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The Role of Social Media in Shaping the Self-Identity of Young Women in Urban Areas (A Cultural Communication Theory Perspective)

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Abstract

Social media has become an important space for young women to express themselves, construct personal images, and negotiate cultural identities. This study aims to examine the role of social media in shaping the digital identities of young women in urban Jakarta from the perspective of cultural communication theory. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, the study focuses on women aged 18–25 who actively use Instagram and/or TikTok. Data are designed to be collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and content analysis, with purposive sampling and snowball sampling where necessary. Thematic analysis will be used to explore participants' experiences, self-representation practices, audience responses, and negotiations of cultural values, social norms, and gender expectations. The analysis draws on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Erving Goffman's self-presentation perspective, and George Herbert Mead's symbolic interaction theory. The study is expected to develop a conceptual model explaining how urban cultural contexts, personal meaning-making, digital representation, and social interaction contribute to the ongoing formation and negotiation of digital identity.

Keywords A Cultural Communication Perspective; Digital Identity; Self-Representation; Social Media; Young Women

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important space in which individuals communicate, express themselves, and construct social identities (Azzaakiyyah, 2023; Salsabila & Listyani, 2023). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are no longer used merely to exchange information or maintain interpersonal relationships; they also provide spaces for visual representation, identity performance, and the production of cultural meanings. Through photographs, short videos, captions, personal narratives, and interactive features, users can select and communicate particular aspects of themselves to different audiences. These practices demonstrate that digital identity is not simply a reflection of offline identity but is also shaped

through communication practices and social interactions. Goffman (1959) explains that individuals manage the impressions they create in social situations (Ytreberg, 2024), while Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is a process through which meaning is produced and interpreted through cultural signs and systems (Hall et al., 2024). In digital environments, these perspectives help explain how everyday online activities become meaningful practices of identity construction.

The formation of digital identity becomes particularly significant when examining young women in urban environments (Chang & Tian, 2021). Jakarta provides a relevant context because urban social life brings together diverse cultural backgrounds, modern lifestyles, popular culture, and changing patterns of social interaction. Young women may encounter different expectations concerning appearance, relationships, independence, career aspirations, and appropriate forms of femininity. These expectations can emerge from family relationships, peer groups, local cultural values, popular media, and online communities. Social media offers opportunities to express individuality and explore alternative identities, but it can also expose users to social comparison and pressure to conform to particular standards. Research on social comparison has identified associations between online comparison and body-image concerns, indicating that digital participation may have implications beyond communication alone. Nevertheless, the experiences of young women should not be understood exclusively through psychological outcomes because their online practices also involve cultural meanings, gender expectations, and negotiations over social recognition.

Theoretically, identity is better understood as a dynamic process than as a fixed personal attribute. Hall (1990) conceptualizes cultural identity in relation to historical experience, representation, and continuing processes of becoming. From this perspective, identity is produced through the ways individuals position themselves and are positioned by others within particular cultural contexts (Yang et al., 2021). Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective further explains how individuals manage self-presentation according to social situations and anticipated audiences. Meanwhile (Ercan & Hendriks, 2022), Mead (1934) highlights the role of social interaction and significant symbols in the development of the self (Husin et al., 2021). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that digital identity emerges through the relationship between self-understanding, cultural representation, and interaction with others. Likes, comments, audience responses, and criticism may influence how users interpret their online presentations, although such responses do not necessarily

determine their identities. Young women may accept, adapt, reinterpret, or resist the meanings attached to their digital representations.

Previous scholarship provides important foundations for understanding these processes. Research on online self-presentation highlights how users curate information and manage impressions in networked environments (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Studies of social comparison and body image also demonstrate the importance of examining the social and psychological implications of appearance-oriented content. However, these research directions do not automatically explain how subjective experiences, audience interpretations, and culturally embedded gender expectations interact in the construction of digital identity. A cultural communication perspective is therefore necessary to investigate not only what young women display online but also how their representations acquire meaning, how audiences interpret them, and how cultural values influence their choices. This study addresses that analytical need by bringing together identity experiences, self-representation, audience responses, and cultural negotiation within a single interpretive framework.

