

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SELF-PERCEPTION

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Abstract

In today's digital era, social media has become a dominant force that not only facilitates communication but also significantly influences individual self-perception. This study explores how the widespread use of social media platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp—affects the way individuals view themselves, particularly through processes of social comparison, identity construction, and exposure to curated online content. Utilizing a qualitative method with a library research approach, this paper analyzes various theoretical frameworks, including the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, to understand user behavior and the psychological implications of digital engagement. The findings indicate that external digital stimuli can impact both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of self-perception, often creating tension between real and virtual identities. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the critical role of digital literacy in fostering mindful and responsible media consumption. As social media continues to evolve, enhancing digital competence is essential to mitigate its negative effects on self-perception and to promote psychological well-being in the digital age.

Keywords: self-perception; social media; digital literacy; identity; social comparison; psychological impact

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, social media has become an inseparable part of daily life. The rapid advancement of technology, particularly in the development of social media platforms, has significantly reshaped the way individuals interact, communicate, and perceive the world. As these technologies continue to evolve and proliferate, their presence has become increasingly prominent across all layers of society. According to a report by *We Are Social*, Indonesia had approximately 167 million active social media users as of January 2023, representing 60.4% of the national population. Additionally, *Data Reportal* indicates that around 78.5% of internet users are estimated to have at least one social media account, a number that is expected to grow steadily in the coming years.

In Indonesia, social media is no longer merely a communication tool; it has rapidly developed into a multifaceted platform encompassing personal branding, business, entertainment, and marketing. Popular platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp are not only used for interaction but also serve as spaces for identity expression and public engagement.

However, the vast and continuous influx of information, coupled with the curated nature of social media content, plays a substantial role in shaping individuals' self-perception. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity frequently arise when individuals compare themselves to the seemingly ideal lives portrayed online. These portrayals, often filtered and selectively posted, can distort one's sense of reality and authenticity. Consequently, what individuals see, read, and consume on social media can have a profound psychological impact.

The concept of *self-perception*—how individuals view and evaluate themselves—is increasingly relevant in the age of social media. Social comparison, driven by the constant exposure to others' curated content, may lead individuals to adopt values, behaviors, or identities that do not align with their true selves. This phenomenon underscores the importance of setting personal

boundaries and developing self-awareness to maintain psychological well-being amidst the overwhelming influence of digital content.

Therefore, understanding how social media influences self-perception is crucial, particularly among users who are highly active in digital spaces. This study aims to explore the extent to which social media affects individuals' self-concepts, with the goal of contributing to broader discussions on mental health, identity, and digital literacy in the modern era.

METHOD

This study utilizes a **qualitative research method** with a **library research approach**. The library research method involves collecting and analyzing information from various credible and authoritative sources such as books, scientific journals, academic articles, and research reports. This approach enables the researcher to explore the topic in depth through the lens of existing theories and previous studies, without conducting direct field observations or experiments.¹

The use of library research in this study is based on the belief that theoretical and conceptual understanding plays a crucial role in analyzing the influence of social media on self-perception. By engaging with a diverse range of literature, the researcher aims to construct a comprehensive framework that supports the arguments and findings presented in this paper.²

The research process was carried out through several stages. First, the researcher prepared all necessary tools and materials, including access to academic databases and relevant reference management software. Second, a wide range of sources was collected and compiled into a working bibliography. Third, the researcher organized the available time to allow for critical reading, reflection, and synthesis of key ideas. Finally, relevant information was extracted, noted, and categorized based on recurring themes and theoretical relevance.

Through this structured and reflective process, the study seeks to provide a well-founded analysis of how social media may influence individuals' self-perceptions, particularly in relation to identity formation, emotional well-being, and self-evaluation in the digital age.³

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Concept of Self-Perception and Social Media

The emergence of social media can be traced back to the 1990s, when Tim Berners-Lee introduced the World Wide Web (WWW), which later revolutionized digital communication. According to White, social media refers to electronic forms of communication accessed online, allowing users to share information in the form of ideas, personal messages, and other content—either in community-based or non-community-based formats. The growth of information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly accelerated the development of social media, resulting in a continuously expanding variety of platforms.⁴

¹ Dinie Anggraeni Dewi, Solihin Ichas Hamid, Farah Annisa, Monica Octafianti, Pingkan Regi Genika, "Menumbuhkan Karakter Siswa melalui Pemanfaatan Literasi digital," *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*. 5, no. 6 (2021): Hal. 5251, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v5i6.1609>.

² Muhammad RijalFadli, "Memahami Desain Metode Penelitian Kualitatif," *Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia* 21, no. 1 (2021): Hal. 33, <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v21i1.38075>.

