes on a dual purpose: maintaining favorable impressions among peers in their new academic environment while also adhering to the social and cultural expectations of their home communities. This dual-audience tension generates complex interpersonal pressures, shaping the digital performance of identity as a continuous negotiation between self-presentation, belonging, and adaptation (Adilia & Wijayani, 2024).

Within online contexts, impression management becomes both more controllable and more precarious. While users can carefully curate images, captions, and interaction patterns, the permanence of digital traces increases the stakes of self-presentation. Mistakes, emotional disclosures, or culturally misaligned expressions may persist beyond their original context, exposing users to misinterpretation or judgment. For migrant students, whose social positions are already marked by transition and vulnerability, this precariousness encourages cautious and calculated communication strategies.

Impression management among migrant students thus extends beyond self-promotion to include risk mitigation. Decisions about what to share, conceal, or relocate to secondary accounts reflect efforts to preserve social harmony, emotional safety, and cultural legitimacy. These practices highlight impression management as an adaptive communicative competence shaped by both interpersonal relationships and broader sociocultural structures.

The Digital Identity Theory by Davis (2016) further enriches this discussion by framing social media as a dynamic arena for constructing and negotiating one's sense of self. In digital spaces, identity becomes fluid, context-sensitive, and co-created through interaction. For migrant students, these identities bridge offline experiences of cultural adaptation and online expressions of emotional and social belonging. Social media platforms such as Instagram thus operate not only as tools of communication but also as stages where individuals mediate cultural continuity and transformation through selective self-representation.

Digital identity formation among migrant students is inherently hybrid, reflecting the convergence of past cultural affiliations and present social realities. Online self-representation allows individuals to selectively preserve elements of their original identity while experimenting with new roles aligned with their current environment. This hybridity challenges static notions of identity, emphasizing fluidity, negotiation, and contextual responsiveness as defining characteristics of digital selfhood.

Instagram facilitates this process by enabling users to present multiple, coexisting identity narratives across different accounts and audiences. These fragmented yet interconnected identities illustrate how digital spaces accommodate the complexities of cultural adaptation, allowing migrant students to navigate belonging without fully relinquishing their origins. Digital identity, in this sense, functions as a communicative bridge between continuity and change.

Recent Indonesian scholarship has contextualized these theoretical perspectives within local cultural and social dynamics. Awaluddin and Mukhlis (2022) examined dramaturgical behavior on Instagram and found that users deliberately separate their

“frontstage” personas, which are curated for public consumption, from “backstage” expressions shared through secondary accounts, where authenticity and emotional honesty are prioritized. This pattern aligns with Goffman’s notion that backstage spaces enable individuals to momentarily withdraw from performative expectations. Similarly, Jihan Salma and colleagues (2023) identified secondary Instagram accounts as interpersonal safe zones that allow students to manage their impressions, sustain close relationships, and express emotional vulnerability while maintaining control over privacy boundaries. Their findings reveal that such second-account use constitutes a form of selective self-disclosure designed to reconcile social expectations with personal comfort. Meanwhile, Ramdianti and Ramadhan (2024) demonstrated that Generation Z students in Bandung use secondary Instagram accounts as spaces of open self-expression within trusted circles. Applying Johari Window theory, their research shows that these accounts serve as emotional outlets that foster confidence and self-acceptance, highlighting how digital platforms support both social adaptation and psychological regulation among young adults. Together, these studies reinforce the idea that Indonesian users engage in complex identity work on Instagram, where digital self-presentation intersects with cultural values of intimacy, respect, and discretion.

To capture the psychological and comparative aspects of these practices, Social Comparison Theory is also employed. Previous research shows that exposure to idealized online portrayals can heighten self-evaluation and emotional strain (Merino et al., 2024). Within this study’s context, such comparisons illuminate how migrant students experience both empowerment and anxiety while constructing desirable identities online. The tension between self-expression and social validation mirrors a broader struggle for belonging and acceptance, especially for students negotiating life between two cultural environments.

Integrating these four theoretical perspectives—dramaturgy, impression management, digital identity, and social comparison—creates a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital self-representation operates as both a performative and relational process. It highlights that social media use is not a superficial act of sharing content, but a deeply embedded cultural practice through which users manage relationships, emotions, and identity continuity.