The novelty of this study lies in its proposed integration of these interconnected dimensions to develop a conceptual model of digital identity negotiation among young urban women. Rather than treating identity formation as a direct consequence of social media exposure, the study examines it as a dynamic process involving urban cultural contexts, personal meaning-making, digital self-representation, social interaction, and the negotiation of cultural expectations. The proposed model will be developed through empirical analysis and interpreted using Hall's theory of representation, Goffman's theory of self-presentation, and Mead's theory of symbolic interaction. Its contribution will depend on how clearly the resulting relationships are demonstrated and distinguished from existing conceptual approaches.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how young women in urban Jakarta experience and interpret identity formation through social media; how they communicate cultural meanings through digital self-representation; how they negotiate cultural values, social norms, symbols, and gender expectations; and how these processes can be synthesized into a conceptual model of digital identity formation. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to cultural communication scholarship and provide a contextual understanding of young women's agency in navigating identity within contemporary digital environments.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore how young women experience, interpret, and negotiate their digital

identities through social media (Silverman, 2022). Phenomenology is appropriate for understanding individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they assign to particular phenomena. The study draws on cultural communication perspectives, particularly representation, self-presentation, and symbolic interaction, to examine how digital identities are expressed and interpreted within specific cultural contexts. The research will be conducted in urban Jakarta, focusing on women aged 18–25 who live or engage in significant daily activities in the city and actively use Instagram and/or TikTok. Participants will be selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. Snowball sampling may also be used to identify additional participants who meet the established criteria. The number of participants will depend on the depth, relevance, and adequacy of the data obtained.

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and content analysis. Interviews will explore participants' experiences of online self-representation, motivations for sharing content, interpretations of audience responses, and negotiations of cultural values and gender expectations. Digital observation will examine images, captions, language, symbols, hashtags, and interaction patterns. Content analysis will complement these methods by examining relevant digital materials provided by participants or accessed with appropriate authorization. Data analysis will follow the thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process will involve familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. The analysis will identify patterns related to self-representation, cultural meanings, audience responses, social norms, and identity negotiation. Relationships among themes will then be mapped to develop a conceptual model grounded in the empirical findings.

Data credibility will be strengthened through source and method triangulation by comparing information from different participants and across interviews, digital observations, and content analysis. Research records will document coding decisions and theme development to support analytical transparency. Ethical considerations will include informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data storage. Pseudonyms will be used, and identifying information will be removed where necessary. Participants' digital materials will be used only with appropriate authorization, and publicly accessible content will not automatically be considered permission for reproduction. These procedures aim to ensure an ethically responsible understanding of how young women in urban Jakarta construct and negotiate their digital identities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences and Interpretations of Young Urban Women in the Formation and Negotiation of Self-Identity through Social Media

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of young urban women in using social media and to understand the processes involved in the formation and negotiation of their self-identity. The data gathered covered motivations for social media use, methods of self-presentation, and the meanings attributed to audience responses. Digital observation was employed to examine the informants' activities and patterns of self-representation analyzing their posts, comments, visual content, and relevant interactions. Content analysis was used to identify themes, symbols, language, and personal narratives that represent the digital identities of these young women. These three techniques were integrated to understand how personal experiences, digital interactions, and cultural contexts contribute to the formation of self-identity.

The formation of self-identity among young urban women via social media can be understood as a process shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and adjustments to one's cultural environment. Social media serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a space for self-presentation, the sharing of experiences, and the receipt of feedback from others. Through the use of photos, videos, language, and personal narratives, young women are able to construct a self-image that aligns with the values, interests, and identity traits they wish to highlight. Simultaneously, audience responses can influence how these women evaluate their own self-representations, though the extent of this influence varies from person to person. Thus, digital identity is not solely the product of individual decision-making; it is also deeply intertwined with the social relationships and cultural contexts in which it is embedded.