³ Miza Nina Adlini, Anisya Hanifa Dinda, Sarah Yulianda, Octavia Chotimah, Sauda Julia Merliyana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka," *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan* 6, no. 1 (1 Maret 2022): Hal. 975.

Hanifa Wulan Ramadhan, Sri Rum Giyarsih, "Hubungan Media Sosial Dengan Persepsi Remaja Tentang Kesehatan Reproduksi Menurut Wilayah Perkotaan Dan Perdesaan Di Yogyakarta," 2017, Hal. 2.

Self-perception refers to the way individuals view their own characteristics ("self" or "I") and their relationships with others.⁵ The formation of self-perception is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include emotions, attitudes, personality, prejudices, desires, attention, physical condition, psychological disturbances, needs, and motivation. Meanwhile, external factors such as family background, information received, knowledge, intensity, size, contrast, repetition, and novelty also contribute to perception. Among these, external influences play a significant role in shaping self-perception through social media.

According to Damayanti, perception begins with stimuli received by the senses. These stimuli are then selected and organized, and finally interpreted by the individual, forming their perception. The Correspondent Inference Theory explains that individuals form perceptions of others based on observed and interpreted information, which supports the development of behaviors and decisions in social interactions.⁶

2. The Relationship Between Social Media and Self-Perception

In today's society, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, offering countless platforms for individuals to interact, share personal experiences, and construct online identities. The rise of digital communication has enabled people to express themselves and engage with others in ways that transcend geographical and temporal limitations. One key effect of social media is the tendency for users to engage in social comparison—often unconsciously—by comparing themselves to others whose curated lives are portrayed on various platforms. This process has a profound impact on self-perception, influencing individuals both positively and negatively.

Social media also reinforces certain beauty standards and ideals of success, which may create psychological pressure and distort users' self-image. The ongoing development of globalization and ICT has contributed to the increasing presence and influence of social media. Initially introduced in the 1990s through the invention of the WWW, the internet has grown into a global network accessible to the public. White defines social media as online-based electronic communication that allows users to obtain opinions, messages, and information in both community and non-community forms. With technological advancements, social media platforms have continued to diversify and evolve.

Social media is essentially a digital platform that enables users to participate, share, and create content. It facilitates social interaction by allowing users to exchange information, ideas, and various forms of content in virtual communities. The increased use of social media is driven by users' interest and attention, which is evident in the ways individuals engage with these platforms.

Two prominent theories help explain the dynamics of social media usage. The **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)** posits that individuals use media to fulfill specific needs and desires. According to this theory, users' behaviors are motivated by the expectation that media will provide satisfaction or meet particular goals. These needs often relate to the quality and quantity of social media engagement. Another relevant theory is the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, which suggests that users adopt technologies such as social media because they perceive them as useful and easy to use. TAM helps to explain the varying levels of engagement based on users' interest and perceived benefits.⁷

Social media has become deeply embedded in modern life, shaped by the forces of globalization and technological innovation. With the widespread availability of smartphones, individuals are now connected virtually anytime and anywhere. Social media plays a central role in facilitating education,

⁵ Lira Aisafitri dan Kiayati Yusriyah, "Kecanduan Media Sosial (FoMO) Pada Generasi Milenia," *Universitas Gunadarma* 4, no. 1 (2021): Hal. 91.

⁶ Rinda Saskiona Nerita dan Rakhmaditya Dewi Noorrizki, "Persepsi Terhadap Citra Diri Pengguna Media Sosial Instagram," *Universitas Negeri Malang* 2 (2022): Hal. 438.

⁷ Hanifa Wulan Ramadhan, Sri Rum Giyarsih, "Hubungan Media Sosial Dengan Persepsi Remaja Tentang Kesehatan Reproduksi Menurut Wilayah Perkotaan Dan Perdesaan Di Yogyakarta," Hal. 2.

entertainment, and communication. However, its influence also extends to shaping users' behavior and thinking patterns. This transformation depends heavily on how social media is used—its impact can be either constructive or harmful.

The rapid rise of digital media has led to both positive and negative consequences. Negative effects include cyberbullying, the spread of fake news, exposure to pornography, and incidents of online sexual violence. On the other hand, social media offers significant benefits such as enhancing learning processes, facilitating communication, and providing quick access to information.