Taken together, dramaturgical theory, impression management, digital identity theory, and social comparison theory offer a multidimensional framework for understanding Instagram use as a relational, cultural, and psychological practice. Rather than operating independently, these perspectives intersect to explain how users perform, evaluate, and negotiate identity within socially mediated environments. Integrating these frameworks allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how migrant students manage the competing demands of authenticity, social validation, and cultural adaptation in digital spaces.

However, despite growing academic attention, there remains a significant research gap. While previous studies such as those by Awaluddin and Mukhlis (2022), Salma et al. (2023), and Ramdianti and Ramadhan (2024) have examined second-account practices, dramaturgical behavior, and self-disclosure among Indonesian students, few have explored how these practices intersect with the lived experiences of migrant students those who navigate dual cultural identities across geographical and social boundaries. The dynamics of intercultural adaptation through digital self-presentation remain underexplored, particularly in the context of Indonesia’s diverse sociocultural landscape. This study therefore seeks to bridge that gap by situating Goffman’s dramaturgical framework and digital identity theories

within the realities of educational migration, where the negotiation of self occurs simultaneously across physical and virtual domains.

In summary, this multidimensional framework underscores that social media, particularly Instagram, serves as both a performative and adaptive tool through which individuals mediate the complexities of cultural belonging, self-expression, and emotional balance. By foregrounding the experiences of migrant students, this study contributes new insights into how digital platforms function as cultural bridges that allow users to perform, protect, and preserve identity within an ever-evolving social ecosystem

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method is written in flowing paragraphs (not numbered). It explains the research design used (method, type of data, data sources, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, variables, and variable measurements).

This study employs a qualitative research design, centering on in-depth interviews to investigate how migrant students at Universitas Negeri Jakarta engage in impression management on Instagram. A qualitative approach was particularly appropriate for this inquiry, as it enabled a detailed exploration of participants' subjective experiences, personal strategies, and emotional nuances in constructing digital identities. By prioritizing the lived experiences of the students, the methodology facilitated rich and contextually grounded insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Safarudin et al., 2023).

The research was conducted within and around the UNJ campus from April to July 2024. This setting was deliberately chosen because it represents both the academic environment and the primary site for social and cultural adaptation for the target population – non-Javanese migrant students navigating the dual challenges of academic life and cultural integration. The four-month duration allowed for comprehensive data collection while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on four criteria: active enrollment between the second and sixth semesters, origin from regions outside Java, maintenance of at least two Instagram accounts, and willingness to share personal experiences openly. This strategy resulted in five female participants who served as key informants. The decision to focus on female students was informed by preliminary studies suggesting gendered differences in social media self-presentation, though future research could explore a broader gender spectrum.

Although the number of participants was limited, this aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth, richness, and contextual understanding over statistical generalization. Each informant provided detailed narratives that illuminated the nuanced strategies and emotional considerations underlying digital self-presentation. The focus on a small, information-rich sample enabled the researcher to explore patterns of meaning and interpretation that are central to understanding impression management as a lived communicative practice.

Data were gathered through two complementary methods. Semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face and lasting 45–60 minutes, accommodated participants' preferences and logistical constraints. The interview protocol, grounded in Goffman's dramaturgical theory and impression management concepts, was validated by two

communication experts and pilot-tested with a prospective participant. Open-ended questions explored participants' motivations for maintaining multiple accounts, strategies for differentiating content across accounts, and the social, cultural, and psychological factors shaping their online self-presentation.

To supplement the interviews, participants voluntarily shared their Instagram content, including posts, captions, engagement metrics, and observable differences across accounts. This combination of narrative and visual data provided a holistic view of participants' impression management strategies and the interpersonal and cultural dynamics embedded in their digital practices.

The researcher functioned as the primary instrument, maintaining an empathetic and open stance throughout all interactions. Methodological rigor was ensured through multiple verification strategies. Methodological triangulation combined interview narratives with content analysis of Instagram posts, while source triangulation compared experiences across participants to identify both shared and unique patterns. Member checking was employed to validate preliminary findings, ensuring that interpretations accurately reflected participants' intended meanings.

