

Instagram in Fixing Our Everyday Life Experience

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ABSTRACT

Bringing the brand promise 'brings you closer to the people and things you love'. Instagram allows users to have the feeling of being connected to the world. In general, people use their Instagram account as a tool to show what is happening with their life. They consciously decide and choose information about their lives to be shared with significant other (Instagram's friends). In doing so, they create self-presentation that leads to the creation of a self-made identity. Instagram itself is filled with users' positive self-presentation. However, the trend nowadays, users have more than one Instagram account. Not only do they present themselves in a positive light or self-idealisation, but at the same time, they also share their self-actualisation. By self-actualisation, it means to express not only their flattering side but also the 'other' side of one's life. According to this research results, it can be defined as ones' unattractiveness, humiliating moments, and embarrassing sides, ranging from facial imperfections, depression, and struggles. This research itself used a complementary combination of content analysis, in-depth interviews, and observation participatory. By posing the research question regarding how Instagram users use their Instagram account to fix their daily life experience and its extent to their Catharsis. This research gives an insight into the limitation and the boundaries of how social media entangles with an individual's identity. While many studies on Instagram available discuss the way Instagram activities work as the representation of individual's identity, they do not consider Instagram itself as the simulacra and how it changes the way we live our everyday life.

Keyword: Instagram, self-made identity, Catharsis, self-presentation, simulacra.

Introduction

In postcolonial contemporary Indonesia, having social media accounts sits at the core of being a decent millennial for individuals in their 20's or any individuals who want to claim their millennial characteristics. Users' activity on their social media account then validate their online visibility. Individuals' online visibility defines individuals' social skills; up-to-date by fluently understanding the current issues in social media, likeable by looking at the number of followers or friends, having good social networking by regularly updating their status, posting in different form of social media.

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Instagram is one of social media services or social networking sites (SNS) that relies on individuals' visual presentation as their way of self-definition (Jin Kang & Lewen Wei, 2020). In terms of popularity, according to Statista (2020) Instagram is a popular social media platform that has more than 1 billion monthly users.¹ Furthermore, they also reported 500 daily active stories users worldwide. *Stories* is an Instagram feature that allowing users to post photo and video sequences that disappear 24 hours after being posted. This feature not only facilitates individuals' augments self-expression, but it also works as individuals' self-promotion. In explaining how Instagram features works for users, Jose Van Dijck (2013) argues that users can use photo-sharing applications, news feeds to express themselves, which result in conscious self-promotion.

In theory, social scientists claim that Instagram is filled with users' positive self-presentation, primarily in the form of selfies (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Moreover, Instagram users present themselves in a positive light to their imagined audience, to be the pretty self (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2016), the happy self (Pounders, Kowalczyk, & Stowers, 2016), or as Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2018 call it the positive-self. However, looking at the trend nowadays, users have more than one Instagram account. Not only they present themselves in a positive light or self-idealisation, but at the same time, they also share their selfactualisation. By self-actualisation, it means to express not only their flattering side but also the 'other' side of one's life. According to different research, it can be defined as ones' unattractiveness, humiliating moments, and embarrassing sides, ranging from facial imperfections, depression and struggles, partying habit to love poems (Molina, 2017; Patterson, 2016; Safronova, 2015)

Hector Postigo (2015) in "Social Media: The Unbearable Lightness of Meaning in explaining how social media can be seen as a way to fix our life argued that who we were yesterday is not necessarily who we are today nor who we will be tomorrow, nor how we will be remembered once we're gone. Moreover, in arguing how Instagram can be used as a tool to fix one's life experience nowadays, Instagram users have more than one Instagram account. In general, Instagram users can

¹ Statista is a German online portal for statistics, which makes data collected by market and opinion research institutes and data derived from the economic sector and official statistics available in English, French, German and Spanish.

create two types of accounts to manage their self-presentation strategically. On a real Instagram account (known as Rinsta) or the first account, users highlight flattering aspects of self. In contrast, on a fake Instagram account (known as Finsta) or the second account, users show unflattering aspects of self (Kang and Wei, 2020). In the first account or Rinsta, users use this account for the general use in which one can always give it to everyone that wants to have their Instagram account. In comparison, the second account or Finsta is more exclusive in principle, so one chooses their followers with caution. They only share their second account with those they share the unflattering aspects of their life experience; such as real-world friends, and other intimate acquaintances.

