

## Influence of Social Media on Self-Identity Formation and the Development of Interpersonal Ability in University Students

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the influence of social media on the formation of students' self-identity and interpersonal skills. In a social context, social media offers opportunities for students to express themselves and network, but it also brings challenges such as social pressure and a decline in face-to-face interaction. This study was conducted with a descriptive qualitative approach in State Islamic universities, using interview, observation, and documentation techniques to collect data. The results show that social media allows students to form digital identities through tailored content, but it often raises unrealistic social expectations. In addition, reliance on social media reduces the intensity and quality of face-to-face interactions, which impacts interpersonal skills such as empathy and listening. This research makes an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of social media in the socio-cultural context of Indonesia, but it has limitations in population coverage. These findings are expected to serve as a basis for further research and the development of more thoughtful social media use strategies.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Self-Identity, Interpersonal Skills, Digital Identity, Social Pressure

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a global phenomenon that cannot be separated from daily life, especially among students (Abaido, 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Yariş & Aykol, 2022). In the social context, social media is not only a communication tool but also a platform for expressing oneself, building networks, and creating personal identities (Alton Endarwanto Hadi Susanto et al., 2023; Iranmanesh & Abokhamis Mousavi, 2023). Based on a report by Hootsuite and We Are Social (2023), social media users in Indonesia reached more than 191 million, with the majority of users aged 18-34 years old (Ihsaniyati et al., 2023; Yurika & Dewi, 2023). Students, as part of the digital generation, utilize social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn for a variety of purposes, from entertainment to academic and professional achievements (Berdiieva & Goroshko, 2022; Kalam et al., 2023; Król & Zdonek, 2020; Obeso et al., 2023). However, this phenomenon also creates new dynamics in social relationships and how students build their identities. Reliance on social media can change traditional communication patterns, reduce the intensity of face-to-face interactions, and affect interpersonal skills.

Literature-wise, various studies have addressed social media's role in forming self-identity and interpersonal skills. Taylor et al. (2023) explain how social media allows individuals to

experiment with identity through online activities. Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020) highlight that social media creates a space for individuals to display their best versions of themselves, often different from reality. Blakemore and Agllias (2020) assert that although social media can improve digital communication skills, this does not always translate into interpersonal skills in a face-to-face context. These literatures show that social media is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it provides opportunities for self-development, but on the other hand, it can pose challenges in social relationships. Sun (2023) found that intensive social media use among college students is associated with increased social interaction through digital platforms but can also reduce face-to-face communication skills. Intensive social media use affects students' interpersonal communication skills, with increased Facebook use in line with increased skills (Kolhar et al., 2021; Kroencke et al., 2023). Ihsaniyati et al. (2023) showed that social media plays a role in social change in Indonesian society, including interaction and communication among college students. This indicates that social media significantly influences the formation of self-identity and the development of students' interpersonal skills, both positive and negative aspects.

However, a research gap needs to be answered regarding the impact of social media on the formation of self-identity and interpersonal skills, especially in the context of Indonesian students. Most existing research focuses on populations in Western countries, with little attention paid to the student experience in Indonesia. In addition, previous research has tended to examine self-identity and interpersonal skills separately without highlighting the linkages between the two in the social media ecosystem. This gap is important to bridge, given Indonesia's unique socio-cultural characteristics, which can influence how students use social media in their lives.

This research offers novelty by integrating the analysis of self-identity formation and students' interpersonal skills in one research framework. This approach aims to understand how college students use social media to shape their identities while developing or sometimes sacrificing interpersonal skills. In addition, this study also considers the influence of local socio-cultural factors, such as collectivist values, in shaping social media usage patterns. Thus, this research enriches the existing literature and provides new insights relevant to the Indonesian context.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how social media influences the formation of students' self-identity and interpersonal skills. This research also aims to identify the challenges and opportunities that arise from using social media and its implications for students' personal and social development. Thus, this research contributes to making theoretical and practical contributions, both for students, educational institutions, and other related parties, in utilizing social media more wisely.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta because this university has diverse students who reflect diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, thus providing a rich context to explore social media's influence on forming self-identity and interpersonal skills (Nasri, 2023). The approach used is a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. This approach was chosen because it was able to dig into a deep understanding of students' subjective experiences in using social media and how the platform affects how they interact and form identities. Through this method, the research is expected to reveal the phenomenon comprehensively, considering various perspectives that emerge from field data.