Data analysis followed a thematic framework outlined by Naeem et al. (2023), involving three iterative phases: data reduction to identify meaningful patterns, data display to organize emerging themes, and conclusion drawing to generate interpretive insights. Key themes that emerged included the differentiated roles of primary versus secondary accounts, experiences of authentic self-expression in distinct digital spaces, social pressures influencing online self-presentation, and strategies for managing the complexities of cultural and interpersonal expectations.

Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytical process. The researcher continuously reflected on personal assumptions, cultural positioning, and interpretive influence to minimize bias and enhance analytical transparency. While this study provides valuable insights into migrant students' digital practices, it is limited by its focus on a single institution and a female-only sample. These limitations offer opportunities for future research to examine broader demographic variations and institutional contexts.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect identities, and all data were securely stored to ensure confidentiality. The research relied solely on basic tools – interview guides, digital recording devices, and internet access – making it replicable in similar contexts without specialized equipment.

Overall, this methodological framework enabled a deep, culturally and interpersonally informed understanding of how migrant students navigate the complexities of digital self-presentation. By combining rigorous qualitative procedures with theoretical grounding in dramaturgy and impression management, the study produced findings that are both academically meaningful and practically relevant, illuminating contemporary digital identity practices within student populations navigating multiple social and cultural spheres.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and field observations systematically, analyzes them critically, and presents them informatively. The use of tables, figures, etc., is

only for essential supporting materials, such as statistical test results or model test results. Discussion of the results should be argumentative, discussing the relevance between results, theories, previous studies, and empirical findings, and highlighting the novelty of the findings in flowing paragraphs. Every table in the manuscript must include the source and year of processed research data.

This study included five female migrant students at Universitas Negeri Jakarta, originating from diverse regions outside Java, namely Lampung, West Kalimantan, West Sumatra, Southeast Sulawesi, and East Nusa Tenggara. Participants were enrolled in their second to sixth semesters and maintained between one and three active Instagram accounts. The variation in account numbers reflects differences in impression management strategies, illustrating how students curate their self-image, protect privacy, and tailor content to distinct audiences (Aulia et al., 2024).

Table 1. Research Participant Data

Informant Code	Gender	Region of Origin	Semester	Number of Instagram Account
INF-01	Female	Lampung	4	2
INF-02	Female	West Kalimantan	6	3
INF-03	Female	West Sumatra	2	1
INF-04	Female	Southeast Sulawesi	5	2
INF-05	Female	East Nusa Tenggara	4	5

Source: Own survey

Instagram as a Medium for Self-Representation

All participants perceived Instagram as more than a simple sharing platform; it functions as a deliberate instrument for crafting specific self-images. INF-01 emphasized careful curation on her public account, explaining, “For my main account, I aim to appear professional and avoid excessive personal venting.” This behavior aligns with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory, wherein front stage accounts are carefully managed to project desired impressions, while backstage accounts allow for unfiltered self-expression (Santoso & Rajagukguk, 2020).

Participants commonly used Instagram to convey independence, adaptability, and academic engagement—traits emblematic of the “migrant student” ideal (Sholihah et al., 2025). Posts featuring lectures, urban exploration, and campus interactions functioned as visual markers of this identity. INF-02 noted, “Our posts inevitably evolve to align with our new environment and lifestyle.” Here, front stage performances strategically address societal expectations of successful migrant students, illustrating impression management as a calculated social practice.

Nonetheless, some participants resisted this adaptive pressure. INF-03, for instance, prioritized authenticity, maintaining consistent content regardless of environmental changes: “I stay true to my style because honesty to myself matters more.” This highlights the tension between social performance and personal authenticity central to Goffman’s framework (Nurhayati, 2023). Conversely, INF-05 considered adaptation a natural process: “Adjusting to a new place is normal, but it shouldn’t erase who I am,” reflecting Goffman’s notion of role distance, where individuals negotiate social roles without full internalization.