The Instagram ability that allows us to create our Avatar – a character that we use to represent ourselves in the virtual world-enables us to live in simulacra. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard (1994) proposed (albeit not explicitly aimed at the field of social media) the simulation's hyper-real quality. He proposed that a simulation, such as an image, can, bear no relation to any reality, becoming, in essence, a reality of its own (simulacrum). Moreover, via his concept of hyper-reality, Baudrillard (1976/2001) has explored the power of media imagery in replacing our actual experiences. The urge for us to share the best version of our selves by using different features on the Instagram such as photo editing techniques, choosing caption and using a hashtag on the first account but at the same time realising that it was not the authentic selfexpression show how we intentionally build and live in our simulacrum. Therefore, to restore the balance or facilitate our self-actualization, we manage to have our second Instagram account in which we post everything that is less controlled but do not necessarily more 'authentic'.

Research Methodology

In principle, this research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Researching social media is a growing field in social and humanities studies. The pervasive position of social media in contemporary society makes it an inevitable platform for socialisation, public discussion, and information-sharing, which generates data that is potential of great interest to social and humanities scientists. Therefore it creates a growing need to develop research methodology to capture, collate and analyse these new forms of data (Anabel Quan-Haase and Luke Sloan, 2017). This research

itself used a complementary combination of content analysis, in-depth interview and participatory observation.

Moreover, as a social platform, interactions and activities on social media cannot be separated from the events taking place outside of it. As Quan-Haase and Sloan (2017) argued: “they are [social media interactions and activities] produced within a specific historical, social, political and economic context.” In that regard, other corpora of study other than the social media being researched are needed to understand further that can aid in the interpretation of research findings. By posing the research question regarding how Instagram users use their Instagram account to fix their daily life experience and to what extent users create and live in their simulacra, this research gives an insight into the limitation and the boundaries of how social media entangles with individuals’ identity. While many studies on Instagram available discuss the way Instagram activities work as simulacra, they do not consider Instagram itself work as the simulacra and how it changes the way we live with ourselves.

In order to answer the research question, this research employed a virtual participatory observation for seven Instagram users both their first account and second account. A total of 14 accounts’ posting were observed for three months. There are 533 postings collected using a screen capture technique. These 533 were analysed using quantitative and qualitative content analysis. It is argued by Hansen et al. (1998), Shoemaker and Reese (1996), Macnamara (2005) that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis should be used in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding in media content. This includes analysing images in social media (Martin Hand, 2017). Several researchers have shown triangulation of method in their study (Banks, 2005; Nomm, 2007; Sadlik & Kim, 2007). Moreover in order to provide a deeper understanding of how users use their Instagram, in-depth interviews were conducted with five Instagram users. Hand (2017) privileged in-depth interview as a fruitful methodological toolkit in doing visual studies of social media. There is a tradition of combining in-depth interviews with other meaning-making methodology in visual studies (Van House, 2011; Rose, 2014).

The content analysis was conducted to code the manifest content of the Instagram post and explore the latent content of each post. Open coding was used to familiarize with the data and to build

theoretical concept of the data being observed. In order to understand the producer context, indepth interviews were conducted with six respondent who are employ first and second Instagram account.