These findings can be analyzed using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which defines representation as a process of meaning-making through language, images, and symbols (Ayuanda et al., 2024; Ica, 2024). In the context of social media, posts by young women do not merely depict their daily lives; they also convey specific meanings about the individuals themselves. The choice of photographs, style of dress, use of language, and the activities shared can reflect the identity one wishes to present to an audience. However, the meanings generated are not always entirely within the content creator's control, as the audience may interpret them based on their own individual experiences and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, digital identity should be understood as the outcome of an interaction between self-representation and the process of social interpretation.

Erving Goffman's ideas on the presentation of self also help explain how young women manage impressions on social media (Anastasia Hutagalung, 2022). Individuals can choose what information to display while simultaneously limiting the disclosure of aspects of their lives considered private. The discrepancy between published content and daily lived experience suggests that digital representation is the result of a deliberate selection and management of one's self-presentation. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that the

displayed identity is "false." Rather, such a representation may simply be one facet of the self that an individual chooses to reveal within a specific context of interaction.

Meanwhile, George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism offers an explanation of the relationship between social interaction and the construction of self-meaning (Muliawan et al., 2026). Comments, expressions of appreciation, or criticisms from an audience can serve as points of consideration for young women as they evaluate how they present themselves. This process demonstrates that an individual's self-understanding can evolve through interactions with others. Even so, audience responses do not automatically dictate an individual's identity, as young women retain the capacity to choose, interpret, and weigh such responses in light of their own personal beliefs.

Overall, the formation of digital identity among young urban women can be understood as a dynamic and continuously negotiated process. Personal experiences serve as a foundation for individuals to determine the identity they wish to project, while social media provides the means to communicate that identity to the public. Digital interactions subsequently elicit responses that may reinforce or alter an individual's identity or, conversely, be rejected by the individual. This process reveals the interplay between personal agency and social expectations in the construction of identity. Thus, young women are not merely passive recipients of social media's influence; rather, they are active agents with the capacity to shape how they are represented.

This interpretation aligns with research by Rusli and Fatra (2025), which indicates that the self-identity of Generation Z in Makassar is shaped through the interaction between social media, peer groups, digital literacy, and local cultural values (Rusli & Fatra, 2025). These findings also resonate with the work of Salsabila and Listyani (2023), who explain that female university students express their self-concept through symbols, appearance, and content on TikTok (Salsabila & Listyani, 2023). Meanwhile, research by Fauzan and Harahap (2025) highlights the role of Instagram in self-expression, while also noting the emergence of social pressures and discrepancies between one's online identity and offline life (Fauzan & Harahap, 2025). Furthermore, a study by Permana (2024) reinforces the understanding that social interactions and collective narratives play a part in the formation of gender identity. The present study contributes to this discourse by framing personal experience, self-representation, and the negotiation of cultural meaning as an interconnected set of processes (Permana, 2024).

Theoretically, this discussion underscores the relevance of Stuart Hall's theory of representation for understanding digital identity as a product of the creation and negotiation of meaning within a cultural context. Concepts from Goffman and Mead further clarify how impression management and social interaction contribute to this process. In practical terms, this understanding may encourage young women to engage more reflectively with social media, particularly when navigating pressures to meet the expectations of their audience. Digital literacy also needs to encompass the ability to understand self-representation,

critically evaluate social responses, and maintain boundaries between public expression and personal privacy.

Cultural Communication Practices through the Self-Representation of Young Women on Social Media

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore how young urban women represent their identities on social media through visuals, language, symbols, activities, and personal narratives. Digital observation was employed by examining the informants' posts to understand patterns of self-presentation and the cultural messages conveyed. Content analysis was used to identify the meanings embedded in photos, videos, captions, and the symbols utilized. Together, these three techniques help reveal how young women use social media as a medium for cultural communication and the expression of self-identity. The findings were then interpreted through the lens of Stuart Hall's theory of representation to understand the processes of meaning-making and exchange within digital communication practices.