These findings are consistent with previous research identifying Instagram as a platform for deliberate self-curation and symbolic identity construction (Santoso & Rajagukguk, 2020; Tobing et al., 2023). However, this study extends existing scholarship by situating self-representation within the lived experience of migration. For migrant students, self-representation is not merely aesthetic or expressive, but communicative of adaptation, resilience, and social legitimacy. Unlike non-migrant users, participants framed their Instagram activity as a means of demonstrating successful adjustment to urban academic life, indicating that self-representation functions as a form of cultural signaling. This highlights Instagram as an adaptive medium through which migrant students negotiate visibility, belonging, and credibility in unfamiliar social environments.

Motivations for Multi-Account Practices

Four of the five participants maintained multiple Instagram accounts, each targeting distinct audiences—an embodiment of Goffman’s front stage/backstage distinction. INF-02 managed three accounts: a public profile for peers and family, a close-friends account for personal updates, and a private account for intimate interactions. This segmentation exemplifies Goffman’s region behavior, wherein digital spaces parallel physical boundaries of social interaction. INF-04 noted, “My second account is for random rants—my main account is for ‘happy’ posts.” Such compartmentalization underscores impression management as both protective and strategic (Nurmala & Setiawan, 2023).

Multi-account practices reflect advanced digital literacy, enabling users to segment audiences and tailor content accordingly. Secondary accounts functioned as backstage sanctuaries for emotional expression. INF-05 described hers as “a space to vent without judgment,” akin to Goffman’s green room, allowing temporary reprieve from performative demands. Additionally, secondary accounts facilitated niche self-exploration. INF-01, for example, used hers exclusively for a digital art portfolio, separating creative expression from her social-academic persona. These practices illuminate how digital identities are fragmented and negotiated across audiences, highlighting the interplay between authenticity, social expectations, and psychosocial pressures.

The motivations for maintaining multiple Instagram accounts observed in this study align with earlier findings on audience segmentation and selective self-disclosure (Awaluddin & Mukhlis, 2022; Salma et al., 2024). Nevertheless, this research reveals that for migrant students, multi-account practices are deeply embedded in cultural and emotional regulation. Secondary accounts do not function solely as spaces for authenticity, but as strategic buffers that protect users from social misinterpretation and emotional exposure. This indicates that multi-account usage among migrant students represents an adaptive communication strategy shaped by displacement, where managing relational boundaries becomes essential for sustaining psychological comfort and interpersonal stability.

Social Pressure and Impression Management

All participants reported feeling social pressure to present an idealized self-image, intensified by distance from family and adaptation to new social environments. INF-01 noted that she sought to appear resilient and content to prevent family worry, illustrating “controlled identity communication” (Al-Shatti & Ohana, 2021). This pressure was shaped not only by immediate surroundings but also by personal standards and social media algorithms (Situmorang & Hayati, 2023). INF-05 reflected, “Sometimes I feel like I’m competing too. When friends post something aesthetic, I want to do the same so I don’t seem

left behind,” demonstrating the effects of comparative social behavior in digital spaces (Onggono & Virlia, 2021).

Responses to social pressure varied. Some participants crafted narratives of positivity and achievement, while others balanced social expectations with personal comfort. INF-04 emphasized concealing private aspects to avoid judgment, whereas INF-03 opted for simpler, authentic moments over trending aesthetics (Asmarani & Shafira, 2022). Participants also described using social media inspiration selectively, distinguishing between motivating content and material that provoked pressure. INF-02 noted she had learned to avoid excessive comparison, recognizing that online appearances rarely reflect reality, highlighting the role of media literacy in navigating social pressures.

These experiences reinforce studies linking Instagram use to social comparison and impression-related stress (Onggono & Virlia, 2021; Situmorang & Hayati, 2023), while offering a more contextualized understanding of pressure formation among migrant students. Unlike general student populations, participants in this study described impression management as a responsibility toward both familial expectations and peer evaluation. The pressure to appear successful, emotionally stable, and culturally adaptable reflects broader narratives surrounding migration as a marker of achievement. This finding positions impression management not only as an individual choice but as a socially embedded obligation shaped by cultural expectations and relational accountability.