Research data was collected through three main techniques, namely interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with students from various study programs to understand how they utilize social media in their daily lives. Observations are carried out in the campus environment, such as in classrooms, libraries, and canteens, to directly

see the pattern of student social interaction. Documentation includes analysis of students' social media content, including posts, comments, and other digital activities, which provides additional insights into how they express their identities online. Combining these three techniques allows the research to obtain holistic and valid data.

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Data reduction is done by sorting, selecting, and simplifying relevant data to focus on key findings. Data is presented through tables, matrices, or descriptive narratives that help illustrate patterns and relationships between observed variables (Nassaji, 2020). The final stage is the conclusion drawn, where the findings are analyzed in depth to understand the research implications and answer the research questions. This approach allows the research to provide a systematic and structured analysis so that the results obtained can be used as a basis for practical recommendations and the development of theories.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Digitally Constructed Self-Identity**

Social media has become an integral part of the life of graduate students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Social media in the digital age allows individuals to form their identities based on how they want to be seen by others. This is often done through content editing, the use of filters, and the selection of information shared. This phenomenon affects students individually and shapes collective perceptions in the academic environment. Many college students use social media such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok to create a self-image that they find more professional, engaging, or relevant to their target audience. For example, students who want to be known as talented researchers often share scientific publications or seminar activities in which they participate. In contrast, students with business interests tend to highlight their business achievements. However, behind the display is a complex dynamic involving identity engineering and, sometimes, the distance between real life and digital representation.

The results of interviews with several graduate students show how they use social media to build their identities. Student A, a student in the Communication study program, revealed, "I use LinkedIn to build a professional portfolio and show my expertise in writing scientific articles. I choose relevant content so that others see me as credible." Meanwhile, student B, who is from the Education study program, said that he uses Instagram to share his creative side. "I like to edit photos with certain filters to make them look aesthetic. It helps me express myself visually," he explained. Student C from the Psychology study program adds, "Sometimes I feel the need to adjust to trends so as not to fall behind, even though it doesn't always reflect who I really am." This interview clearly shows that social media is an essential tool in creating self-identity for personal and professional purposes.

The researcher's observation of the social media accounts of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta postgraduate students revealed interesting patterns in the construction of digital identity. Many college students show diverse personalities depending on the platform they use. On Instagram, they showcase their creative side, daily life, and visual aesthetics. On LinkedIn, their focus is more on academic achievement, work experience, and professional connections. The researcher also noted a gap between digital representation and students' real lives. For example, some students who look simple daily create a more glamorous self-image on social media. In addition, some students choose to limit their digital presence and only share very selective information.

**Table 1. Aspects of Self-Identity Construction**

| Aspects                   | Explanation   | Example  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Content Editing           | The process of changing or improving the uploaded content to create an ideal image of yourself. | Edit photos to make them look more appealing using apps like Photoshop or Lightroom.                 |
| Use of Filters            | Use filters on photos or videos to create a specific impression.                                | Use Instagram filters to make your face look brighter or aesthetically look more attractive.         |
| Information Selection     | Choosing the information to share to create a specific narrative about yourself.                | Only share certain happy moments or achievements on social media.                                    |
| Self-Imaging              | A conscious effort to display a self-image that is in accordance with certain desires or goals. | Create social media accounts that only contain content about a healthy lifestyle or traveling.       |
| Interaction with Audience | Respond and communicate with followers to reinforce the image they want to build.               | Respond to comments that support the positive image you want to show.                                |
| Use of Personal Data      | Concealing or revealing certain information to support identity construction.                   | It doesn't share personal information like where you live, but it highlights your employment status. |

Tabel 1 suggest that the self-identity constructed digitally by graduate students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta is the result of various social pressures and individual needs. Social media allows them to create a narrative about who they are and how they want to be seen. However, this often leads to a double identity, which is an online identity that is sometimes different from real life. This analysis shows that while social media can be a powerful tool for self-expression, it also requires college students to face challenges, such as maintaining consistency between digital identities and reality. So, better digital literacy is needed so that students can use social media in a healthy and authentic way in shaping their identity.