The self-representation of young women on social media can be understood as a cultural communication practice involving the use of visuals, language, symbols, activities, and personal narratives. Through photos, videos, captions, and digital interactions, young women gain a space to project an image of themselves while simultaneously communicating their values, experiences, and the social environments that shape them. In the context of this study, in-depth interviews, digital observation, and content analysis were directed toward understanding how these elements are used to construct messages of identity. However, as the specific data from the interviews and examples of the informants' posts have not yet been presented in detail, this account serves as a conceptual interpretation that requires further substantiation through empirical research evidence.

The findings explored through these practices of self-representation are closely linked to Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Hall views representation not merely as an act of depicting reality, but as a process of meaning-making through language and systems of signs (Ica, 2024). On social media, elements such as photographs, clothing choices, facial expressions, word usage, and even the setting can function as signs that convey specific messages. Consequently, posts by young women cannot be understood solely by what appears on the screen; they must be interpreted by considering the intended meaning and the surrounding cultural context. Such interpretations must be grounded in the accounts provided by the informants and the context of the posts, rather than relying solely on the researcher's own assumptions.

The use of visuals and self-presentation can also be analyzed through Erving Goffman's concept of self-presentation. Social media serves as a space where individuals choose specific aspects of themselves to reveal to an audience (Anastasia Hutagalung, 2022). The selection of photographs, the crafting of captions, and the determination of what content to publish can be understood as a form of impression management. From a dramaturgical perspective, posts visible to others function like a "front stage" a space where an individual

projects an image deemed appropriate for the situation and the audience. However, this selectivity does not necessarily imply a false identity; an individual can highlight certain facets of themselves without negating other experiences or aspects of their personality.

George Herbert Mead's perspective on symbolic interactionism helps explain that the meaning of identity is not shaped solely by individual decisions but also evolves through social interaction (Muliawan et al., 2026). Language, symbols, and expressions acquire meaning when they are used and understood within the context of relationships with others. Audience responses such as comments or other forms of social recognition can serve as a basis for reflection, allowing account holders to evaluate their own self-representation. Nevertheless, the impact of such responses cannot be assumed to be the same for every young woman; it is essential to gather input from the informants to determine whether these audience reactions are embraced, ignored, or even questioned.

The relationship between content creators and their audiences can be further examined through Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Messages crafted by account owners are not always received in accordance with their original intent. Audiences may accept the intended meaning, interpret it through a process of negotiation, or arrive at an entirely opposing reading. Such variations in interpretation demonstrate that cultural communication on social media is a process of exchanging meanings, rather than a one-way transmission of messages. To apply this concept empirically, research must present specific examples of messages alongside evidence of how audiences interpret them.

Conceptually, the self-representation of young women on social media can be understood as a process of cultural communication that brings together personal choices, the symbols employed, and social interpretation. Digital identity is not merely displayed; it acquires meaning through cultural context and interaction with an audience. Consequently, self-representation is best understood as a process open to change and negotiation, rather than as a fixed depiction of identity.

This perspective aligns with the work of Rusli and Fatra (2025), who highlight the interplay between social media, peer groups, and local cultural values in the identity formation of Generation Z (Rusli & Fatra, 2025). Salsabila and Listyani (2023) also emphasize the use of symbols, appearance, and TikTok content in how female university students express their self-concept (Salsabila & Listyani, 2023). Meanwhile, Fauzan and Harahap (2025) illustrate the dual role of Instagram facilitating self-expression while simultaneously imposing social pressure (Fauzan & Harahap, 2025). Permana (2024) further identifies social interaction and collective narratives as components in the formation of gender identity (Permana, 2024). This research seeks to expand upon these discussions by focusing on cultural communication practices encompassing visuals, language, symbols, activities, and audience interpretation within the context of young urban women.