Authenticity and Safe Spaces for Expression

While primary accounts often adhered to idealized self-presentation, secondary accounts functioned as backstage zones (Goffman, 1959) where social pressures were relaxed. INF-03 described her private account as a sanctuary for uncensored vulnerability: “Only close friends follow it—I can be brutally honest there.” This aligns with findings on finsta accounts as sites of guarded authenticity (Arafah & Sugandi, 2024). Importantly, authenticity here is strategic, reflecting agency in selecting where and how to express different facets of identity. Secondary accounts allowed migrant students to preserve authenticity while managing social risks in a performative digital environment.

These accounts also acted as experimental spaces. INF-05 used her Close Friends list to test opinions among trusted peers before broader dissemination. This iterative process mirrors Goffman’s backstage as a preparatory stage for front stage performances, enabling users to manage disclosure while mitigating digital risks (Suherman et al., 2021). The dual functions of secondary accounts—as sanctuary and laboratory—highlight their role in contemporary identity work, where users oscillate between raw self-expression and strategic curation.

Consistent with previous research on secondary accounts as sites of guarded authenticity (Arafah & Sugandi, 2024; Ramdianti & Ramadhan, 2024), this study demonstrates that authenticity in digital spaces is not absolute but situational. For migrant students, authentic expression is carefully allocated to trusted digital environments where emotional vulnerability carries minimal social risk. These findings challenge binary interpretations of authenticity versus performance by illustrating how selective self-disclosure enables users to maintain psychological well-being while navigating public expectations. In this context, backstage spaces serve not as retreats from identity work, but as essential components of a broader self-presentation ecosystem.

Impression Management Across Dual Audiences

Managing impressions across dual audiences requires significant emotional labor. Participants described carefully calibrating content to avoid appearing either unsuccessful or overly detached from their roots. This balancing act reflects broader sociocultural expectations placed on migrant students as representatives of ambition and resilience. Instagram thus becomes a site of cultural translation, where identity is continuously adjusted to maintain legitimacy across social boundaries. This finding highlights digital self-presentation as an adaptive cultural practice rather than mere aesthetic curation.

Migrant students carefully curated content with both urban peers and hometown communities in mind. INF-02 noted, “People back home are curious—they project their own expectations onto me, the ‘bold one’ who dared to move to Jakarta.” This dual-front impression management requires balancing inherited and aspirational identities. Each post functions as a calculated act of self-representation, signaling successful adaptation while maintaining ties to home communities.

Instagram self-presentation thus transcends generic digital engagement; it involves intricate emotional and cultural negotiations of belonging. Displays of success, independence, or resilience operate as semiotic markers, simultaneously indicating assimilation into urban life and ongoing connection to one’s roots. This duality transforms the platform into a stage for identity triage, where students selectively amplify traits to satisfy both audiences without fully surrendering to either. Taken together, these patterns indicate that impression management among migrant students extends beyond situational performance and reflects a broader process of cultural negotiation shaped by platform dynamics.

This process of identity triage also entails sustained emotional labor, as migrant students must continuously monitor audience reactions and anticipate potential misinterpretations. The need to remain legible and acceptable across multiple social contexts places pressure on individuals to internalize external expectations, often blurring the boundaries between self-expression and self-regulation. Over time, this can shape how migrant students perceive authenticity, success, and belonging within digital spaces. Rather than functioning as a neutral platform, Instagram becomes an affective environment where validation, anxiety, and self-surveillance coexist. The constant negotiation of visibility and restraint suggests that digital self-presentation is not merely strategic, but emotionally taxing, particularly for students navigating cultural transition. In this sense, impression management operates as both a coping mechanism and a source of vulnerability, revealing how cultural adaptation in digital contexts is deeply intertwined with psychological well-being.

Building on these emotional and cultural negotiations, digital self-presentation on Instagram can be understood not only as a form of individual expression, but also as a process of cultural negotiation. Migrant students often occupy a liminal position between their culture of origin and the dominant culture of the host environment, which shapes how they curate their online identities. Instagram becomes a mediated space where students actively manage how much of their original cultural identity is revealed, modified, or strategically downplayed in order to achieve social acceptance, belonging, or academic legitimacy within the host community.