Self-perception plays a vital role in cultivating awareness and promoting responsible social media use. Several factors influence individual perception, including cultural traditions, education level, social background, personal characteristics, and environmental conditions.⁸ Therefore, individuals must develop **digital literacy** to critically evaluate and respond to the information they encounter online, especially in the face of misinformation or hoaxes.⁹

Digital literacy empowers individuals to engage in effective communication, even in the absence of face-to-face interactions.¹⁰ It also plays a crucial role in shaping cognitive processes and determining how people assess the credibility of information. Social media exerts a powerful influence on users' worldview, shaping how they interpret and relate to their surroundings.¹¹

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and process digital information from a variety of sources. It is essential for developing knowledge in educational contexts, fostering curiosity, and encouraging creativity. Building digital literacy helps individuals navigate the overwhelming flow of information and keep pace with rapid technological changes.^{12 13}

The application of digital literacy in relation to self-perception on social media involves several key stages:¹⁴

- Understanding the concept of digital literacy;
- Developing skills in using digital media responsibly;
- Applying digital tools effectively in education;
- Cultivating personal competence and behavioral awareness.

⁸ Muhamad Hamzah, Arief Suci Kurniasihanto, Zidni Ilman, Hafidz Al-Faridho, Qanita, "Peran Literasi Digital Dalam Pembentukan Karakter," *Universitas Pamulan.*, Hal. 67.

⁹ Stephanie Wimona, Riris Loisa, "Konsep Diri Individu Pengguna Media Sosial," *Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta*, 2, 6 (16 Januari 2022): Hal. 318.

¹⁰ Cecep Darmawan, Hana Silvana, Heni Nuraeni Zaenudin, Ridwan Effendi, "Pengembangan hubungan interpersonal remaja dalam penggunaan media sosial di Kota Bandung," *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia*. Volume 7, no. 2 (Desember 2019): Hal. 159.

¹¹ Erga Yuhandra, Suwari Akhmaddhian, Anthon Fathanudien, Teten Tendiyanto, "Penyuluhan Hukum Tentang Dampak Positif Dan Negatif Penggunaan Gadget Dan Media Sosial," *Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Kuningan, Kuningan, Indonesia*. 4, no. 1 (2021): Hal. 78.

¹² Diah Mustika Anggraeni, Sunarso, "Persepsi tentang kampanye politik melalui media sosial dan partisipasi politik pemilih pemula pada Pilkada Kabupaten Sleman tahun 2020," *Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Sleman, Indonesia* 11, no. 3 (2022): Hal. 278.

¹³ Haickal Attallah Naufal, "Literasi Digital," *Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta*, t.t., 197, <https://doi.org/10.53947/perspekt.v1i2>. Hal. 32.

¹⁴ Muh. Yamin, Nur Fakhrunnisaa, "Persepsi Literasi Digital Mahasiswa Calon Guru Iain Palopo," *Pendidikan Agama Islam, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palopo* 7, no. 1 (Agustus 2022): Hal. 5.

Through these stages, individuals can continuously develop their abilities and achieve a healthy balance between self-awareness and the rapid shifts brought about by globalization and technological advancement.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

In an age where digital connectivity defines much of daily human interaction, social media has emerged not only as a communication tool, but also as a powerful force shaping the way individuals perceive themselves and their surroundings. The ubiquity of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp has created a new space where identities are constructed, validated, and sometimes distorted—consciously or unconsciously—through curated representations of life.

This study highlights that self-perception, a core component of individual identity, is increasingly influenced by what people see, consume, and internalize on social media. The interplay between internal factors (such as personality, motivation, and psychological needs) and external factors (such as information exposure, social comparison, and online interaction) has resulted in a complex process where self-perception is no longer formed solely through real-world experiences, but is significantly mediated by virtual realities.

Theoretical insights from the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model offer a valuable framework to understand users' motivations in engaging with social media. These frameworks reveal that beyond entertainment and connection, there lies a deeper need for affirmation, belonging, and even validation—often fulfilled through likes, comments, and followers. Yet, the gratification sought is not always accompanied by emotional well-being. Instead, it can lead to anxiety, inadequacy, and identity confusion when individuals measure their worth against the filtered lives of others.

This underscores the importance of fostering digital literacy—not merely as a technical skill, but as a cognitive and ethical framework that enables individuals to navigate, interpret, and critically assess digital content. Digital literacy equips users to set boundaries, maintain awareness of online influence, and develop resilience against the psychological pressures induced by social media.

Moreover, the findings call attention to the need for a more conscious and mindful use of technology, especially among adolescents and young adults, who are in critical stages of identity formation. Educational institutions, families, and policy-makers must collaborate to create environments that prioritize mental health, digital ethics, and critical thinking.

In conclusion, while social media offers unprecedented opportunities for self-expression and social connection, it also poses substantial challenges to authentic self-perception. Navigating this duality requires not only awareness but also empowerment—through digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and the ability to distinguish between the virtual self and the true self. Only then can individuals reclaim autonomy over their self-perception in the midst of a digitally saturated society.

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