Theoretically, this study integrates Hall's theory of representation with Goffman's concept of self-presentation and Mead's symbolic interactionism, framing digital identity as a meaning-making process that unfolds through appearance and social interaction. The

encoding/decoding model strengthens the analysis by accounting for potential discrepancies in meaning between content creators and their audiences. In practical terms, this understanding can encourage young women to develop critical digital literacy specifically regarding the selection of symbols, the interpretation of audience responses, and the consideration of privacy boundaries. For educators and the broader social environment, these research findings can serve as a foundation for fostering digital spaces that are more receptive to diverse forms of identity expression, moving beyond judgments based solely on appearance.

Negotiating Values, Norms, Cultural Symbols, and Social Expectations in the Construction of Young Women's Digital Identities

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the cultural values and norms that influence young women as they construct their digital identities, including social expectations regarding appearance, behavior, and lifestyle. Digital observation was employed to identify how local cultural values and digital culture are reflected in the informants' posts, interactions, and self-representations. Content analysis was used to examine the strategies of adaptation, compromise, reinterpretation, and resistance manifested within their social media content. The interviews also explored the roles of family, peers, communities, and digital audiences in shaping the informants' decisions when presenting their identities. All data were analyzed through the lens of Stuart Hall's cultural communication theory to understand how young women exercise agency in negotiating cultural meanings and shaping their digital identities.

The construction of digital identities among urban young women is inextricably linked to the intersection of personal values, cultural norms, and the social expectations prevalent in their environments. While social media provides a space for self-expression, it simultaneously serves as a site where diverse perspectives on women's appearance, behavior, and lifestyle converge. Through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and content analysis, this research aims to uncover how young women navigate the influences of family, peers, communities, and digital audiences when determining the identities they wish to project. The primary focus lies on the strategies of adaptation, compromise, reinterpretation, and resistance employed in response to social demands. As specific interview data and examples of posts have not yet been presented, the following account serves as an analytical interpretation that should be adjusted in light of actual fieldwork findings.

Stuart Hall's perspective on representation provides a framework for understanding that cultural values and norms do not simply appear in social media; rather, they are conveyed and imbued with meaning through systems of signs (Ica, 2024). Choices in clothing, linguistic style, religious symbols, daily activities, and lifestyle can all carry specific cultural messages. However, the meanings of these symbols are not necessarily singular. What one group perceives as an expression of modesty, for instance, may not be interpreted in the same way by another. Consequently, the digital identities of young women must be

examined by considering the social context surrounding the use of these symbols, as well as how they are interpreted by the audience.

The negotiation of identity can also be explained through Hall's concept that meaning is dynamic and open to interpretation. Young women do not always accept cultural norms in their entirety; instead, they may adapt, reinterpret, or question the application of these norms within their digital lives. Adaptation strategies are evident when an individual follows the conventions prevalent in their environment, while compromise occurs when they attempt to reconcile personal desires with social expectations. Reinterpretation allows a value to be understood from a different perspective, whereas resistance signifies a refusal to accept certain norms. The existence of such strategies must be evidenced through the narratives of informants and the content being observed, rather than assumed to apply uniformly to all participants.

Erving Goffman's ideas on the presentation of self help to explain the considerations young women make when projecting their identities to an audience (Mokos, 2025). The awareness that their posts may be viewed by family, friends, communities, and other users leads individuals to carefully weigh the content they choose to publish. This process relates to "impression management" the effort to cultivate a specific image in the eyes of others. Nevertheless, adjusting one's presentation does not necessarily mean that an individual has lost the freedom to define themselves. Rather, it can serve as a way to maintain social comfort, while simultaneously delineating the boundaries between personal expression and the demands of one's environment. Meanwhile, George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interaction posits that an individual's self-understanding develops through interaction with and the interpretation of the attitudes of others (Muliawan et al., 2026). Family, peers, communities, and digital audiences can all serve as points of reference when making decisions regarding self-representation. However, environmental influence does not always lead to conformity. Young women retain the capacity to accept, filter, or reject the perspectives they encounter. This is where agency becomes crucial: digital identity is shaped not merely by social pressure, but also by an individual's ability to interpret such pressure and determine their own stance toward it.