This negotiation process reflects Goffman's concept of impression management, where individuals perform different versions of the self depending on audience expectations. However, for migrant students, this performance is intensified by cultural distance and the perceived risk of misinterpretation. Visual choices such as clothing, language use in captions, location tags, and interaction patterns (likes, comments, story engagement) are often adjusted to align with dominant norms while still maintaining a sense of personal or cultural authenticity. As a result, self-presentation becomes a balancing act between adaptation and resistance.

Furthermore, Instagram's affordances amplify this dynamic by encouraging visibility, comparison, and algorithmic reinforcement. Posts that align with popular aesthetic standards or socially acceptable narratives are more likely to receive engagement, subtly pressuring users to conform. For migrant students, this can lead to selective self-disclosure, where culturally specific practices are shared only within close circles or private accounts, while public-facing profiles reflect a more neutral or globally recognizable identity. This highlights how digital platforms do not merely reflect identity, but actively shape the ways cultural adaptation is performed and negotiated in everyday life.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on digital self-presentation and migrant identity, which emphasize the role of social media as a space for negotiating belonging and visibility. Prior research suggests that migrant individuals often engage in selective self-presentation to minimize cultural misunderstanding while maximizing social acceptance, particularly within institutional or peer-related contexts. The present study supports this view by demonstrating how Instagram is used strategically by migrant students to navigate multiple social expectations simultaneously.

However, this study also extends existing literature by highlighting the platform-specific nature of self-presentation practices. Unlike text-based platforms, Instagram's visual emphasis intensifies impression management, making appearance, aesthetics, and symbolic cues more central to identity construction. This suggests that cultural adaptation on Instagram may operate differently compared to other social media platforms, reinforcing the importance of examining platform affordances when analyzing digital identity among migrant populations.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a nuanced understanding of how migrant students at Universitas Negeri Jakarta manage their digital identities across multiple Instagram accounts, revealing the complex interplay of cultural adaptation, social pressures, and online self-presentation. By applying Goffman's dramaturgical framework alongside impression management, digital identity, and social comparison theories, the research demonstrates how students navigate dual audiences—urban peers and hometown communities—while balancing authenticity, social expectations, and emotional well-being.

These practices demonstrate that digital self-presentation is not merely performative, but deeply relational and emotionally regulated. For migrant students, maintaining visibility across platforms requires constant reflexivity, where each post becomes a calculated response to imagined judgments, cultural norms, and the desire for social stability within unfamiliar urban environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends Goffman's dramaturgical framework by demonstrating how front stage and backstage performances are reconfigured through platform affordances in contexts of cultural transition. The findings also contribute to digital identity scholarship by illustrating how identity fragmentation functions as a coping strategy rather than a sign of inauthenticity. Practically, the results suggest that universities should recognize digital self-presentation as part of migrant students' adaptation processes. Support programs that promote digital literacy, emotional awareness, and culturally sensitive counseling may help students navigate online pressures more effectively. Future research should explore longitudinal changes in digital identity practices and include diverse gender and cultural backgrounds to further enrich understanding of digital self-presentation in migratory contexts.

Theoretical contributions of this study include extending dramaturgical theory to educational migration contexts, illustrating how digital front stage and backstage boundaries are fluid and negotiated through platform affordances. The findings also highlight the psychosocial challenges of maintaining dual identities, providing empirical evidence for the ways cultural and interpersonal factors intersect with digital self-presentation. Additionally, the study introduces the concept of "reflexive platform literacy," emphasizing how awareness of audience segmentation, content curation, and platform dynamics can empower users to manage identity strategically while safeguarding mental health.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. Its focus on Instagram and reliance on qualitative data from a limited participant group may constrain the generalizability of the findings and overlook variations across platforms and social contexts. Nevertheless, these limitations also point toward meaningful directions for future research. Expanding the scope to include multiple social media platforms, diverse demographic backgrounds, and longitudinal approaches would allow for deeper insight into how digital self-presentation evolves over time. Ultimately, this study underscores that online self-presentation among migrant students is a sophisticated, relational practice in which cultural negotiation, emotional labor, and psychological management intersect within digitally mediated environments.

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