### Social Pressure

Social pressure is an increasingly visible phenomenon among UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta graduate students. As individuals who are in an academic and social transition period, they are often exposed to unrealistic social standards, such as lifestyle, career success, or ideal beauty promoted through social media and the surrounding environment. This can trigger an identity crisis, especially for students who find it difficult to meet these expectations. Students often feel they must demonstrate academic success, a modern lifestyle, or professional networking skills in order to meet applicable social standards. This pressure not only affects their mental well-being but also creates a distance between the ideal self they want to achieve and the real self they have.

The results of interviews with several students revealed various perspectives on the social pressures they experienced. Student A, from the Educational Management study program, said, "The social pressure that I feel the most is showing that I am able to balance the busy study and personal life well. Sometimes I get tired of trying to meet these expectations." Student B, from the Law study program, shared his experience, "On social media, many of my friends show me a life that looks perfect. I feel I have to follow that trend so as not to be considered left behind." Meanwhile, student C, from the Psychology study program, added, "This pressure does not only come from outside, but also from oneself. I often compare myself to others and feel like I'm not good enough." From this interview, it can be seen that social pressure has various dimensions, ranging from societal expectations to internal pressures felt by individuals.

The researcher's observation of the environment of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta postgraduate students shows that there is a great influence of social media in forming high social standards. Many students actively share academic achievements, travel photos, or social activities that depict an ideal life. On the other hand, there are also students who choose to hide their personal lives because they feel unable to compete with existing standards. This observation also

found that social pressure not only affects students individually but also shapes patterns of social interaction between them. Students who look more successful or follow social standards tend to get more attention and appreciation, while others feel marginalized.

Based on these findings, the researcher analyzed that social pressure in graduate students of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta is the result of a combination of external and internal factors. Social media is one of the main sources that influence their perception of success and happiness. In addition, the academic environment also plays a role in reinforcing this pressure through competition and high expectations. Students who lack the ability to manage social pressure are prone to stress and identity crises. Therefore, it is important to provide education about social and emotional literacy so that students can manage social pressure in a healthy and realistic way, as well as build a more inclusive and supportive environment.

### **Decline in Face-to-Face Interactions**

Postgraduate students of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta are facing a phenomenon of declining face-to-face interaction amid the rampant use of social media. The reliance on digital technology and social media has reduced the intensity and quality of direct communication. Students communicate more often through text messages, video calls, or online discussion groups, compared to meeting in person. This condition has an impact on the development of empathy, listening skills, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships. In an academic environment, meetings that used to be held in person are now shifting to virtual platforms, reducing opportunities for students to interact in depth. This is compounded by the demands of multitasking, where students must divide their attention between academic work, social media, and personal life, which ultimately hinders meaningful social relationships.

The results of interviews with several graduate students revealed their views regarding the decline in face-to-face interaction. Student A, from the Islamic Education study program, stated, "In the past, we often discussed after class in the canteen or library. Now, almost all discussions are done via WhatsApp or Zoom, so it feels less personal." Student B, from the Communication study program, added, "I find it easier to communicate online because I can answer at any time. But I also feel that relationships with friends have become more superficial." Student C, from the Psychology study program, revealed, "Sometimes I feel awkward when I have to speak directly, because I am used to communicating through texts. I think this made me lose confidence." From these interviews, it can be seen that although digital communication offers convenience, there is a negative impact on students' direct communication skills.

The researcher's observation of the interaction of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta postgraduate students supports the findings of the interview. Researchers noted that students tend to be busier with their phones when in public spaces such as canteens or libraries, rather than engaging in face-to-face conversations. In some seminars and group meetings, students often rely on digital presentations and chat features to express their opinions, rather than speaking in person. This reduces the opportunity to develop verbal communication skills and emotional expression. Researchers also noted that students who are less active in face-to-face interactions often find it difficult to establish closer relationships with their peers.

Based on these findings, the researcher analyzed that the decline in face-to-face interaction in graduate students of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta is a consequence of technological advances and lifestyle changes. The reliance on social media has shifted the way students communicate, from in-person interactions to faster and more efficient virtual communication. However, this shift also brings challenges, such as declining interpersonal skills and a sense of empathy. Therefore, it is important to create a balance between digital and face-to-face communication. Campuses can play

a role by providing more space and opportunities for direct interaction, such as workshops, group discussions, or social activities that encourage students to be actively involved. Thus, students can develop better social skills, while still making positive use of technology.