Conceptually, the negotiation of digital identity is a process of reconciling personal desires with cultural values and social expectations elements that do not always align. Young women are not merely passive recipients of norms; rather, they are individuals capable of choosing how to conform, reframe cultural meanings, or distance themselves from specific expectations. Thus, digital identity is shaped through a dynamic interplay between social structures and individual agency.

This perspective aligns with the work of Rusli and Fatra (2025), who highlight the connection between the identity of Generation Z, their peer groups, and local cultural values (Rusli & Fatra, 2025). Salsabila and Listyani (2023) demonstrate that symbols and personal appearance serve as means for expressing one's self-concept on TikTok (Salsabila & Listyani, 2023). Meanwhile, Fauzan and Harahap (2025) point out that social media can facilitate self-

expression while simultaneously imposing social pressures (Fauzan & Harahap, 2025). Permana (2024) further emphasizes the role of social interaction and collective narratives in the formation of gender identity (Permana, 2024). This discussion has the potential to expand upon existing research by centering the negotiation strategies and agency of young women as the primary focus of analysis within the intersection of local and digital cultures.

Theoretically, this discussion reinforces the relevance of Hall's theory of representation for interpreting digital identity as a process of meaning production and negotiation, supported by Goffman's concepts of self-presentation and Mead's symbolic interactionism. In practical terms, such an understanding can foster the development of digital literacy, enabling young women to recognize social pressures, consider the boundaries of privacy, and make decisions in a reflective manner. Furthermore, families, educators, and communities should cultivate an environment that values diverse forms of identity expression, rather than imposing a single standard of appearance or behavior as the sole benchmark for young women.

A Conceptual Model of Digital Identity Formation Among Young Urban Women

In-depth interviews were conducted to synthesize the experiences and interpretations of young urban women as they construct their identities through social media. Digital observation and content analysis were employed to identify key elements in the formation of digital identity, including cultural context, self-representation, digital interaction, and audience response. The analysis suggests, at a conceptual level, that personal experiences and the urban cultural context influence how young women present their identities. Audience responses play a role in the process of negotiating cultural meanings, which may prompt young women to maintain, adjust, or alter their self-representations. The synthesis of these three data collection techniques serves to formulate a conceptual model of digital identity formation among young urban women, contributing to the field of cultural communication studies.

The formation of digital identity among young urban women can be understood as a process involving personal experiences, cultural context, self-representation, digital interaction, and audience response. These five elements do not exist in isolation; rather, they are interconnected, shaping how young women perceive and present themselves on social media. Based on an analytical framework incorporating in-depth interviews, digital observation, and content analysis, personal experiences and the cultural environment serve as the starting point for understanding choices in self-representation. Subsequent interactions and audience responses may then be taken into account when deciding whether to maintain, adjust, or modify the identity being presented. Nevertheless, the relationships between these components require further validation through empirical evidence gathered during the research.

This conceptual model draws upon Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which posits that identity and meaning are constructed through language, imagery, symbols, and cultural practices (Ica, 2024). In the context of social media, young women do not merely showcase

their daily lives; they also construct representations of who they are and how they wish to be perceived. Personal experiences and the context of urban culture can influence the selection of symbols, language, lifestyle, and forms of expression employed. The meaning of these representations is not entirely determined by the account holder, as the audience may interpret them based on their own individual experiences and cultural frameworks. Thus, Hall's theory provides a foundation for viewing digital identity as a product of the creation and negotiation of meaning, rather than as a fixed, immutable self-image.

The components of self-representation within this model can be further explored through Erving Goffman's concept of self-presentation (Ytreberg, 2024). Individuals tend to consider how they will be perceived by others when presenting themselves in a public space. On social media, this process is evident in the selection of photographs, the crafting of narratives, the management of privacy settings, and the decisions regarding whether to publish or withhold specific content. Audience responses become part of the social situation under consideration, though their influence may vary from one individual to another. Goffman's perspective helps explain how young women manage their self-presentation, while Hall's theory aids in analyzing the cultural meanings embedded within those presentations.