Results and Discussion

Unlike the traditional one-way pattern, social media changes the way people use media. With its user-generated content character, people not only serve as the consumer of the message, but they also function as the message producer. This characteristic allows user to build and create their message and distributed to their targeted audience. By analysing different definitions available in the literatures, in their article title “What is Social Media and What Questions Can Social Media Research Help Us Answer “, McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2017) stated that social media allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible (p.17). Instagram is one of the social media services or social networking sites (SNS) that relies on individuals' visual presentation as their way of self-definition (Jin Kang & Lewen Wei, 2020). Bringing the brand promise ‘brings you closer to the people and things you love’ (Instagram, 2020), Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world (Clement, 2020b) that allows user to engage through a series of pictures. Indeed, from in-depth interviews, the majority of the research participants stated that they first open their Instagram account for the sake of finding information about their idols, favourite peoples or things they like. As emphasized by one of our research participant statement, “I created my Instagram account 9 years ago because of Justin Bieber [American Pop Singer], I just want to look at his pictures and doing fangirling”. Though this ‘finding information’ activities do not necessarily be openly acknowledged by the person looking for the information itself. According to Hogan (2010), the mediated relationship facilitated by social media blissfully allows people to consume and view other’s profile without directly engaging with the individual. This activity is commonly known as stalking. In comparison, another participant mentioned that he was solely following the trend or, in other term feeling connected with his peers.

As a social media platform that heavily relies on visual presentation, Instagram requires users to use an image on each post. This characteristic leads to different user behavior compared to other social media platforms (Baym, 2015; Laestadius, 2017). The visual practices on Instagram demand its users to think about the aesthetic of the post consciously. Indeed, Instagram is popular due to its ability to improve the ‘mediocre’ appearance of a photo through filters. Moreover, according to its creator (in Laestadius, 2017), rather than encouraging skillful photography, by placing emphasis on mobile phone photos, Instagram offers ‘awesome looking filters transform your photo into professional-looking snapshots’. The word Instagram itself became an adjective, *Instagramable*. It is used to describe that something is photogenic enough, according to the Instagram standard. The research participants also acknowledged that posting on Instagram consumes a greater effort and time. They have to make a conscious decision about the ‘final’ look of the image they are going to share; the angle, the background, the lighting, as well as the caption if they feel it is needed. To this extent, users fully acknowledge that their Instagram accounts are part of their identity. They do not want their posting or online activities to harm their selfpresentation, which they intentionally create. Presentation of self is one of the core patterns of social media engagement. With its user-generated content, users are free to craft their selfpresentation through the personalization of their social media account (McCay-Peet and QuanHaase, 2016).

Regarding social media ability in providing users with self-presentation tools, several pieces of research has explained it by using Irving Goffman’s impression management works on online platforms (Hogan, 2010; Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010; Çadırcı and Güngör, 2019; Kang and Wei, 2020). The general assumption of impression management is that individuals would employ the selective disclosure of personal details designed to present an idealized self. “In terms of content, I create a post that definitely will enhance my image. Not only should it fulfill the aesthetics requirement to be uploaded, but it should also have a supporting caption, which I give a thought about it first”, explained one of the research participants in describing the character and qualification of her Instagram post. While Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) observed the use of photo galleries as an instrument of self-presentation that conform to impression management's

traditional notions, Hogan (2010) proposed the updated version of impression management theory. Rather than looking at social media accounts as user's performance, He advocate the idea of Exhibition in understanding people's online activities on their social media account and putting it as an exhibition implies that user's social media account "are subject to selective contributions and the role of a third party" (p.384).

Furthermore, it is worth noting one of the relevant cultural dimensions of social media; aesthetics driven (Payal Arora, 2012) explains how users personalise their social media account. She discussed the fact that users incline for personalisation in using social media. Indeed, users cater to their individual needs by using predefined structures and personalization desires are socially shaped and shared. The socially shaped and shared desires of users lead to different users' behaviour and, in many cases, the social media creator has to make some updates and adjustments based on the way users use their product. Facebook has to update its privacy regulations; Instagram offers different functions to adjust their user's needs.

Regarding to the existing phenomenon of Rinsta and Finsta, Instagram creates the 'close friends' option. All of the research participants shared the reason behind their second Instagram account existence. That due to the unavailability of particular tools in their social media account, they decided to cater to their own desires by using the available option on Instagram, " I opened my second account [Finsta] before 'close friends' option available in Instagram". However, based on the interviews, users considered this function is ineffective and does not suit their need. "Each time you want to limit the access of your post you have to choose your audience [either close friends or general audience]. Not only it takes time, but I am afraid I will push the wrong option," explained one of the research participants about the reason why the feel more comfortable using Finsta. Therefore, they choose to stay with their Finsta or second Instagram account in order to fulfill their need.

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