## Discussion

Social media provides a vast space for individuals to experiment with different versions of their identity (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Granic et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2020). Boyd revealed that this process is often influenced by social pressures, group norms, and a desire to be accepted by their social environment (Chen et al., 2020). This aligns with the phenomenon observed in graduate students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, where social media such as Instagram and LinkedIn are used to build a professional and relevant self-image for their academic community. Boyd's research also highlights that while social media can support identity development, there is a risk of forming "false personas," i.e. self-representations that do not fully reflect the individual's reality. In the context of postgraduate students, this can be seen from the gap between digital identities that look glamorous and simpler in real life.

Although social media provides ease in expressing oneself, users are often pressured to display the perfect identity (Bazi et al., 2020; Stahl & Literat, 2023). This is relevant for students who need to continue to follow trends or build a specific narrative on social media to keep looking attractive in the eyes of their audience. The emphasis is that overly controlled digital identities can lead to psychological stress and feelings of inauthenticity (Darr & Doss, 2022; Feher, 2021; Haimson et al., 2021). Therefore, to overcome this challenge, students need good digital literacy, such as the ability to filter social pressure and use social media more healthily. This approach can help them create a more authentic and consistent self-identity between online and real-life representations.

Social pressure triggered by social media exposure can significantly impact an individual's mental well-being, especially in the young age group, which forms a self-identity (Chen et al., 2020; Yang, 2022). They found that social media often reinforces unrealistic social standards, such as academic achievement, career, or physical appearance, thus evoking feelings of inadequacy among users. This is relevant to the findings of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta graduate students, where the expectations of social media create pressure to display a life that looks perfect. Livingstone and Helsper also highlight that this exposure can exacerbate social anxiety, especially in individuals who lack the skills to filter or critique the information they receive.

Herrero et al. (2022) research on digital generation shows that increased social pressure correlates with a surge in stress and depression levels in social media users. Bearman and Ajjawi (2023) noted that individuals who compare themselves to others too often on social media platforms are more prone to decreased life satisfaction and feeling emotionally isolated. Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta graduate students who feel pressured to display an image of success on social media to gain recognition. Developing digital and social literacy to help individuals understand the boundaries between the virtual and real worlds (Vodă et al., 2022; Maulidia, 2023; Faiz et al., 2023). This education is important so students can manage social pressure healthily and focus on authentic self-development.

Excessive use of digital technology can reduce the quality of interpersonal communication, including empathy and listening skills. Aktas and Pasinlioğlu (2021) found that communication through digital devices, while efficient, tends to reduce an individual's ability to read nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, which are important in face-to-face interactions. This is to the condition of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta graduate students, where dominant virtual communication causes relationships between students to be less profound. Digital

interactions are often transactional, thus reducing the emotional aspects important for building trust and interpersonal relationships.

Research by Roussos (2023) supports these findings by showing that digital multitasking can affect brain function, especially in processing social interactions. When individuals too often divide their attention between digital devices and in-person interactions, they lose focus on the conversation in progress. This phenomenon is seen in observing busier students with their phones than directly interacting in public spaces. The implications of this study are in the contribution of theoretical references on balancing the use of social media with strengthening students' interpersonal skills. The study results are also relevant as research implications for psychologists and educational counsellors in designing intervention strategies to help students build a healthy self-identity in the digital era.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that social media plays an important role in forming students' self-identity, where students can display their ideal version of themselves through content that has been edited and adapted to specific social standards. However, this phenomenon also causes social pressure due to unrealistic expectations, such as lifestyle or physical appearance, which triggers feelings of insecurity and identity crisis in some students. Additionally, reliance on social media has reduced the quality of face-to-face interactions, potentially hindering the development of empathy and listening skills. Students who rely too much on social media tend to face challenges in building healthy interpersonal relationships in the real world.

The main contribution of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of how social media influences the formation of self-identity and interpersonal skills in the socio-cultural context of Indonesia. The study also highlights the importance of a holistic approach considering the relationship between digital identity and social skills. However, this study has limitations, especially concerning population coverage involving only students from one institution. Further research is needed to generalize these findings by involving a broader population and examining the dynamics in different age groups or social contexts.

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