Furthermore, George Herbert Mead's ideas on symbolic interactionism clarify the relationship between digital interaction and the formation of identity. An individual's self-understanding develops through social processes, including the interpretation of others' reactions (Muliawan et al., 2026). Comments, support, criticism, or recognition from an audience can serve as material for reflection, prompting young women to evaluate their own self-representations. However, such responses do not automatically dictate changes in identity; individuals retain the agency to accept, consider, or reject the perspectives they encounter. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model is also relevant, illustrating that the messages conveyed through posts are not always interpreted in accordance with the creator's original intent. Audiences may accept a message, interpret it in a negotiated way, or assign it an opposing meaning. Such differences allow for the negotiation of cultural meanings, which in turn becomes a factor in the formation of digital identity. Therefore, the flow of the model should not be viewed merely as a linear process, but rather as a relationship that facilitates feedback between self-representation, interaction, and personal interpretation.

Conceptually, this model frames the formation of digital identity as a dynamic and iterative process. The urban cultural context influences an individual's experiences and self-conception; these experiences are reflected in digital representations, while interactions with and responses from an audience create space for the negotiation of meaning. The outcomes of such negotiations can shape subsequent representations, allowing digital identity to continuously evolve. The arrows in the model indicate initial analytical relationships rather than empirically proven cause-and-effect sequences.

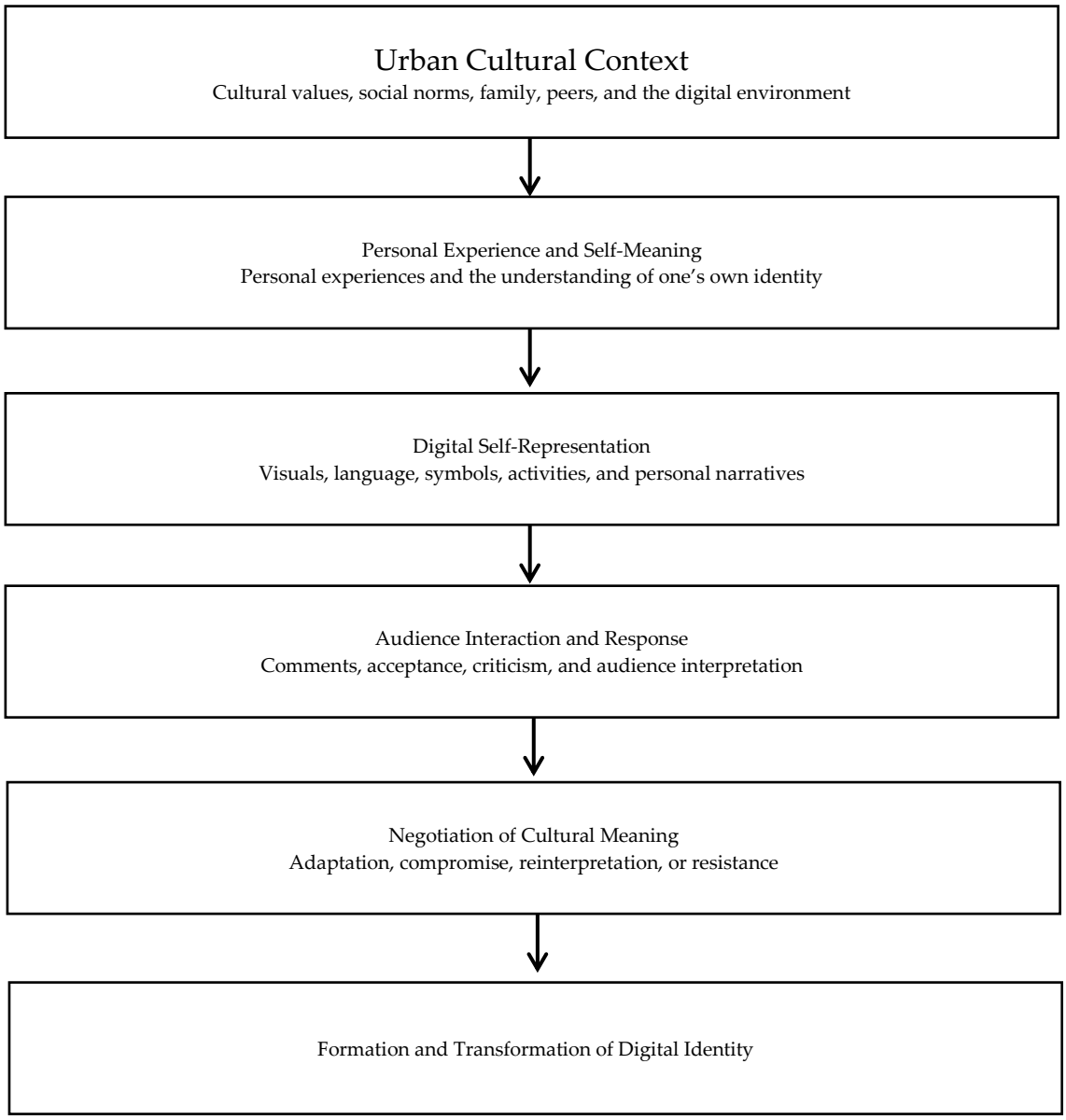


Figure 1: A Model of Digital Identity Negotiation Among Young Urban Women

This model can be supplemented with a feedback loop represented by an arrow extending from the formation of digital identity back toward personal experience and self-interpretation. In other words, an identity that has been presented, along with the responses received, can influence how young women understand and represent themselves in future instances. This model aligns with the work of Rusli and Fatra (2025), who highlight the interplay between social media, peer groups, and local culture in the identity formation of Generation Z (Rusli & Fatra, 2025). Salsabila and Listyani (2023) demonstrate the significance of symbols and appearance in expressing one's self-concept via TikTok (Salsabila & Listyani, 2023). Meanwhile, Fauzan and Harahap (2025) show that social media can facilitate self-expression while simultaneously imposing social pressure (Fauzan & Harahap, 2025). Permana (2024) emphasizes the role of interaction and collective narratives in the formation

of gender identity (Permana, 2024). The proposed model has the potential to synthesize these aspects into a framework that underscores the interconnectedness of personal experience, self-representation, audience response, and the negotiation of cultural meaning.

Theoretically, this model offers an integrative framework for examining digital identity, drawing upon Hall's theory of representation, Goffman's concept of self-presentation, and Mead's symbolic interactionism. Its contribution lies in positioning the negotiation of meaning as a bridge between personal experience, cultural context, and digital interaction. Practically, this model can serve as a foundation for developing digital literacy initiatives that encourage young women to be more reflective in how they present their identities, respond to audience feedback, and manage their privacy. For educators and communities, the model can also assist in fostering a digital environment that values diverse forms of identity expression.

CONCLUSION

The formation of digital identity among young urban women is a dynamic process involving personal experiences, cultural contexts, self-representation, digital interactions, and audience responses. Social media serves not merely as a tool for self-expression, but also as a space for cultural communication where the meaning of identity is shaped, conveyed, and interpreted. Through visuals, language, symbols, and personal narratives, young women can project an identity that reflects their own experiences and values.

Stuart Hall's theory of representation posits that the meaning of identity is not fixed; rather, it is constructed and negotiated within a socio-cultural context. Erving Goffman's ideas help explain strategies of self-presentation, while George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism provides insight into the role of social interaction in the formation of one's sense of self. Furthermore, Hall's encoding/decoding model demonstrates that messages conveyed are not always understood by the audience in the way the creator intended. Such discrepancies in interpretation can, in fact, become part of the process of negotiating digital identity. Consequently, the conceptual model for this research frames digital identity as the outcome of an interaction between an individual and their socio-cultural environment. In practical terms, this understanding is essential for fostering critical digital literacy, raising awareness about privacy, and promoting appreciation for the diverse ways in which young women express their identities. Ultimately, any empirical conclusions must be aligned with the findings from verified field research.

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